

MAKING CONNECTIONS



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Homework Without Tears (For You or Your Child)

By Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW

For better or for worse, the days of summer have ended. For many of us, this marks a time of trepidation where we hold our cell phones close at hand hoping and praying the ringing isn't the school calling. For some of us (maybe the very same people), this marks a time of celebration—the television and the computer have finally been given the opportunity to rest, and the long days of “I'm bored” have ended. In these first few weeks, we have a bit of a false sense of security as we hope for a few more days of honeymooning and a few more weeks homework free. But we all know, the honeymoon will end and the homework will increase. Here are just a few tips for how to avoid the dreaded arguments and tantrums:

1. Create a homework routine with your child that is predictable and consistent. “If your child helps build it, he/she may be more willing to “live in it”.
2. Provide the opportunity for frequent breaks to refuel and receive some sensory input. The average adult mind begins to lose focus after 10 minutes; imagine what that means for the average child or adolescent's mind.
3. Use visual strategies to support your routine. For example, you can write a list of tasks and time frames so that the work times and breaks are very predictable and clear. This can also help children who have trouble getting started again after a break.
4. Provide a healthy snack for your child.

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Sometimes chewing gum, eating something crunchy or chewy can help focus and concentration.

5. If your child is having trouble organizing, breaking tasks down and remembering things, you might want to consider signing up for the Making Connections “Making PLANS” groups which take place the first Thursday of the month. “Making PLANS” offers specialized assistance with executive function skills in order to increase school success, organizational skills and confidence in educational tasks. In addition, Jennifer Pelcyger, M.Ed. from Dyslexia Solutions of Colorado will be available for individualized assessment and tutoring appointments during each “Making PLANS” group. Call today for more information.

*Sometimes we all need a little guidance to climb
the mountain of
responsibilities we face.*

What are Kids *REALLY* Saying?

Understanding Idioms Used in Schools

By Melyssa Mayer, LSW

That test was “a piece of cake?” For a typically developing learner, the statement, “the test was a piece of cake” is a comment that can be extrapolated to mean that it was an easy exam. For someone with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) this comment could cause a great deal of stress due to the literal nature of their brain. The perception of a person with an ASD would be more along the lines of the test being tasty or covered in frosting.

Anyone who has tried to learn a foreign language can understand how frustrating idioms are. This frustration is shared by learners with ASD when learning their first language-not a second or third.

Doing some outside research and talking to students from some area schools, I found out some of the common idioms that are being used and their literal meanings.

- ∞ *I'm down with that*- I understand or I agree with whatever you said or suggested, ok
- ∞ *Dawg or bro or dude or homey* - all names that you call friends
- ∞ *def fo sho*- definitely for sure (but it sounds like "deaf")
- ∞ *Let's go kick it*- let's get together and hang out
- ∞ *For real*.- means something is true
- ∞ *"For real?"* - "No way!!! I can't believe that!"
- ∞ *That's dope*-that is cool
- ∞ *You got owned*- I got you or I got the answer right and you were wrong. It can also mean you got dominated!
- ∞ *Don't go there*- don't say that or do that
- ∞ *That's beast* or *That's clutch*- really good or cool
- ∞ *That's phat* or *that's tight* or *that's bomb*- that's cool
- ∞ *Sick* or *that's sick*- cool
- ∞ *Legit*- legitimate or true or for real
- ∞ *Throwdown*- let's fight about it (but in a joking manner)
- ∞ *Grub*- food
- ∞ *It kills me*- it cracks me up; I can't take it; it is



overwhelming to me

- ∞ *Break a leg*-Good luck
- ∞ *Making it official*-Going from just friends to boyfriend/girlfriend
- ∞ *Going out*- In a relationship
- ∞ *Tweeting/Facebooking*-Sending life updates over Twitter/Facebook

How can we teach our students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to understand and decode idioms used by other students in mainstream schools? Since idioms are similar to a foreign language, to anyone with ASD, a great starting point would be to translate these abstract phrases into literal ones. It is important to have an open dialogue with your child about the actual meaning of the phrases that are being used at school that they may not understand.

