



## ASW MONTHLY UPDATE

PO BOX 165, TWO RIVERS, WI 54241

TOLL FREE 1-888-4AUTISM; 920-553-0278

e-mail: [asw@asw4autism.org](mailto:asw@asw4autism.org) website: [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

### DECEMBER, 2006

Jane Pribek, Executive Director

The Autism Society of Wisconsin's mission is to promote lifelong opportunities for persons within the autism spectrum, and their families, to be fully included, participating members of their communities through information and referral, advocacy, public awareness, and education and support for local Autism Society of America chapters, professionals and others who support individuals with autism in Wisconsin.

Please feel free to contact the Autism Society of Wisconsin or any local chapter if you have questions or concerns regarding autism spectrum disorders and/or your child.

### UPDATES FROM AUTISM SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN LOCAL CHAPTERS

#### Autism Society of Wisconsin (ASW)

Early Bird registration materials for our 2007 Annual Conference are available on our website, [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org). The deadline to receive the Early Bird Fee is December 29<sup>th</sup>. This conference would be a good opportunity for you to learn about autism spectrum disorders, and to meet many others families who have children with an autism spectrum disorder. Some local chapters offer scholarships for parents to attend the conference. Local chapter contact information is listed below. You can also call the ASW office for assistance.

#### Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM):

ASGM Family Get Together/AUsome Social Group outing at Pump It Up. Join us at [Pump It Up: The Inflatable Party Zone](#) for an autism-friendly get-together! Kids of all ages will love ...Bouncing ...Sliding ... Climbing and ...Tumbling on Pump It Up's giant inflatable play areas.

December 9, 2006

Pump It Up

2911 Marketplace Dr. (in Fitchburg, near Breakaway Soccer and Pinnacle Health Club)

Check -In (hand in signed waiver forms and pay admission) - 8:45 am - 9:00 am

Video introduction - 9:00 am - 9:15 am

Play and network: 9:15 am - 11:15 am

Light refreshments will be available.

ASGM Members: \$5 per child/participant (parents/adult support person can play for free)

Non-Members: \$10 per child/participant (parents/adult support person can play for free)

Space is limited. Pre-registration required: call (608) 213-8519 or email [autismmadison@gmail.com](mailto:autismmadison@gmail.com)

**\*Important Note\*** - Childcare will not be available at this event. A parent/guardian/adult support person must attend this party with your child(ren). A parent/guardian must sign a Pump It Up



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Waiver form for each child. Waiver forms are available at:

<http://www.pumpitupparty.com/waivermadison.pdf>

### Autism Society of Northeast Wisconsin (ASNEW):

ASNEW is having an annual holiday party, Friday, December 8th, at the CP Center in Green Bay, 5:30 - 8PM. There will be swimming, decorating cookies, playing games, and all children (siblings included) will receive a specific gift from Santa. This is an RSVP event so we can coordinate appropriate gifts for each child. Please contact us at (920) 497-1212 for details.

### Autism Society of the Lakeshore (ASL):

ASL meets the third Thursday of the month at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 411 Reed Ave., Manitowoc, at 7:00 PM. For more information, call (920) 683-9381.

### Autism Society of the Fox Valley (ASFV):

If you are interested in being on the ASFV mailing list, please contact Kathy Lett at [kathy\\_Lett@hotmail.com](mailto:kathy_Lett@hotmail.com) or phone her at (920) 582-4724.

### **ASFV December Updates:**

Members Only!

GymKids, **December 2**. Santa is coming to Gym-Kids!!

Tuesday Workshop "Best Practices in the EC Environment", **Tues. Dec. 5**

Parent Support Group Meeting, 6:00 - 7:30 **December 10**

Members Only Bus Tour of the "Festival of Lights, Oshkosh" - date to be determined

For more information on any of the above events, contact Kelly Brodhagen at 920-832-1111.

### Chippewa Valley Autism Society (CVAS):

CVAS can be reached at (715) 836-9507.

### Central Wisconsin Autism Society (CWAS):

CWAS meets the first Thursday of each month. They coincide with the school calendar year, taking July and August off. We meet at St.



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Mark's Lutheran Church, 600 Stevens Drive, Wausau, at 6:30 PM. We try to vary the meetings between Family Support, speakers and business meetings. **CWAS** can be reached at (715) 845-5524.

### Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin (ASSEW):

Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin (ASSEW)

9733 W St Martins Road, Franklin, WI 53132

For information on our events, call our office at 414-427-9345 or see our website: [www.assew.org](http://www.assew.org)

Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin

[www.assew.org](http://www.assew.org) or 414-427-9345

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>** - Members' Holiday party, call for details, 414-427-9345

**December 7<sup>th</sup>** - Morning Coffee Support group 9:30 am to 11:30 am at the ASSEW office, 9733 W St Martins Rd, Franklin

**December 9<sup>th</sup>** - Parenting Series 9:30 to 11:30 am, Nicolet High School in Glendale, Topic: Collaborating with your provider for success in post-intensive programming. Presenter: Alissa Maki from WEAP. This is a free workshop but we appreciate a call to register so we have enough handouts and refreshments.

**December 12<sup>th</sup>** - Library night. This is an opportunity to come to the ASSEW office and check out library materials if you can't come during regular office hours. We have hundreds of titles available for members to use.

### TWO NEW AUTISM SUPPORT GROUPS:

**The La Crosse Area Autism Support Group** will be having its first meeting Wednesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, from 6:30-8:30 pm, at the La Crosse South Side Neighborhood Center, 1300 6<sup>th</sup> Street South in La Crosse. This support group will be open to anyone interested in the opportunity to meet and share insight, questions, feelings, and concerns regarding autism spectrum disorders. There is no fee to attend. To be added to the e-mail/snail mail list, contact Steven or Rena Cash at [lax-autismgroup@charter.net](mailto:lax-autismgroup@charter.net) or 608-519-0883.

**Pierce County Area Autism Support Group** will be having its first meeting on Thursday, January 18<sup>th</sup>. For more information, contact Katie Knutson at [knubell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:knubell@sbcglobal.net) or 715-273-4548.



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### UPDATES FROM WISCONSIN IN-HOME TREATMENT PROVIDERS:

#### **Beyond Boundaries of Autism - *Serving in 23 Wisconsin Counties.***

BBA is a non-profit program of Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin. Our mission is to provide the services covered under the waiver, but also to look to the future to serve youth and adults. We provide pre-intensive services to families while they wait for their 'slot' to open, and we work with children who have behavioral concerns. BBA believes some important things about kids and families. We embrace the belief that kids do well "IF" they can. If they're not doing well, something's getting in the way. We look to sensory issues, language difficulties, and processing problems to understand what's getting in the way. Once we understand then we help the child and families use approaches that begin to make changes. Families are the foundation for all positive changes, and BBA helps each family member understand that. Sara Kaiser is ready to answer any questions about BBA. Give her a call at 920-795-4183.

#### **Beyond Boundaries of Autism offers Holiday Tips**

As we head in to the Holiday Season, BBA would like to provide some tips on helping families address the possible difficulties that children with autism experience during this time. It is predictable that children who have difficulties with change, transitions, and out of the ordinary occurrences will show a stress response to a tree appearing in the house, loss of routine, breaks from school and the increased stress in those around them!

#### **Tips**

1. Provide the child with a visual Holiday schedule such as when the tree will go up, and come down. When school will be in recess and when it will start back up.
2. Use a social story to let them know what will happen each day, and what others may be doing, such as- "Today is the last day of school until after Christmas. None of your friends or teachers will be going to school either. They will be home, doing their own holiday fun."
3. Show them pictures or videos from past holidays, and let them know more pictures will be taken this year.
4. Gift receiving is sometimes difficult, especially for kids who do not like surprises. Consider giving them a picture of the gifts ahead of time to help them prepare.
5. Keep it simple for you and for them, a stressed parent increases stress in the kids.
6. Be aware of the odors of the holidays some of which may be difficult for the kids. Live trees can be very hard for some kids to tolerate.
7. Help the child become a gift giver, let them help make something or wrap something or deliver gifts to others.



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Sometimes families will be asked what gifts the child with autism would like. Be mindful that some kids have very limited interests, so a gift in their name to a charity special to the family may be an idea. BBA hopes these ideas give you some tips to manage the possible stress of the Holidays.

### **The Wisconsin Early Autism Project (WEAP)**

#### **WEAP Offers Services Before and Outside of State Waiver**

Many families want help immediately to reach their children. WEAP offers services to families before the waiver begins so that they may immediately start building relationships and skills that their children need to learn. WEAP also offers services to children who do not qualify for the waiver because of age, level of functioning or for other reasons.

