



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

April, 2024

Volume 12 | Issue 4



Siblings of Children with Autism

By Wendy Overturf

Raising a child with autism can place some extraordinary demands on parents and on the entire family. Among these demands is the lack of enough hours in the day to do all one wishes. Specifically, the time involved in meeting the needs of a family member with autism may leave parents with little time for their other children. Research indicates that the majority of brothers and sisters of children with autism cope well with their experiences. That does not mean, however, that they do not encounter special challenges in learning how to deal with a sibling who has autism or a related disorder.

Not all siblings will experience these stressful issues, but here are some to be aware of, from the [Autism Society Indiana](#):

- Embarrassment around peers
- Jealousy regarding amount of time parents spend with their brother/sister
- Frustration over not being able to engage or get a response from their brother/sister
- Being the target of aggressive behaviors
- Trying to make up for the deficits of their brother/sister
- Concern regarding their parents' stress and grief
- Concern over their role in future caregiving

Research by Susan McHale and colleagues (1986) found that siblings without disabilities viewed their relationship with their brother or sister with autism as positive when: 1) They had an understanding of the sibling's disability; 2) They had well-developed coping abilities; and 3) They experienced positive responses from parents and peers toward the sibling with autism.

Research supports the idea that siblings need to understand what autism is about. The rule of thumb: Do it early and do it often! It is important that siblings of children with autism know about autism and that the information given is appropriate for their developmental age. From early childhood, they need explanations that help them understand the behaviors that are of concern to them. For the preschool-

age child this may be as simple as “Rick doesn’t know how to talk,” while for an older child, it may involve a more in-depth conversation.

Although each family situation is unique, parents may want to read an article on The Autism Society website entitled [Sibling Perspectives: Guidelines for Parents](#). The article has important information and practical suggestions for helping and supporting siblings. Additionally, “Autism Speaks” has a [Siblings Guide to Autism](#) on their website that might be helpful for siblings.

The [Wisconsibs](#) website is another resource parents may want to investigate. Wisconsibs is not specifically just for siblings of a child with autism. However, for more than 20 years, they have been serving siblings of people with disabilities through peer support programs, education and networking opportunities, leadership development, and more. The **WisconSibs resource library** is located in their Appleton office. It includes books and videos that focus on the blessings and challenges of having a brother or sister with special needs. If this location is not convenient, the website lists three great downloadable resources for young siblings, teen siblings, and parents. The resources can also be obtained in paper copy for free for up to two resources.

- **Young Siblings Guide:** [Autism, My Sibling, and Me](#)
- **Teenage Siblings Guide:** [Life as an Autism Sibling: A Guide for Teens](#)
- **Parent’s Guide:** [Brothers, Sisters, and Autism: A Parent’s Guide to Supporting Siblings](#)

UPCOMING WI FACETS EVENTS

[The Anti-Racist Individualized Education Program - Phase 3](#)

Presenter: Dr. Nakia S. Wiley, Community Advocate

Date: April 3, 2024

[IEP 3: Evaluación y Elegibilidad en el Proceso del IEP](#)

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

Date: April 4, 2024

[WSEMS: Friendly and Productive IEP’s \(Pre-Recorded\)](#)

Date: April 8, 2024

[Sirviendo en grupos: La función de las familias en los grupos \(Seccion 7\)](#)

Presenter: Alejandra Loeza, WI FACETS

Date: April 11, 2024

[Preparing for Smooth and Successful Grade-Level Transitions](#)

Presenter: Cheri Sylla, WSPEI

Date: April 17, 2024

[IEP 4: Reevaluación y Evaluaciones Educativas Independientes](#)

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

Date: April 18, 2024

[Proactive and Positive Family and School Relationships](#)

Presenters: Anna Moffit and Nancy Molfenter, Madison Metropolitan School District

Date: April 24, 2024

[Sirviendo en grupos: Habilidades para prestar servicio \(Seccion 8\)](#)

Presenter: Alejandra Loeza, WI FACETS

Date: April 25, 2024

HOME LEARNING



[Children's Activity Calendar: April 2024](#)

Help children grow as learners with engaging activities, craft projects, and book suggestions. Celebrate School Library Month and all that libraries offer, help kids create their own submarines on Submarine Day, encourage kids to give magnetic poetry a try, and much more.



