

PUZZLE PIECES

Planning for Summer 2004



Meryl Lipton, MD, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Planning for a Terrific Summer

Last fall caring parents sat in tears in my office "We expected to have a great family trip for the summer," the mom reported. "Matt (their son and my patient) worked so hard in school last year that we saved up and in July went to Disney World"

"...We were there two and one-half days....It was awful. Matt was so

out of control that we had to come home....That made it a terrible trip for everyone....Our whole family was upset for weeks."

This family's pain made clear that now is the time for everyone to plan for next summer.

Our children have endless combinations of neurobehavioral issues, but some themes predominate. Here are four big ones. Read through them. Does any part of them apply to your daughter or son? If they do, their description and the related suggestions may help you begin your summer planning.

1. Structure

For some children like Matt, there is as much need for structure in the summer as during the school year. If you don't want things to spiral out of control, these youngsters should not be confronted with experiences that are too stimulating such as Disney World. This doesn't mean that they should live a closeted life. Not at all. They should do fun, appropriate, interesting things, but ones less overwhelming. Structure during the summer at home is hard to develop and maintain, but it is often the key to a successful time for the family.

2. Academics

Other children would profit from doing things for their neurobehavioral issues that they didn't have time to do during the school year. Decide with your child (if age appropriate) what those areas are that need strengthening. Now is the time to check out the best summer programs that teach executive functions, social skills or tutoring in a wide variety of academic areas. Pick the best programs and sign your daughter or son up now. Summer reading that covers areas of curriculum for the coming school year is often helpful as well.

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Regarding Retention

Meg Heron-Blake, EdS

There are few issues in educational research upon which there is such consensus. Yet this year, thousands of parents will have to face the possibility that their child will be retained. This issue is especially of concern to parents of children with learning disabilities. While some districts exclude students with learning disabilities from retention policies, research has shown that learning disabled children are at additional risk for being held back. In a 1996 study exploring retention rates of students with undiagnosed learning disabilities, researcher Katherine Barnett found that 71% had been retained at least once. More than a third of children with learning disabilities had repeated one grade according to 1995 Census Bureau data. And this number may grow as school districts adopt policies in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act.

This is disturbing considering the voluminous research pillorying the practice, or at best calling for extreme caution in its implementation. The titles of some of the articles on grade retention alone tell the story. One hyperbolic headline reads, "Your Child has a Better Chance of Surviving a Heart Attack than Retention." The culmination of research has shown that retained students are more likely to drop out, do not show academic gains, and are more at-risk for behavioral difficulties. Additionally, the damage to self-esteem can be devastating. One study found that children rank retention as their third biggest fear, after blindness and death of a parent. And this fear is too often realized. According to the National Educational Longitudinal Survey in 1988, one in five 8th graders has repeated at least one grade.

So, are retention or social promotion our only options when a student is not achieving academically? Additional tutoring and parent involvement programs are often cited interventions to reduce academic failure. Linda Darling-Hammond in her article "Alternatives to Grade Retention" offers many others. First, citing studies that have indicated teacher expertise is the most important determinant of student performance, she calls for enhancing professional development. Teachers networks, expert consulting relationships, and pairing expert teachers with those with less experience, are some of the ways to accomplish this. Darling-Hammond also suggests redesigning schools to promote closer relationships between students

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A Terrific Summer

3. Recreation

Many young people worked really hard in school and need to stop academic pursuits in the summer. They should have fun with their friends and do other things quite apart from the classroom. As adults, we always want more achievement for our children, but remember, having fun and being with friends and family are also important parts of life – just as important as academic learning in school.

For a child who isn't going to focus on academics this summer, think about sending him or her to a good overnight or day camp or getting them into some other worthwhile program. A warning: excellent programs fill up early. Talk to other parents who had children in them, and ask if the program is sensitive to participants with neurobehavioral issues. Also, check if the program has a winter "reunion" where your child can meet and talk to kids who were in the program last year. Then, cement your plans.

4. Exploration

Summer is a great time for some children to develop interests that are their strengths but that they don't have time to explore during the school year. It is often a perfect time for pursuits such as acting, music, photography and swimming.

One patient of mine, Amy, loves the drums. She and her parents explored this activity last summer. Amy had an "OK" year in school, but at summer's end she told me, "You know, I would rather take drum lessons and play next summer than go on any trip. I just love my music." She beamed, and her parents glowed at her happiness and accomplishments. Her father smiled and fished a pair of ear plugs out of his pocket. "I guess I should buy a bigger supply of these," he said. As the school year progressed Amy was able to play in the school band. This turned out to be a wonderful experience that built her self-esteem.

It isn't too early to start planning for next summer. Begin now, and look forward to the rewarding time you and your child will have.

Finally, if your child is old enough, include her or him in exploring the summer possibilities, setting goals and prioritizing the options. These are important life skills. Think what a gift you are giving by starting early with something fun like plans for summer.

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Retention

and teachers. Specific examples include smaller class sizes, longer class periods and remaining with teachers for more than one year. Multi-age grades have been shown to be effective in promoting academic progress. Programs targeted for specific populations such as Reading Recovery programs may reduce the number of students at risk for retention. Finally, moving away from standardized tests as the final arbiter of retention while replacing single tests with more detailed assessments of how students think, their strategies and areas of strengths and weakness provides a better way of making serious decisions about a child's future.

Chicago ended "social promotion" in 1996, and though the research results depend on how the data is interpreted, there is enough evidence to give further credibility to the mountains of past research. Although the number of students passing the high stakes testing rose in the first few years, the students held back were doing no better two years later than similarly unsuccessful students who had been socially promoted in previous years. A recent study on the efficacy of the summer program that is mandatory for failing students found similar results.