Services that families may choose at any time include:

- Consultation with one of our Clinical Directors or Supervisors for guidance on handling behaviors, establishing relationships, and learning to play (weekly, biweekly, monthly, as needed or just one visit)
- Social skills classes and play groups with peers
- Speech and Language Services (currently in the Madison clinic only)
- Individual or family counseling for parents and siblings
- Second opinion assessments and evaluations
- Consultation with birth to three or school personnel
- Other services as needed

For more information on services available before or outside of the state waiver, please call the WEAP office in your area:

Madison 608-288-9040

Milwaukee 262-432-5660

Green Bay 920-338-1610

La Crosse 608-781-6500

Eau Claire 715-832-2233

### **IDS "While You Wait" Services**

Waiting for funding doesn't have to mean waiting for services. If you are wondering what you can be doing while you wait for intensive services to begin, consider our *Family Foundations - While You Wait* program. Our specially trained consultants equip parents with knowledge and strategies



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to support children's communication, relationship, and cognitive growth. Build a strong foundation for your child's development, and for a more successful intensive therapy experience, regardless of the intensive program you plan to use. Contact IDS Intake Coordinator Sam Garlock at (608) 441-0123 for more information.

### CESA #7 ON-LINE DISCUSSION

Join CESA #7's On-Line Discussions. The purpose of the "Online Discussions in Special Education" is to provide a platform for parents and school staff to share information, support and expertise in all disability areas. The Online discussion topics change monthly and each month the group is moderated by an autism consultant with expertise in the area of autism spectrum disorders. There is no cost for this service. You can join the discussion at <http://www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/sped/chatroom/index.htm>.

### WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities (WCDD) is looking for pictures of individuals and their families who are on waiting lists for services in the state of Wisconsin. It would be nice to have individuals who have been on waiting lists for a long period of time and are looking at being on waiting lists for a long period of time. These pictures will be used in the production of a slide presentation that is being put to music by the hip hop group, *The Figureheads*. The DVD will be presented to members of the legislature when they come into session early next year. We will also have the video placed on the takefivewisconsin website when we get that up and running. For more information, contact John Shaw 608-266-7707.

**Family Respite Care Services, Inc** in Janesville, WI serves families that have a child or children with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and/or special health care needs in Rock County. Most families we serve are on a waiting list for funding from programs such as Family Support. We provide four core programs: Respite, Sib's Day Camp (open to kids grades K-12 from within and outside of Rock County), and The Respite Registry (open primarily to Rock County, but may be helpful to parents outside of Rock County). We also have the Reye Jean Timmer Memorial Fund, which is a statewide fund available to families across the state of Wisconsin. To find out more about Family Respite Care Services, please call us 608-758-0956 or check out our website at [www.rockcountyrespite.org](http://www.rockcountyrespite.org)

Upcoming events: December 16<sup>th</sup> Sib's Day Camp Holiday Shopping and Potluck 9-2:30  
Local Department Store & Janesville United Way of North Rock County  
Cost: Free to currently registered Sib's Day Camp participants  
\$10 Outside of Rock County  
\$ 5 Rock County new participants



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# *Assistive Technology for Children with Autism*

by [Susan Stokes](#) Autism Consultant

"Written by Susan Stokes under a contract with CESA 7 and funded by a discretionary grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction."

For years, different modes of technology have been used to improve the quality of life of people who have various developmental disabilities. However, the **varied** use of technology for children with autism continues to receive limited attention, despite the fact that technology tends to be a high interest area for many of these children.

This article will discuss how **various** modes of technology (including technology designed as augmentative communication systems), can be used for children with autism to increase or improve their:

- Overall understanding of their environment;
- Expressive communication skills;
- Social interaction skills;
- Attention skills;
- Motivation skills;
- Organization skills;
- Academic skills;
- Self help skills;
- Overall independent daily functioning skills.

### *What is Assistive Technology?*

According to the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-407), an **assistive technology** means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, off-the-shelf, modified or customized, that is used to **increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities** of individuals with disabilities. **Assistive technology service** is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

Typically, children with autism process visual information easier than auditory information. Any time we use assistive technology devices with these children, we're giving them information through their strongest processing area (visual). Therefore **various** types of technology from "low" tech to "high" tech should be incorporated into every aspect of daily living in order to improve the functional capabilities of children with autism.

### *Visual Representation Systems*

It is important to determine which visual representation system is best understood by the child, and in what contexts. Various visual systems, such as **objects, photographs, realistic drawings, line drawings, and written**



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words, can be used with assorted modes of technology, as long as the child can readily comprehend the visual representation.