Indoor Activities to Release Kids' Energy

The calendar may say that winter is over. But April in Wisconsin can still bring cold and snow, as well as rain.. When your kids can't go outside, consider these indoor activities that will help them have fun and get rid of some of their energy. View more at [PBSkids](#).

Turn on the music and dance.

Play your favorite songs and move to the beat together. Moving to music is a great way to get energy out and to practice important skills, such as self-regulation. Here are some [Music Games for Practicing Self-Regulation](#).

Try "mirror dancing" with your child. Stand face-to-face several feet apart and take turns being the dancer and their reflection (try to copy what the dancer does like a reflection in a mirror). You can also use [PINKADANCE](#) to create some new dance moves with Pinkalicious or play freeze dance with Peterrific!

Create a scavenger hunt.

Make a checklist using simple pictures or words with items your child can find around the house, such as: two red books, four chairs, two tables, one black shoe, one white shoe. Help your child cross off each item as they are found. For children who are a bit older, you can create more complex scavenger hunts focused on finding items that are specific shapes or colors, such as two triangles, four circles, three things that are purple.



Weather Charting

Charting activities related to weather can be a fantastic educational tool for kids, combining elements of science, math, observation, and perhaps even art.

These activities encourage children to observe, record, and analyze weather patterns, helping them understand the world around them while developing critical thinking and data interpretation skills.

Learn how to [create a weather chart](#). Your child will also learn how to record what they notice and practice sharing their research with you and others. Keeping a weather chart is also a great way for children to learn more about nature and the environment.

Here is another [data and graphing worksheet](#), along with some great follow-up questions you can ask your child to extend their learning.



Drop Everything and Read

April 12th is Beverly Cleary's birthday and is D.E.A.R. Day. [Beverly Cleary](#) was a beloved children's author who created the character Ramona Quimby. The concept of "Drop Everything and Read" is referenced in the [second chapter of Ramona Quimby, Age 8](#). (The entire book read aloud can be found [here](#).) While it is important for children to read daily, D.E.A.R. Day is a national celebration of reading designed to encourage families to make reading a priority activity in their lives. Listed below are a few tips to make this day extra special.

Participate as Parents: Lead by example. Make sure to have your own reading material and demonstrate that reading is a valuable and enjoyable activity.

Make It Cozy: Use blankets, pillows, or even build a reading fort with sheets.

Snacks and Drinks: Prepare some favorite snacks and drinks to enjoy while reading.

UPCOMING STATE EVENTS

[Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin 35th Annual Conference](#)

Dates: April 25-27, 2024

Location: Kalahari Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

This conference provides a wide range of information to those within the autism community. Their goal is to provide relevant information for attendees at all levels, including those who are new to autism and those who have years of experience. **Registration closes on 4/3/24.**

Training for Home Language Interpreters: Supporting Families through the Special Education Process

For those seeking training for home language interpreters for families at IEP meetings, DPI has partnered with WI FACETS, LEAs, and other organizations to develop a one-day training for home language interpreters who interpret for families at IEP meetings. Language interpretation training is a requirement to meet the provisions outlined in DPI's [Providing Language Assistance to Parents guidance document](#). The training provides increased awareness of state and federal laws, regulations and policies related to the educational rights of students who receive special education through an IEP and who may also be English Language Learners. The training also provides increased knowledge of legal responsibilities and requirements related to translation and interpretation of special education terms and concepts, tools, and resources for interpreters. Finally, the training supports improved skills to handle common ethical considerations while interpreting IEP meetings.

We have two final Home Language Interpreter training sessions scheduled for the 2023-24 school year.

For more information and to register, please choose an option with one of our partners below.

In-person Trainings:

- [Milwaukee, April 8, 2024](#) (8:30am-2:30pm)
- [Wausau, April 26, 2024](#) (8:30am-2:30pm)

If you are interested in bringing this training to your area in the 2024-25 school year, please contact Lori Karcher at lkarcher@wifacets.org.