As more school districts adopt retention policies, it is more important than ever to be an "educated consumer." Ask questions, explore alternatives and reject cookie-cutter approaches that ignore individual differences.

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RUSH
NEUROBEHAVIORAL
CENTER

Founded in 1997 the Rush Neurobehavioral Center brings together (professionals from) multiple disciplines to address the diagnosis and treatment of children with neurobehavioral issues. RNBC's unique contribution is the understanding of each child's strengths and weaknesses within the context of the family and school. From this knowledge individualized interventions are developed, implemented, and monitored.

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Early Signs of Neurobehavioral and Learning Disabilities

Amy Davis, PhD

Being a parent of two children under the age of 6, with one child who will be entering kindergarten in the fall of 2004, I can relate to the parental stress of, “Is my child where he should be?” regarding social, emotional, and pre-academic skills. Oh sure, we all hear about the 4-year-old girl who has been reading since she was 2, or the 4-year-old who is already doing second-grade level math. But when should we be concerned that our child might have a neurobehavioral disorder, and how can we potentially address these problems early on?

Research has shown that the most common learning disability is difficulty with language and reading. A recent study also showed that up to 67 percent of young students who were identified as being at risk for reading difficulties were able to achieve average to above-average reading skills if they received early intervention. We have to keep in mind that all children learn in highly individual ways. Nonetheless, it helps to be aware of some early signs that may indicate a neurobehavioral and/or reading disability.

For preschoolers

- late talking, compared to other children
- pronunciation problems
- slow vocabulary growth or difficulties with word finding
- difficulty rhyming words
- trouble learning numbers, the alphabet, and/or days of the week
- restless and easily distracted
- trouble interacting with peers
- poor ability to follow directions or routines

For older children in kindergarten and first grade, these difficulties might become more pronounced, or might also include:

- slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds
- confuses basic words (run, eat, want)
- letter reversals, inversions, transpositions, and substitutions in reading and spelling
- transposes number sequences or confuses arithmetic signs
- slow recall of facts
- slow to learn new skills
- impulsive, lack of planning, or excessively talkative
- unstable pencil grip
- trouble learning about time
- poor coordination, accident prone, and unaware of personal and “other” space

If your child exhibits difficulties in a number of these areas over an extended period of time, you may want to pursue it further.

Consider contacting your local public school for a free evaluation. RNBC clinicians are also available to conduct comprehensive evaluations and develop intervention plans.

Here are some ways to provide enriching experiences for your child in the pre-academic and social domains.

- Read, read, read to your child.
- Ask your child questions along the way as you read, to help encourage critical thinking and reading comprehension skills.

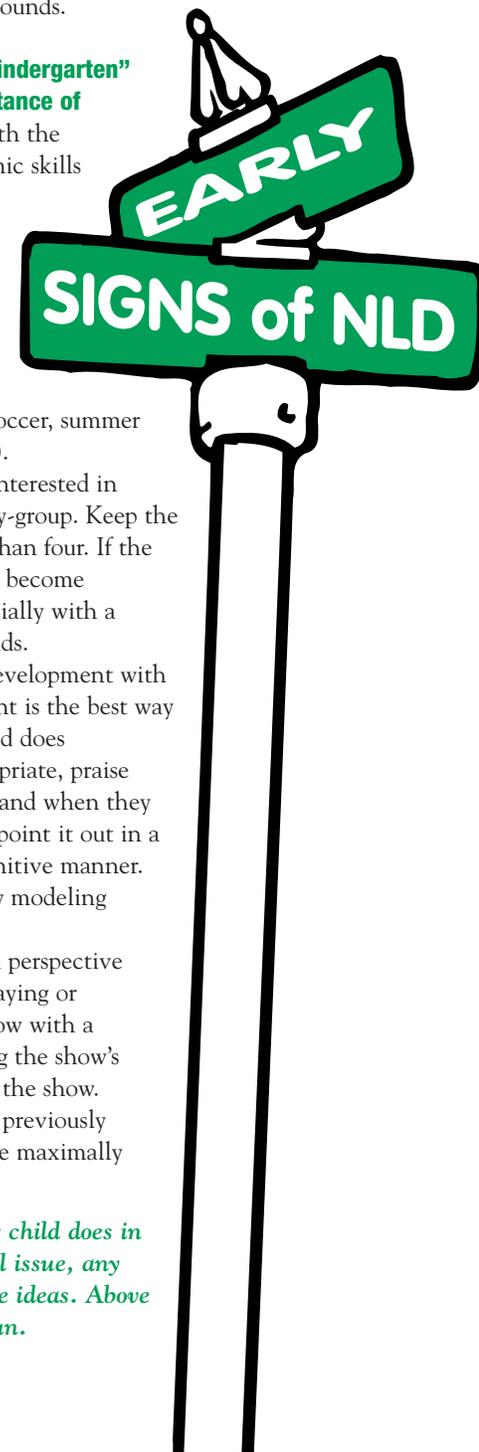
- Have your child listen to the sequences of sounds and rhymes, particularly in books that encourage this (e.g., David Kirk’s “Miss Spider” series, the Dr. Seuss Books, any book of poetry for children).
- Use puppets to play language games, such as rhyming games or elision games (e.g., “If we took away the c sound in cat, what new word would we have?). These skills will help encourage phonological awareness skills that drive reading.
- Have your child trace and say letters. Involving multiple sensory modalities is a powerful teaching tool.
- Encourage your child to watch your lips while you make certain sounds.