An exercise that you can do with your child is to “match the idiom with its definition”. This can be done by making cards that and matching an idiom to its literal meaning. For example, one card would say “to be cool as a cucumber” and another card would say “calm and confident”. Having your child work to match the idiom with its correct literal term will help them to feel more confident within the walls of school, where idioms are used often.

Another way you can help teach your child idioms is to have them fill in your blanks with idioms. For example, “I heard that Bobby and Sarah have been out to the movies a lot this month, have they made it official?” Idioms, though a foreign language, can be understood and used by learners with an ASD. By doing exercises to help strengthen knowledge of idioms and being open to phrases that might seem out of the ordinary and absurd at times these learners will “hit the ball out of the park”.

“Anyone who has tried to learn a foreign language can understand how frustrating idioms are.”

Talking Your Way to Being Happy

By Mara Trager, MA

What if you were able to control your own level of happiness by simply talking with people in your life? What if there was a link between deep, meaningful conversations and an increase in happiness.

In her New York Times Magazine article, Rabin (2010) describes a study conducted by Matthias Mehl (2010), a psychologist at the University of Arizona, who found exactly that—more meaningful conversations throughout the day can lead to an increase in happiness. He proposed that substantive conversations open a door to greater happiness for two main reasons: 1. Human beings are driven to find and create meaning in their lives; and 2. Human beings are social animals who want and need to connect with other people. Meaningful conversations help humans structure and give meaning to the world around them. Additionally, the act of engaging in a meaningful conversation can create a bond that fulfills the human desire for social connectedness.

Although Dr. Mehl's (2010) small study did not prove a causal relationship, he did find that people who reported a higher level of happiness in life had twice as many meaningful conversations as conversations about lighter subjects. In his study (2010), Mehl engaged 79 college students. They agreed to wear a recording device on their lapel that recorded 30-second snippets of conversation every 12.5 minutes for four days. Researchers then organized these snippets into categories based on content, either substantive or small talk. A sample of small talk examined by Mehl and his fellow researchers was: "What do you have there? Popcorn? Yummy!" An example of substantive conversation was ". . . be a nurse, so I don't know how many years that is. I think I might want to be an English major. Maybe journalism?" Mehl (2010) found that the happiest person in the study engaged in twice as many substantive conversations.

Still Mehl wonders about whether there is a causal relationship between happiness and substantive conversations. Subsequently, he is in the process of conducting another study that looks at whether those actual substantive conversations trigger happiness.

Some preliminary research indicates it might. In a follow-up study Mehl is asking people to have either one extra substantive conversation a day or one extra conversation involving small talk. These are interesting tasks in the world of modern technology where many "conversations" take place in the form of texts, voice mails and emails.

So. . . challenge yourself! Try having one extra substantive conversation a day; it couldn't hurt.



Lauren's Reflections

I often receive articles via email that are supposed to be "definitely worth reading". Unfortunately, I often walk away thinking, "definitely NOT worth reading." I recently received an article that caught my eye. It was entitled, *Can Preschoolers be Depressed* (Paul, August 25, 2010) published in the New York Times Magazine. After reading every valuable word in this article, I became acutely aware of the preschoolers with whom I have interacted over the past 15 years who showed signs of decreased self-worth, lack of self-confidence, irritability and were generally struggling. Many of these children were referred to therapists who might be of assistance. Some families went, some did not.

At best, the children were going through a phase. Quite possibly, however, they were struggling with depression, anxiety or doubts about their own self-worth. It seems critical that we look at ways to boost self-confidence and self-awareness (see *Everyday Ways to Boost Your Child's Development*) from the time our children are born in order to provide a strong foundation-- a foundation strong enough to handle the obstacles life throws at our children—bullying, challenges with school, relationship challenges, sensory difficulties, attentional concerns and the numerous other stumbling blocks our children might encounter.