[Circles of Life Conference](#)

Wisconsin's annual conference for families who have children with disabilities and professionals who support them.

Dates: May 16-17, 2024

Location: Holiday Inn, Stevens Point, WI

[10th Annual 2024 Employment First Conference](#)

All stakeholders are encouraged to attend, including people with disabilities and their family members, service professionals, school staff, and others who support people with disabilities to achieve employment, make connections, and contribute to the community. The link for the conference agenda can be found [here](#).

Dates: May 21, 2024

Location: Kalahari, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Supporting Neurodiverse Students (SNS)

The Supporting Neurodiverse Students (SNS) Professional Learning System provides learning events, virtual cohorts, coaching, resources, and technical assistance to support educators and families serving students with disability-related needs in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL). The goal of the SNS is to support a skills-based approach to challenging behaviors that will improve a student's social understanding and emotional management skills. The SNS System provides learning opportunities with a focus on regulation, social communication, flexibility, resilience, sensory processing, and executive functioning. For more about these events and registration information, please visit the [SNS Learning Events Registration](#) webpage. Complete information about the SNS can be found at the [Supporting Neurodiverse Students Professional Learning System](#) webpage.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS for WI FACETS [Endless Possibilities Conference](#)

Friday, August 2, 2024

Please plan to join us IN-PERSON at Waukesha County Technical College.

Registration and MORE information coming soon!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The Transition Improvement Grant (TIG) Has Launched the Newly Revised WiTransition App

The [WiTransition App](#) serves as an engaging and interactive tool designed to align with the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP). This empowers students and their families by including their voices into the transition planning process. Additionally, it promotes the growth of self-advocacy and self-determination skills among students with IEPs. Listed below are some of the features.

- The app is now available in Spanish! Simply click the ES letters in the right side of the app when beginning.
- The app now has a closer alignment with the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP).
- Users no longer need to complete the app in one sitting. They can resume the app at any point. Click the "Finish Later" button and write down the code provided to return where the user left off.
- Currently, the revised app is only available online. However, within the next month it will be

accessible on a smart device through Google Play or the Apple App store.

- Be sure to check out the [archived webinar](#) presented by the TIG staff. Through this training opportunity, families will view the app and learn how to utilize it through the transition planning process.

ONLINE RESOURCES: Early Childhood

[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

This site has an extensive list of links to information on autism. Also be sure to check their [Facebook page](#) for information related to autism.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\) – Disability Category of Autism](#)

The website includes eligibility criteria for autism, information about trainings, and links to archived webinars. This site also has a link for more information on the Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation process.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\) – Inclusive Strategies to Address the Behavioral Needs for Students with IEPs](#)

This professional learning series provides resources and strategies to help adults address the behavioral needs of students with IEPs in educational settings.

[Autism Society](#)

The Autism Society, and their nationwide network of affiliates, connects people to the resources they need through education, advocacy, support, information and referral, and community programming.

[Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin](#)

The Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin exists to provide a community for individuals affected by autism, their families, and professionals who serve them. Their goal is to increase the quality of life for those affected by autism and respond to the emerging needs of the autism community.

[Autism Society of Southeastern WI \(ASSEW\)](#)

ASSEW works to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocate for appropriate services for individuals across the life span, and provide the latest information regarding treatment, education, research, and advocacy.

[Autism Navigator](#)

This website features a unique collection of web-based tools and courses that integrate the most current research in autism with an interactive web platform and video footage showing effective evidence-based practices. It is intended for professionals as well as families.

[Autism Source](#)

The Autism Source™ Resource Database, a product of the Autism Society of America, is the most comprehensive database of its kind. Autism Source employs a nationwide network of affiliates and collaborates with other autism organizations and professionals throughout the U.S. to ensure that the database continues to grow and is kept current with reliable resources for information related to autism.

[Autism Speaks](#)

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. They do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.

[100 Day Kit for Young Children](#)

The days after an autism diagnosis can be overwhelming. The Autism Speaks 100 Day Kit helps families of children ages four and under make the best possible use of the 100 days following the diagnosis. [A 100 Day Kit for school age children is also available.](#)

[MyAutismTeam](#)

MyAutismTeam is the social network for parents of kids with autism. The site provides emotional support from other parents of children with autism. Parents may gain practical advice and insights on managing treatment or therapies for autism. Parents can also share daily ups and downs in a judgment-free place.