Most preschool and “pre-kindergarten” programs stress the importance of developing social skills,

with the argument being that academic skills will be learned in kindergarten. As a parent, you can encourage social skill development in your child in several ways:

- Enroll your child in activities with same age peers (e.g., gymnastics, soccer, summer day-camp programs, etc.).
- Find a group of parents interested in setting up a monthly play-group. Keep the number small, no more than four. If the group gets too big, it can become counterproductive, especially with a rambunctious group of kids.
- Encourage social skills development with your child. In the moment is the best way to learn. When your child does something socially appropriate, praise him or her immediately, and when they have made a “faux pas,” point it out in a constructive but non-punitive manner.
- Encourage social skills by modeling appropriately at home
- Have your child work on perspective taking skills with role-playing or watching a television show with a “social theme,” discussing the show’s content during and after the show. Viewing a show that has previously been taped or a videotape maximally allows for this.

Regardless of whether your child does in fact have a neurobehavioral issue, any child will benefit from these ideas. Above all, make these activities fun.



Help your child prepare for summer camp

Joshua F. Mark, LCSW

Many children going to overnight camp, especially first-time campers, experience some degree of anxiety. This is a normal response to what is often the most significant separation a child has yet experienced. Normal expressions of human emotion can be indicative of a healthy parent-child attachment...a good thing! Understanding what is being communicated by a child's anxiety can provide clues to best preparing them for camp.

The tension surrounding the natural separation and individuation that occurs developmentally can be at times more complicated in children with neurobehavioral issues. These kids are often accustomed to using their parents for help interpreting the social world, attempting to solve these problems, or just receiving a little love and support in the face of the struggle of it all. Leaving for camp "alone" can be big deal. They may need a hand to better prepare emotionally and practically to be without your help while at camp. It's not just about soothing them; it's about helping them solve problems.

Of course, some kids may not seem to have any anticipatory anxiety at all. They may be leaving all the worrying to you! You may need to pay attention for them to what awaits them at camp.

For many of the kids we serve at RNBC, we need to use a "special lens" to see how to help them prepare for camp. Using existing knowledge about who they are temperamentally and neurobehaviorally can be a guide to any intervention. What have other transitions, separations and adaptations been like for them? What can be learned and applied here?

Children with social learning disabilities are often particularly prone to struggle with changes in their lives or breaks in the routine. They may become overwhelmed when the scheme of things is altered and have difficulty figuring out a new situation and its social meanings. Camp is a unique environment, and it has different rules and expectations from those at school or home.

Other children may become anxious because of a specific fear at camp, such as thunderstorms, insects, "the dark" or bullies.

Here are some things to consider doing when preparing your child for camp.

- If your child hasn't had sleepovers yet, start now at comfortable settings such as relatives or close friends. Preview the plan with your child, and discuss it with the adult on the other end. After the sleepover, talk it over with your child. What did it feel like? What went right? What was fun? What wasn't?

- Teach to gaps in life skills. Children need to know how to make their beds, put clothes away, maintain daily hygiene and select the right clothes. Addressing these missing skills is important for dealing with the needs of camp and can be a confidence booster. The results make up for their resistance and complaining.
- Communicate to the camp in an in-depth manner about your child's special needs so the camp staff can get the inside scoop regarding your child's strengths and problem areas. If you feel extremely hesitant to do so, this may be an indication that this particular camp may not be best for him or her.
- Problem solve "what if" situations. What if you lose your towel? What if a kid is bothering you? What if you don't feel well? Probe about other "what ifs." If this is anxiety-producing, that's a cue to pull back and talk about it later.
- Familiarize your child with the outdoors. Many kids don't have experience walking with a flashlight in the dark. Practice it outside. Make it an adventure. Have fun, and build confidence with repetition and mastery.
- Predict and normalize "homesickness." Talk about it ahead of time as a possibility. Most kids feel some of this, and camp staff is very familiar with helping kids through it. Campers need to know it's normal rather than an indication of failure, and most importantly that it's a stage that kids get through as part of adapting to camp.
- Many kids find clever ways to sneak their "transitional object" to camp, even if they have abandoned this at an earlier age. They keep their teddy bears or blankets hidden in the pillow case or sleeping bag. Let your child make the call on this one.
- Keep a sense of humor! Discuss and plan for communication, including letter writing or lack thereof. Most camps have expectations and policies about this.
- Continue to discover and address other issues that relate to your child's unique concerns. It's a process to tune in to your child to minimize anxiety and enhance the camp experience.

These and other practical ideas for parents can be found at:

www.aboutourkids.org

www.mochasofa.com

www.offtocamp.com

Anxiety about camp is a two-way street. Although I felt no anxiety before my daughter left for camp, I was an emotional wreck the entire first week she was there! It was the second letter we received, filled with fun stories, that eventually calmed me down. Children often take cues from us, even in subtle ways. It's important for parents to be aware of and to manage our own anxieties about this separation.

Professional help may be useful to assist you in deciding the right age for your child to begin camping and to pick the best type of camp. A professional may also be helpful in diagnosing and treating anxiety that is persistent or extreme. At a camp with a therapeutic focus, anxiety management may be a point of attention.

Summer camp can be a rich and memorable experience, and a lot of fun. For all kids, camp offers a special opportunity to step forward developmentally; learn new life skills and gain the confidence that comes with them.



Your Child's Summer Reading

Gail Connelly, MS, CCC-SLP

It's not too soon to begin planning a summer of enjoyable reading for your child. Here are some suggestions:

1. Ask for book suggestions

It is essential to remember that children need individualized reading programs, and no one program fits them all. Several weeks before school ends, talk to your child's classroom teacher and reading /learning specialist about recommendations for summer reading. Teachers regularly assess student reading ability and often can provide lists of books that are leveled at a child's ability. If a student is receiving Multisensory Structured Language remediation in a program such as Wilson, SLANT or Project Read, appropriate decodable text can be usually be provided.