Everyday Ways to Boost Your Child's Development

By Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW

I think of child development in the same way I think about planning a road trip. There are two paths you can take in planning a road trip. Path one may include deciding upon a destination such as Yellowstone, choosing dates, choosing a hotel, mapping out the trip, packing, buying snacks for the trip, and so on. In the end, you may drive for approximately 10 hours feel tired, but well-fed and thankfully, arrive in Yellowstone. Path two may include choosing a destination such as Yellowstone, packing the night before, getting into the car and going. Ultimately you may drive for 10 hours and end up hungry, frustrated and in New Mexico.

Clearly, as with planning a road trip, child development takes a lot of thought, preparation, intermediary steps and careful planning. In my 15 years working with families of children developing "typically" and families of children with developmental delays, it seems the destination is often linked with big ticket developmental items such as reading, writing and arithmetic. While this is critical, in actuality, there are at least 14 different areas of development that need to be fostered and nurtured in order to ultimately reach the critical goals of reading, writing and arithmetic. If these areas are not fostered, kids may end up in "New Mexico" rather than "Yellowstone". Conversely, if these areas are fostered, kids may end up in "Yellowstone" and feel good about themselves and their abilities in the process. In the end, positive feelings and confidence in skills are the greatest gifts we can give our children.



*Supporting Development
from preschool on. . .*

In this issue, we will take a look at ways to foster self-awareness and self-confidence as well as social/emotional development. In subsequent issues, we will examine development in the following areas: fine and gross motor; cognitive; expressive and receptive language; number recognition and math; letter recognition and reading; and self-help.

The following are some ways to boost your child's self-awareness and self-confidence:

(Self-Awareness/Self-Confidence refers to the development of self-regulation skills, comfort with oneself and one's environment and belief in one's abilities.)

In order to support your child's development of self-regulation, you can talk about stoplights as you approach them; e.g., "Red means stop." This can support self-awareness as well as self-regulation* as you help to identify the difference between stopping, slowing down and going. You can then use this in your home. "Red light, stop, I need to tell you what we are doing next." The more a child is able to regulate, the more self-confident he/she will feel. Please note, self-regulation is typically considered a 4-year old developmental milestone.

In order to support your child's development of self-awareness/self-confidence, you can: Offer choices you've pre-selected (e.g., "do you want oatmeal or toast for breakfast") to assist your child with developing the self-confidence to make his/her own decisions; create a consistent bedtime routine; play "row, row, row your boat" quickly and slowly to work on your child's ability to slow down and speed up his/her body. Self-awareness, self-confidence and self-regulation are skills that are critical to your child's healthy development. Take the time to teach these skills rather than assuming they will develop on their own. It will most certainly pay off.

"Positive feelings and confidence are the greatest gifts we can give our children."

“Making Connections”

Relationship Skills Groups

“Making Connections” began in 1999 as a way to create an opportunity for individuals struggling with relationship skills to come together to find friends. The groups are designed to work on the numerous skills involved in interacting with others, creating friendships and sustaining fulfilling satisfying relationships. Most importantly, “Making Connections” was designed to make interactions meaningful and fun! The groups incorporate the following skills into fun activities:

- Interaction and friendship skills
- Reading nonverbal cues
- Recognizing one’s areas of challenge
- Understanding one’s strengths and the ways in which to build upon those strengths
- Sensory awareness and strategies
- Cooperation
- Executive Function
- Big picture thinking vs focusing on the small details (Central Theory of Cohesion)
- Bullying
- Effective problem solving

For more information about the “Making Connections” series for this school year, please visit our website at: www.LaurenKerstein.com

Sibling Groups

In 2009 “Making Connections” expanded to include groups for siblings of individuals with extra needs. The “Making Connections” sibling groups include:

MONTHLY- Thursday Night “Sibling Supper Clubs”

This group will meet from 5:00-7:00 the third Thursday night of the month for dinner and dessert. The group members will have the opportunity to begin to create a group project recording, illustrating and discussing the ups and downs of having a sibling with unique needs. The group will also include games and an opportunity to have FUN!



QUARTERLY- Community “SIBLING SHEBANGS!”

Once per quarter, we will host a SIBLING SHEBANG! on a Sunday from 11:30-2:30! The SIBLING SHEBANGS! will include outings in the community at such places as bowling alleys, museums, parks, etc. These groups will include some meaningful games and activities to offer support and encouragement as well as an opportunity for a LOT of FUN!