[IRIS Center Modules](#)

The first module provides information on the early signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as an overview of the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational determination of ASD. The second module highlights strategies that have been shown to be effective in teaching appropriate behaviors and skills and decreasing inappropriate behaviors with children and youth with ASD. [IRIS Center](#) is a national center dedicated to improving education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities birth through age twenty-one, using effective evidence-based practices and interventions.

Scripted Stories (Social Stories) for Children with Autism

Scripted stories, also known as social stories, are written to help individuals, particularly those with autism, understand and navigate various social situations or routines. Learn more about social stories in the article, [“Social Stories for Kids with Autism.”](#) [“Cleaning up my Toys”](#) and [“I Can Follow the Family Rules”](#) are two examples of social stories from the [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations website.](#)

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS & SUPPORTS



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([PBIS](#)) is a strategy schools use to teach children expected behavior. Check [this article](#) from the July 2023 Family Engagement Newsletter for more detailed information on PBIS.

PBIS Tip of the Month for Parents

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach to establishing the behavior needed for children to achieve social, emotional, and academic success. When applying PBIS strategies to encourage a child to clean their room, the focus is on teaching and reinforcing positive behaviors rather than punishing negative ones. Here are some PBIS tips you can use to motivate and guide your child in keeping their room clean:

Set Clear Expectations

Define Clear, Achievable Goals: Clearly outline what a clean room looks like. Use visual aids or a checklist if helpful. Break the task down into smaller, manageable steps (e.g., "First, put toys away, then make the bed...").

Model Desired Behaviors

Lead by Example: Show your child how to do each task, demonstrating the behavior you want to see. This can be done through a fun demonstration or by cleaning together initially.

Use Positive Reinforcement

Immediate Praise and Rewards: Offer praise or rewards as soon as you notice your child engaging in the desired behavior, such as cleaning up without being asked. Rewards can be privileges, stickers, or points towards a larger reward.

Behavior Charts: Use a chart to track progress and reward completion of tasks. This visual representation of success can be very motivating.

RESEARCH

Building Comprehension Skills of Young Children With Autism One Storybook at a Time (Tutorial)

Fleury VP, Whalon K, Gilmore C, Wang X, Marks R. Building Comprehension Skills of Young Children with Autism One Storybook at a Time. Lang Speech Hear Serv Sch. 2021 Jan 19;52(1):153-164.

[Read Full Article](#) (Note: While this was written for educators the tutorial does offer suggestions that might be valuable for parents.)

Reading involves the ability to decode and draw meaning from printed text. Reading skill profiles vary widely among learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). One fairly common pattern is relative strength in decoding combined with weak comprehension skills—indicators of this profile emerge as early as the preschool years. For children with ASD to develop a facility with language that prepares them for reading success, practitioners must intentionally create and provide appropriate instruction practices. In this tutorial, the authors describe ways in which educators and practitioners can support language development and comprehension skills for children with ASD within the context of shared reading activities

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Upcoming newsletter topics:

May: Mental Health

June: ADD/ADHD

July: Speech and Language

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources you may use the [Word document](#). Send submissions to [Wendy Overturf](#). If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

This monthly update is provided by Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, please email [WI FACETS](#).

The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter can be found online: www.servingongroups.org/newsletter



This document was produced under grants from the U.S. Dept. of Education, (PTIC-#H328M200017) and WI Dept. of Public Instruction (CFDA# 84.027A/2024-M132-WIFACETS-342) to WI FACETS. The content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Dept. of Education, WI Dept. of Public Instruction, or WI FACETS. You should not assume endorsement by the U.S. Dept. of Education, WI Dept. of Public Instruction, WI FACETS, U.S. Dept. of Education Project Officer, David Emenheiser; or WI Dept. of Public Instruction Grant Director, Rita Fuller of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. The citation should be U.S. Dept. of Education, WI Dept. of Public Instruction, and WI FACETS, Milwaukee, WI, 2024.



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