2. Use the five-finger test

You can use the Five-Finger or Thumbs-Up test to evaluate the appropriateness of reading material for your child. Ask the child to hold out one hand with the fingers extended. Turn to the first page of the text, and ask the child to begin reading. When confronted with a word that can't be sounded out or deciphered, the child turns down one finger. If the child still has any fingers up at the end of the page, the book should be within an appropriate reading level. This little test is simple and surprisingly accurate.

3. Create an incentive system

A simple incentive system can be used as an effective motivator. One example is Home Reading, a logbook designed to be used by both parent and child after a night's reading. The booklet provides a periodic incentive page and also offers helpful hints to parents. Refer to their website (www.homereading.com.au) for information on the three levels of these books and sources in the United States. With more reluctant readers, offer the reward of a toy, video or educational kit after a number of log pages are completed.

4. Provide a variety of text for your child

Picture books help activate background knowledge and create a visualization of the story. Be sure to discuss the most important parts of stories—the setting, characters and problems. Use prediction strategies to guess what will happen. Have fun writing text for pictures, and help your child learn new vocabulary. Picture books are invaluable for young students and also can benefit older children. Your librarian will be helpful in directing you to picture books such as *Pancakes for Breakfast* for youngsters and more sophisticated stories such as *The Silver Pony* for older students.

Nonfiction text, especially science and history, is often overlooked as an opportunity for summer reading. Choose books that appeal to a child's hobbies and interests. For example, a volume containing science experiments to perform at home offers a stimulating hands-on activity as a direct reward for carefully reading text.

Poetry can stimulate interest in sound, figurative language and imagination. Because poems are often short, they appeal to a

struggling reader.

Some poems are quite funny; others are mysterious. Poetry is also great for choral reading, which facilitates expression and fluency. *Knock at a Star* and *A Jar of Tiny Stars* are two anthologies which are highly recommended.

5. Read aloud to your child

Never forget that reading aloud to your child is the most important summer reading activity. Both young and struggling readers usually have listening comprehension and interests far above text that is at their reading level. They may wish to learn about space exploration, magic tricks, basketball stars or Hobbits, but they may not be able to decode the words. Reading aloud to children surrounds them with good literature, facts and ideas and provides opportunities for vocabulary and language growth.

6. Act as a coach, monitor and advocate

Most importantly, be aware that your most important relationship with your child is as parent **not** teacher. Unless you have had specialized training, you should not assume the role of reading teacher. Read the book *Straight Talk about Reading* for helpful, research-based ideas about your roles as a parent in teaching your child to read. Authors Hall and Moats suggest that the most appropriate roles are those of coach, monitor and advocate.

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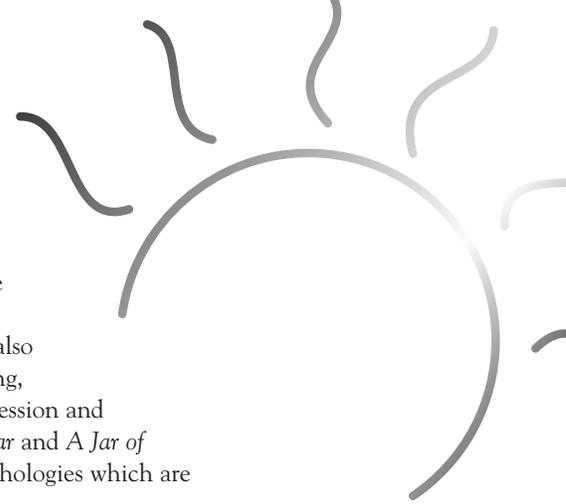
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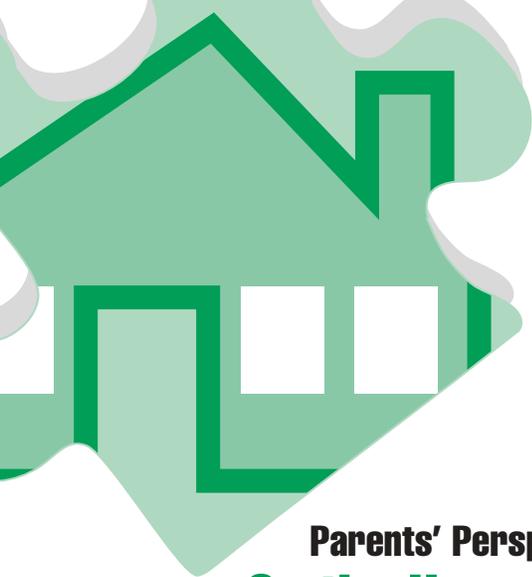
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Parents' Perspectives On the Home Front

Suzanne Bissette-Smith

Avoiding Trouble in Vacation Paradise

Family vacations are meant to be full of fun and adventure and to leave all of the family members with special memories. As parents, however, we know that vacations can be stressful times, particularly when well-laid plans go awry. Those of us who parent children with neurobehavioral issues are particularly attuned to the challenges of planning and taking a successful family vacation. We need to be ever vigilant in our effort to successfully incorporate our children's special needs into our vacation planning. Here are a few suggestions to help increase the likelihood that our family's vacation will, indeed, be memorable—and for all the right reasons!

Plan Ahead

- Leave little to chance, and make reservations (or arrange tickets in advance) for everything possible.
- Visit major tourist attractions during off-peak months or off-peak hours to avoid crowds.
- Study guidebooks in advance.
 - Learn what to avoid as well as the “must-sees.”
- Check out the web sites of attractions you wish to visit to learn hours of operation, advance ticketing arrangements and tips for visiting or touring.
- Involve your child(ren) in the planning process ; ask them to create a list of the top 10 things they'd like to do.
- Procure a note from your child's doctor describing your child's special needs.
 - Some amusement parks, such as Disney World, will provide a special needs visitor's pass and special gear.
- Rehearse with your child(ren) what to do and say if they are lost.
 - Safety pin a laminated card in a pocket of your child's clothing to provide identifying information about your child and his/her medication, as well as hotel information.
 - Consider using two-way radios.