Some children may need different visual representation systems in different situations. This may be dependent upon numerous factors, such as the skill being taught, as well as the unique characteristics of autism: attending, organization, distractibility, etc.

**Example:** A child may use **real objects** for his visual schedule, as the objects appear to give him more information as to where he's going and what's coming up next, as well as to help him remain more focused during the transition. However, this same child may use **photographs** or **line drawings** in a picture exchange in order to **communicate expressively**.

Some researchers suggest that, for most children, it is best to start with a visual representation system of line drawings, and move to a more concrete representation system of photographs or objects needed (18). See the line drawings in Mayer-Johnson "Picture Communication Symbols".

The Mayer-Johnson software program, **Boardmaker**, is a user-friendly program for both adults and children (18). The program offers a 3,000 Picture Communication Symbol (PCS) library in either black/white or color, and can be accompanied by any written word/message. The symbols can be made in any size, and tend to be universally understood. They present a relatively clear, 'uncluttered' representation and remove any ambiguity, which can sometimes arise when using photographs, especially personally-made photographs, as in the following example.

**Example:** A teacher took photographs of the various teachers that a child with autism encountered at school, in order to help him learn the names of his teachers. When reviewing the names of the teachers in the photographs, the child referred to the photograph of a particular teacher as "Mexico". Upon further review of this photo, the teacher realized that in the background, barely visible, was the corner of a map of Mexico. Although the teacher's face was the prominent feature in the photo, the child processed the minimally visible map as the most prominent feature and thus labeled the photograph according to this feature.

When using line drawings such as Boardmaker, caution should also be taken in determining whether to use black/white or color picture communication symbols, as some children with autism may prefer or dislike specific colors. They may focus only on the color instead of processing the entire picture. This will render the Picture Communication Symbol (PCS) virtually meaningless to the children as they are not processing the entire picture. Black and white picture communication symbols tend to remove any ambiguity which might arise.

**Example:** If a child prefers the color red, and the Picture Communication Symbol (PCS) for "lunch" has a red apple as well as a brown sandwich and orange juice, the child may only process the apple, as it contains his preferred color. The child may not even process the image, but attend only to the color red. Therefore, the PCS becomes non-meaningful to the child.

If the child has difficulty understanding the Picture Communication Symbol (PCS) line drawings and needs a more concrete representation, a good software program to use is **Picture This** (20). This program allows for the presentation of real photos, without risking ambiguous background clutter, which can be a part of personal photographs. **Picture This** contains over 2,700 photos from numerous categories which are ideal for:



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- Creating schedules;
- Augmentative communication systems;
- Games;
- Reading activities;
- Sequence activities for following directions;
- Various academic activities.

**Strategy:** To teach a child, who is using photographs or objects as his visual representation system, to understand black/white line drawings, place a small black/white picture communication symbol in the corner of the various objects/photographs currently used by the child. Gradually increase the size of the picture communication symbol until it eventually covers up the entire photograph/object.

For children who have difficulty understanding two dimensional visual representation systems (e.g., photo, drawings, line drawings), and require **objects** as their visual representation systems, the use of **True Object Based Icons (TOBIs)** is suggested (3). These TOBIs can be any line drawing, picture, etc., **which are cut out** in the actual shape or outline of the item they represents. The child can both **see** and **feel** the symbol and shape, thus assisting him to more readily understand the two-dimensional representation system. TOBIs tend to be somewhat larger than the typical two-dimensional visual representation system. When first introduced, they may be 3 inches in size or larger (3). The **printed word label** should always accompany the picture, and should be placed strategically so as not to alter the symbol shape.

**Strategy:** When any visual representation system is used, it is important to combine it with a written word, as many children with autism exhibit a high interest in letters and words, and some even become early readers. Therefore we should continually enhance the child's literacy skills by also providing the written word with any type of visual representation system.

The rest of this article will outline the various skill areas commonly associated with children with autism, with supporting technology strategies defined as follows:

**"Low" Technology:** Visual support strategies which do not involve any type of electronic or battery operated device - typically low cost, and easy to use equipment. Example: dry erase boards, clipboards, 3-ring binders, manila file folders, photo albums, laminated PCS/photographs, highlight tape, etc.

**"Mid" Technology:** Battery operated devices or "simple" electronic devices requiring limited advancements in technology. Example: tape recorder, Language Master, overhead projector, timers, calculators, and simple voice output devices.

**"High" Technology:** Complex technological support strategies - typically "high" cost equipment. Example: video cameras, computers and adaptive hardware, complex voice output devices.