2010-2011 Calendar of Relationship Skills Group Dates

Mondays: Early (4-5) and Late Elementary (5:30-6:30)

Tuesdays: Middle School Groups (Group 1: 4-5) (Group 2: 5:30-6:30)

Wednesday: Girl's Group (4-5) and Teen Group (5:30-6:30)

2010

September	October	November	December
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5 6 7 8 9 10 11	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	5 6 7 8 9 10 11
12 13 14 15 16 17 18	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	12 13 14 15 16 17 18
19 20 21 22 23 24 25	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	19 20 21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30	26 27 28 29 30 31
	31		

2011

January	February	March	April
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23 24 25 26 27 28 29	27 28	27 28 29 30 31	24 25 26 27 28 29 30
30 31			

THE PROFESSIONALS WITH: Lauren H. Kerstein LCSW, P.C.

Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW: *Lauren Kerstein, LCSW* is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in working with children, adolescents, adults and families. After receiving Bachelors of Arts in both Education and Psychology at Washington University in St. Louis, Lauren attended George Warren Brown School of Social Work and received a Masters in Social Work. Lauren completed a post-masters fellowship at JFK Partners, the University Affiliated Program at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center where she received multi-disciplinary training from psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, developmental pediatricians, neuropsychologists, and social workers at JFK Partners. Lauren specializes in working with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders and particularly Asperger's syndrome. She also works with children experiencing anxiety, depression, relationship skill difficulties, divorce and other adjustments, developmental or mental health needs. Lauren is the author of *My Sensory Book: Working Together to Explore Sensory Issues and the Big Feelings They Can Cause: A Workbook for Parents, Professionals, and Children (AAPC)*, and a textbook entitled *Asperger's Syndrome-- Diagnosis, Treatment Issues and Intervention Options* which is available as an on-line course through Western Schools Publishing.

Mara Trager, MA: *Mara Trager, MA, NCC* is a psychotherapist who specializes in the relationship skill development of children ages 2-18. She holds a B.A. in Art History and an M.A. in Counseling Psychology. Mara provides in-home therapy for families and children through Colorado's Early Intervention Program. In her private practice, she offers individual, family and group therapy. She is particularly passionate about the group process in which her clients can problem-solve, practice social interaction and develop friendships. Mara is also a child yoga instructor and loves to teach children cooking and art.

Melyssa Mayer, LSW: *Melyssa Mayer, LSW* is a Licensed Social Worker who holds a B.A. in Psychology and Sociology, and a Masters in Social Work. In her private practice, Melyssa specializes in working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, relationship skill development, mental health issues and school consultations. Melyssa also provides home-based therapy through Colorado's Early Intervention Program. Melyssa builds upon the strengths of the individuals with whom she works in order to create a successful intervention plan.

Kelly Chavanu, BA: *Kelly Chavanu* has a B.A. in Human Services. She has a teaching certificate and is nearing completion of a Master's program in Special Education. Kelly specializes in autism spectrum disorders, behavioral issues and relationship skill development. Kelly provides in-home consultation through Colorado's Early Intervention Program as well as assistance around behavioral issues.

Introducing:

Ginny Parsowith, MSW : *Ginny Parsowith, MSW* has experience working with children and families. She has particular experience with autism spectrum disorders.

Kendra Gent, MSW: *Kendra Gent, MSW* has experience working with children and their families. She has particular experience with Down's Syndrome.

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"Making Connections"

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Resources:
www.AutismAspergerBooks.com

We help individuals develop strength-based, individualized approaches in order to more effectively manage life's challenges.

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.LaurenKerstein.com

Please call today to receive more information regarding our specialized services including:

- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Dyads
- School Consultation
- Behavior Consultation
- Sibling Groups/Interventions
- Relationship Skills Groups
- Executive Function Support
- Home-Based Consultations
- Early Intervention
- Parent Support and Therapy
- Training

WE'VE MOVED!!

We are excited to announce our new address:

5347 S. Valentia Way, Suite 120
Greenwood Village, CO 80111