Medication Matters

- If your child takes a break from medication during the summer, you should nevertheless consider utilizing medication during the family vacation. Avoid accidents caused by impetuous behavior.
 - Facilitate your child's ability to focus on activities, pay attention and follow instructions.
- Fill all prescriptions before leaving town, and travel with the medication in the pharmacy container that includes the prescription information.
- Travel with telephone numbers of your child's physician and your pharmacist.

Daily Schedule

- Plan a daily schedule, and review it with family members the night before or at breakfast that day.
- Plan more activities for the day than you will actually complete, so that you have the ability to be flexible.
 - Make sure your child is told in advance that you won't be doing every item on the day's agenda.
- Build “down time” into each day.
 - Consider a break of some sort every two or three hours.
 - Breaks are also needed if you are traveling by car.
- Be flexible and prepared to be agile with your planned schedule.
 - Consider a “divide and conquer” approach that permits your family to split up to pursue separate interests.
- Plan your family's mealtimes for off-peak hours, and choose restaurants that will satisfy our child's eating idiosyncrasies. (Our family has learned the hard way that not every restaurant will make a grilled cheese sandwich!)
- Carry nutritious snacks and cold water (use an insulated bag) in your backpack,
 - Carry hand wipes for inevitable sticky messes.
- Locate quiet spots to rest if your child seems headed for a meltdown.

Packing

- Bring a range of attire: raingear, sweatshirts, layers that will adjust to warmer and cooler weather.
- Let your child pack his own backpack with items to occupy his attention, although you will need final approval rights. (We had to unpack our son's cap gun and caps!)
- If you will be waiting in lines, bring hand-held games, a Walkman and action figures (or Polly Pockets).
- If you'll be spending time in the car, bring games, card games, books on tape, CDs and a Walkman.
- As mentioned earlier, consider two-way radios.
- Medication and contact information for your physician and pharmacist .

There are, of course, no guarantees of a perfect vacation, regardless of the effort you invest in advance planning. Nevertheless, if you are well-prepared, including the willingness to be flexible and to accept the unexpected, your family and you will have a great time together and may find that some of your most memorable moments arise from the pleasures to be found in the unexpected. Happy Travels!

Family Fun Over the Summer

Sheeba Daniel-Crotty, PhD

Long days, vacations, change in routine and lack of structure are just a few of the challenges that parents face over the summer in keeping their children socially connected and fostering their social development. While your child may be involved with wonderful summer camps and regular play dates, there are also some simple family activities that can be equally beneficial for social development.

Ask your child to be the Summer of 2004 family photographer.

Depending on your child's age, enlist his help or assign him the role of taking family photos across a number of family events. Be specific in for pictures of the family (or individual family members) experiencing different emotions, interests, new experiences (positive or negative), etc. Instruct your child in the use of the camera, and ask him to bring along the camera on regular activities (e.g., going out to dinner) as well as special events (e.g., a trip to Disneyland). Being behind the lens allows the child to observe emotions and how they are expressed nonverbally in a removed and therefore safe and comfortable fashion. Parents can be more interactive and discuss pictures taken while helping their child create a scrapbook (manually or digitally).

Create a family movie night or a family book club at home.

Watch a movie or read a book with your child, and discuss various aspects of the character's personality and relationships in order to teach valuable social skills. Discuss the behaviors of the protagonist and antagonist and how those behaviors affect others. For example, "In this movie, how did the policeman make the scared child feel more at ease?" For younger kids, renting a movie and watching without sound is a great way to help direct attention to nonverbal behavior (e.g., body gestures) in order to guess emotions.

If traveling to a foreign country, schedule time to see the sites as well as to people watch.

When in a foreign country, point out differences in behaviors, expressions, customs, traditions and values. Discretely ask your child to guess "what is going on" or "what are people feeling" in an interaction between two or more people. If your child does not know the language, then he or she must rely on nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, body gestures, tone of voice, etc.) to figure out the "tone" of the interaction (e.g., humor, serious, argument, etc.).

Get bitten by the acting bug.

Depending on the age and interest level of your child, use role plays or play charades to practice behaviors in social situations as well as to teach the importance of attending to nonverbal cues to understand others' emotions, perspective and intentions. Encouraging an older child to join a summer theatre group or improvisation lessons may be helpful in providing a forum within which to practice certain emotions or to experience a particular problem. Taking on a "role" may provide the distance and comfort level your child needs to practice new behaviors (e.g., expressing new feelings and responding to the feelings of others).

Provide your child with a positive model of appropriate social skills.

Remember that your behaviors, reactions and responses are carefully attended to by your children. Model prosocial behavior, polite etiquette toward others and effective conversation skills (e.g., good listening skills, asking questions, taking turns in conversation, etc.). Depending on the content and nature of the situation, discuss with your child decisions you made that resulted in positive and negative outcomes. Lastly, explain, out loud, how you interpret others' nonverbal cues and how those cues give you information about emotions and intentions.

Have fun and enjoy positive time with your child.

Registration for Spring Social Development Groups has begun. Call Betsy, 847-933-9339, x225 to register for groups starting in March.

Teen Summer Program

June 21 – June 24, 2004

June 28 – July 1, 2004

Plans are being developed for a concentrated eight-day program, (3 hours/day, Monday - Thursday) for high school-aged boys and girls with social-emotional learning disabilities. We're looking to create a working environment to support self-awareness and personal change in a peer-centered space that is stimulating, fun and meaningful. Joshua Mark, LCSW, will lead the program, assisted by other RNBC staff. More detailed information will be available in April. Please leave your name and contact information with our office staff if you would like to learn more about this new offering.

Eighth Annual NLD Symposium

South San Francisco, CA

March 5-6, 2004

Nationally recognized speakers including our own Meryl Lipton, PhD, presenting "The Role of Pharmacology in the Treatment of NLD." For more information, visit www.NLDline.com

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RNBC presents...

Home and School Interventions for Children with Social/Emotional Learning Disorders

*Oakton Community College
1600 East Golf Road, Des Plaines*

*Friday, November 12, 2004
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

Open to parents, teachers and all other allied health care professionals interested in understanding and helping children with a variety of social learning disorders, including but not limited to ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome and other Autistic Spectrum Disorders. The workshop objectives include:

The registration fee will include the workshop and includes a continental breakfast, box lunch and afternoon snack. Participants may also apply for Continuing Education Credits. For additional conference information call Cate at RNBC, 847-933-9339, x222.

Julie Becker

Out of the myriad of web sites, one that stands out is SchwabLearning.org. Self-described as “a parent’s guide to helping kids with learning difficulties”, the site offers wonderful, practical information and guidance for parents of children with LD and/or AD/HD. It was established by the non-profit Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation after the Schwabs encountered difficulties when their own son was identified with dyslexia. (Ironically, the highly successful Charles Schwab discovered that dyslexia was also the cause of his life-long struggle with reading.) The site contains over 350 articles organized into four easy-to-navigate sections:

Identifying: This section is designed to help parents who are just beginning to understanding their child’s learning difficulties. Facts about dysgraphia, dyslexia, Central Auditory Processing Disorder and AD/HD are presented in simple, accessible language. Frequently used terms, relevant legal issues and general information on assessments are also provided to help those unfamiliar with the special education process.

Managing: Managing the issues that arise from having a child with a learning difference, both at home and at school, are discussed here. Effective behavior and learning strategies, how to

talk to your child about their learning difference, school communication, advocacy, family relationships and assistive technology are just a sampling of the many topics discussed.

Connecting: Message boards, inspiring personal stories and support information are provided to help those interested in connecting with other parents facing similar challenges, both locally and across the country.

Resources: The resource section is where parents can sign-up for Schwab’s weekly online newsletter. The newsletter consistently features articles of interest including topics such as *Parents Survival Guide* and *Hints for Homework*. Books, videos, other web sites, quizzes, event calendars and polls are also included in this section. A wide variety of downloadable publications are offered, including a series of Schwab E-ssential Guides with topics such as *A Parent’s Guide to Sibling Issues* and *25 Ways to Encourage Reading*. Don’t miss the links to other relevant free publications such as the very informative *Life Success for Children with LD* by the Frostig Center.

While SchwabLearning.org positions itself primarily for parents, it’s an excellent source to share with teachers and other school staff. The site consistently offers easy access to valuable information and always with an optimistic attitude. And isn’t that something we can all use!

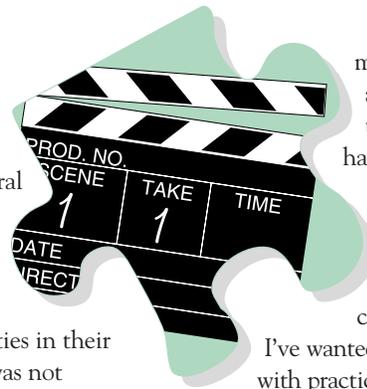
Our Take

I didn’t always know how hard it was for me to pay attention until this year. I have always been able to pass on my common knowledge and natural smarts. Upon entering high school paying attention and concentrating became harder. I no longer could even keep up when I was trying to pay attention. Also, it was not helping that the teachers did not realize that I was having difficulties in their classes. I think that the teachers thought that I was not studying, even though I was studying. I just did not understand it. One thing I think teachers could do is sit down and talk to a failing student and ask what is wrong, rather than just giving you your grade. Although one of my teachers did this, it was not enough. If only the rest of my teachers would sit down with me for only two minutes a day it would make a huge difference in my performance. But meeting with a student or students for two minutes a day might not always be possible, so I use strategies to help me on my own.

Sophomore at Loyola

When I go home and don’t do my work, I’m not actively ignoring it. I’m not thinking about not doing work, I’m just not thinking about it at all. Hard work pays in the future, but laziness pays now. I’ve never consciously ignored or put off an assignment. I have a feeling that when I’m really not looking forward to doing something, my mind sort of subconsciously puts it away where I don’t have to worry about it.

When I first started having this problem, I would always realize that I hadn’t done my homework while I was on my way to that class. I compare my problem to alcoholism. At first, I had some concern about what I had done, but it was more or less quickly forgotten about. As it got worse, I went from thinking, “Oh no, I didn’t do my homework,” to thinking, “I guess I didn’t do my work,” to thinking nothing about it at all. As an alcoholic gets worse and worse with their drinking problem, they are constantly drunk, and when it becomes a problem they assure themselves there’s nothing wrong. As



my problem became worse, I started never doing any work at any time, sometimes even in class, and I always thought that I was doing fine. It never seemed to occur to me that having over 10 missing assignments in each of my five classes could be a problem. I only ever started to think that there might be something going wrong somewhere when I got a report card with D’s and was surprised.

The only area I’ve ever been able to really concentrate on is my music. Since I was three years old, I’ve wanted to play guitar in a rock band. I’ve never found a problem with practicing, even when I was taking classical guitar lessons and wasn’t fond of the material. One reason playing in a rock band professionally would be ideal for a person like me is because a rock musician has nothing to worry about when it comes to something like paperwork, which has constantly been my weakness. It consists almost entirely of just playing music, which is the one thing I’ve never had a single issue with.

Whether somebody is successful in life has nothing to do with eliminating problems like mine; they just need to find a way around the problem. For me, that means working hard with music, so that I can work with my strengths and avoid my weaknesses. I realize that whether I like it or not, I really do have to get through high school at least, and I’m pretty sure I would like to graduate from college, but I’m afraid of all the problems I’ve had with just one year of high school. I’ve recently been asking myself, what can I do for myself? I’ve had a much higher success rate in visual arts. What I can do for myself is sign up for classes where I can see myself more successful than in the past. I can sign myself up for classes with teachers I have a hard time letting down. What my teachers can do for me I can’t say, because it is the teacher that decides what they can do for me. I need to develop doing my homework into a habit. I need to make a habit of writing down my assignments, looking at what I wrote when I get home, and actually doing the work without my mind wandering off in some other direction. All I can ask of a teacher is to do anything they are willing to do to help me make homework a habit for me.

Sophomore at Chicago Academy of the Arts

MASTER PIECE



Bullying

Ed Marks, Student at Cove School

What is bullying? In my opinion, bullying is when someone bigger, smarter, or more powerful takes advantage of someone smaller, weaker, or less intelligent. The most common example of bullying is a big, tough kid beating up the class brain. But kids aren't the only ones who bully. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden are bullies who want to destroy our capitalist way of life. The Catholic priests who have been molesting young boys are bullies. Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan are racist bullies who believe any people of a minority, should be eliminated.

Bullies are people who are cowardly, insecure, ignorant and, ultimately, jealous. I think every kid and adult in the world has been bullied at least once. Bullies torment people whom they consider to be different. I've been bullied in my life many times, for basically two reasons: I've been a bit overweight for much of my life and because I have learning differences. People bully kids like me and many of my friends with LD because, to uneducated and mean people, we're a little different to them.

They're so insecure about themselves and their pathetic lives that the only thing that makes them feel better is to mock and patronize someone different from them. But the main reason they want to be cruel to people with LD is because they're jealous. There are so many people who have LD that have become very successful, rich and famous. These people include Tom Cruise, Cher, Winston Churchill, Whoopi Goldberg, James Earl Jones and Albert Einstein.

There is a story about bullying that happened to me in my life that I'll never forget. Someone made a crack about my inabilities. Once, when I was younger, I was leaving a restaurant downtown with my mom, and we were going through the revolving door. I was kind of overwhelmed and a little confused. As we were going through it, a man passing said to my mom, "Not too smart, is he?" That's how ignorant and cruel people can be, a grown man basically calling an innocent little kid dumb. That's why I want to show the world that learning differences is not the same thing as a physical or mental handicap.

Bullying is a bad, unfair thing. Whether it's a kid at school stealing lunch money, a racist crack or something as big as a terrorist bombing, bullying will probably never go away. Chances are, if you're mean to someone, they'll be mean to other people, and those people will be mean to other people, and so on. So why not try to accept people for whom they are and be good to others? What have you got to lose? Bring a little peace into this crazy world. If you see a homeless person or a lonely kid or anyone in need, help him, befriend him, or just be nice to him. We'd live in a much better world if Whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Homosexuals, Lesbians, Gentiles, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, poor people, rich people, fat people, thin people, mentally and/or physically handicapped people, people with learning disabilities and many others, could all shake hands and make peace. As the great Martin Luther King, Jr., once said: "Someday I wish that my children will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

CENTER SPOTLIGHT

Michael Balthazor, PhD, Pediatric Neuropsychologist,

has been a Paediatric Neuropsychologist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada, for the past seven years where he conducted assessments on preschoolers, youth and adolescents with developmental problems. He has conducted research and been published in several peer reviewed journals in areas including medication effects in children with autism spectrum disorders and ADHD, children's self-perceptions regarding their social acceptance and neuropsychological outcomes of several metabolic and solid organ diseases. Dr. Balthazor's educational background reflects training in school psychology, child clinical psychology, and paediatric neuropsychology. He obtained an MEd and trained as a school psychologist at the University of Arizona. He went on to complete an MS and PhD in clinical child psychology from Florida State University. He then completed an internship in child clinical psychology with an emphasis on neuropsychological assessment from the University of Washington School of Medicine. Following this, he did a two-year fellowship in Pediatric Neuropsychology from the University of Minnesota School of Medicine.



Clark McKown, PhD, Child Clinical Psychologist

earned his PhD from the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley and his BA in Psychology from Yale University. After completing his doctoral training, Dr. McKown joined the Psychology faculty at U.C. Berkeley, where he taught courses on developmental psychopathology, clinical psychology, and community psychology. Dr. McKown completed his predoctoral internship training at the University of California, San Francisco Department of Psychiatry and Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital. His postdoctoral experiences included further training at U.C. Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Area Center for Cognitive Therapy. Dr. McKown has worked with children from preschool through adolescence and their families. In his clinical capacity, Dr. McKown has conducted assessments and individual, family, and group therapy with children with autistic spectrum disorders, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, eating disorders, learning disabilities, and disruptive behavior disorders. At RNBC, Dr. McKown will conduct psychological evaluations, provide treatment, consult with schools and develop the Center's research program. Dr. McKown maintains an active research program examining how instructional environments and teacher-student relationships affect children's academic development.



Dawn Greco, MA, Pearl H. Rieger Fellow

recently began the Pearl H. Rieger Fellowship at RNBC. This is a two-year fellowship that provides training in the area of psychoeducational assessment of children and adolescents, with additional training in clinical and neuropsychological assessment. Dawn is earning her PhD in Counseling Psychology at Loyola University Chicago. She completed her Pre-Doctoral Clinical Internship in Child Clinical/Pediatric Psychology at La Rabida Children's Hospital in Chicago. Her additional Pre-Doctoral training included externships in the Pediatric Neuropsychology Clinic at Children's Memorial Hospital, Child Psychiatry Department at Cook County Hospital and at the Illinois Masonic Children's Home. Prior to earning her master's degree from Loyola University Chicago, Ms. Greco earned her BA in Psychology from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Through the years, she has obtained experience in assessment and therapy while working with a wide range of pediatric populations, including children with social/emotional difficulties, behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, medical illnesses, and children who have experienced trauma.



David K. Pelo, MA, Pearl H. Rieger Fellow

holds a BA in psychology from Wheaton College, an MA in Clinical Psychology from Wheaton Graduate School, an MA in psychology and an MA in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, where he is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology in the Graduate School of Psychology. He recently completed his predoctoral internship at the Louis Stokes Cleveland Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center where he received specialized training in neuropsychology. He also completed a preinternship in pediatric neuropsychology at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute and Hospital in Los Angeles. David has extensive experience working with children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems in inpatient, outpatient, and residential treatment settings. At RNBC, as part of his fellowship he conducts psychological and psycho-educational evaluations, provides individual and family psychotherapy, consults with schools, and co-facilitates social skills groups.



Parents Connections

Parents of children with neurobehavioral disorders often face many challenges unique to having children with these special needs. While a supportive friend or sympathetic family member is always appreciated, it can be helpful to talk with others in similar circumstances. That's why Parent Connections was formed.

Parent Connections is an opportunity to:

- Participate in an informal, parent-led group comprised of other parents
- Share ideas on what has worked for you and your child
- Benefit from the experiences and suggestions of others
- Discuss issues or concerns you may have about your child
- Receive support and network with other parents
- Act as a mentor to a newer parent or be assigned a mentor

Parent Connections meets periodically throughout the year. There is no fee to participate in this program. For more information, contact Cate Gonley at Rush Neurobehavioral Center at (847) 933-9339.

Outreach Partnerships

“Learning Disabilities and More” is a monthly series of programs presented in cooperation with the staff of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center (RNBC) and the Adult Services Office of the Chicago Public Library.

Austin-Irving Branch • Chicago Public Library 6100 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago 312-744-6222

All programs are on Tuesdays, beginning at 7 p.m.

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| Tues., Jan. 13, 2004 | Strategies to Enhance Your Child's Social Skills,
Jennifer Grim, MS, Special Education |
| Tues., Feb 10, 2004 | Individualized Education Programs (IEP),
Catherine J. Oliver, RN, C, MSN |
| Tues., March 9, 2004 | Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction,
Deborah Michael, MS, OTR/L |
| Tues., April 13 2004 | Beyond Articulation: Exploring Aspects of Language Production,
Gail J. Connelly, MS, CCC-SLP,
Learning Disabilities Specialist, Latin School |
| Tues., May 11, 2004 | Understanding Children's Central Auditory Processing Deficits,
Jeanane M. Ferre, PhD, Audiologist,
CCC-A |

Grand Rounds Rush Neurobehavioral Center 9711 Skokie Blvd., Suite D, Skokie RSVP at 847-933-9339, x222

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|----------------------|---|
| Tues., Jan. 27, 2004 | Gloria Levin MA, Registered/Licensed Occupational Therapist presents
<i>Sensory Integration – Theory and Practice: An Overview</i> |
| Tues., Mar. 9, 2004 | Shartrina Robinson-Amato, Director of Educational Programs presents
<i>Executive Function Disorder: Exploring the Difficulties Associated with having an Executive Function Disorder</i> |

Grand Rounds are held at the Kenton Activity Center, across from the Healing Garden, 9701 N. Knox. The presentations begin promptly at 12:30 p.m. and last approximately one hour.

Participation is free and open to the public. Registration is required since space and materials are limited. Call Cate at (847) 933-9339 ext. 222 to RSVP or for additional information.

Edgebrook Branch • Chicago Public Library 5331 W. Devon Avenue, Chicago 312-744-8313

All programs are on Tuesdays, beginning at 7 p.m.

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|-----------------------|---|
| Tues., Jan. 20, 2004 | How to Manage Your Child with ADHD: Advice for Parents and Teachers,
Marc S. Atkins, PhD |
| Tues., Feb. 17, 2004 | Communicating with the “Difficult to Communicate with” Child,
John Dominguez, PhD |
| Tues., March 16, 2004 | Assistive Devices for Children with Learning Disabilities,
Cilla Sluga |
| Tues., April 20, 2004 | Strategies and Learning Tools for Visual-Spatial Learners,
Doris Wells-Papanek |
| Tues., May 18, 2004 | Special Siblings:
Helping Relationships Grow,
Judith Loseff Lavin |



Rush Neurobehavioral Center
Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center
9711 Skokie Blvd., Suite D
Skokie, IL 60077

RNBC Seventh Annual Benefit Dinner

RNBC would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our advisory board, friends, supporters and staff for the success of our seventh

annual gala. This year's benefit raised \$565,000 dollars.

The 2003 Pearl H. Rieger award was bestowed upon **Samuel P. Gotoff, MD, retired professor and Chairman of Pediatrics, Rush University Medical Center**, for the significant difference he has made in the lives of children with neurobehavioral disorders.



Samuel P. Gotoff, MD



Diane Swonk

This year, the center presented **Diane Swonk, Chief Economist at Bank One**, with the Living Proof Award. This award honors an individual with neurobehavioral differences who has successfully overcome such challenges.

Watch for our announcement of RNBC's Eighth Annual Benefit Dinner in the next issue of *Puzzle Pieces*. For information call 847-933-9339.