

PUZZLE PIECES

RUSH NEUROBEHAVIORAL CENTER • FALL 2007



Endings Are Important and Shouldn't Be Overlooked



Meryl Lipton, MD, PhD
Executive Director

As the school year begins, it may seem odd to write about endings, but for a youngster returning to school, endings are what they call, “a really big deal.”

In our culture we—and our children—are often taught about beginnings. There is frequent advice on “starting the new school year,” and “getting ready for the new grade

and teacher.” Of course, we cannot experience beginnings without also experiencing endings. While each has its challenges, culturally we don't prepare for endings as frequently and thoroughly as we do for beginnings. As a result, we often struggle with endings.

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RNBC Celebrates Pearl H. Rieger for Over a Decade of Service!!!

Please join us for the RNBC Eleventh Annual Awards Dinner at the Four Season Hotel Chicago, Grand Ballroom on Thursday, October 18, 2007.

When you meet a former patient of Pearl H. Rieger, M.A. it is more common than not to hear them say, “Pearl saved my life. I would not be the person I am today without her.”

It is a privilege to honor Pearl H. Rieger, M.A., psycho-educational diagnostician, for her contributions to RNBC. Her charisma, methodology and individualized approach to diagnosing children with learning differences are truly one of a kind. As Pearl steps down from her current role at RNBC, we are taking an opportunity to offer her a public thank you from the RNBC family and those individuals that have been deeply affected by her loving approach to

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Using Executive Functions to Navigate the Back-to-School Transition



Georgia Bozeday, EdD
Director of Educational Services

Those of us who teach Executive Functions at RNBC would begin reading this article by highlighting the three key terms in the title. These are: Executive Functions, Transition, and Back-to-School. In our work with schools and our tutoring sessions at the Center we help students recognize that their first task is to understand what's being asked of them. As a reader of

this article, the first task is to understand the title.

Let's start with the word “transition.” The dictionary definition provides synonyms like “passage” and “change.” Although “change” is listed as a synonym, it really refers to the change process, not the change itself. We need to understand that making transitions involves leaving something behind, giving up certain specific aspects of the previous situation in order to move forward. This experience of giving something up will be accompanied by naturally occurring emotional responses like feeling discomfort, unhappiness, and disturbance. The transition process, therefore, includes paying attention to the emotional concerns that accompany the space between leaving the old and taking on the new.

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MASTER PIECES

Selections from Children and Young Adults



Sam Becker

High School Student Overcomes Challenges for Love of Hobby

Have you ever wanted to be a part of something that you've always wanted to do but obstacles got in your way? This problem happened to me, but I found a way around it. My name is Sam Becker; I'm a 17 year old senior at Glenbrook North High School in Northbrook. For a long time I have been interested in doing martial arts, and video game design. I have always wondered how the fight scenes were done in the movies. I even did a little twist to the Pirates of the Caribbean theme with a sword demonstration in my school's talent show.

In the spring I went to a college fair, and Columbia College Chicago was there. I asked if they had any summer programs and turns out that they have a program in the arts for high school kids. In their brochure I found an unarmed stage combat class. I signed up for it right away thinking, "Wow! I have a feeling that this is going to be interesting."

A few weeks later, I was admitted, registered, and went to their orientation. But, there was one big obstacle in my way . . . How do I get there??? I had to think about my options. At first I thought, "Maybe Mom can take me!" That didn't go so well. Then, I figured that I could take public transportation to the city. And, that's exactly what I did. Here are the steps I followed . . .

First, I made a plan of how to get to Columbia from Northbrook. I started with a map the school gave me to plan my route and decide what transportation I could use. I rode my bike to the nearest Metra train station and picked up a schedule. I figured out on the timetable when I needed to be at the station. For me, my class started at 1:00 p.m. so I decided on the 10:32 a.m. train from Northbrook arriving Union Station 11:18 a.m. Sometimes the train came a little late, but I didn't worry because I still had plenty of time.

Once at Union Station, I took the CTA bus to State & Adams which is 7 blocks to the campus. I found out which local bus to take by using the CTA Trip Planner at www.transitchicago.com and checking CTA pamphlets available at the train station.

Second, I had to practice my plan multiple times with my mother or a helper. I learned it's important to practice the exact days and times because the bus and train schedules can be different. The first few times I practiced I felt a little afraid—being in the city which can be so loud and noisy. For someone who lives in the suburbs, it felt completely weird and I felt out of place. But after awhile it felt like I was part of the city.

Finally, be prepared. Leave PLENTY of extra time in case something unexpected happens. Buy a train and bus pass so you don't have to worry about having the exact change every time. Be sure to stay alert and focused, otherwise you could end up in Indiana or Wisconsin. I never play DS video games on the train. I also only listen to my iPod on the train—never when on the bus or walking. Also, keep your personal belongings in your pockets.

My experience at Columbia was truly unforgettable because I learned so much about the theater industry and entertainment. I got to study a subject that I found personally enjoyable and see what it might feel like when I actually go to college. I especially liked being on my own and taking care of myself.

In conclusion, if you have a chance to do something you really want, (like Columbia) but there's an obstacle in your way, (how to get there) my advice is to not let fear get in your way. Make a plan, practice and be prepared. As one martial arts saying goes, "one meeting, one opportunity."

Please Visit our Website at www.RNBC.org

RNBC Celebrates

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helping children with learning differences.

A very special *Creating the Future Award* will be accepted by former Pearl patient and businessman, **Eric Cooper**. The Creating the Future Award highlights the accomplishments of a young adult with neurobehavioral issues who, with his or her family, have struggled and achieved. Eric is the founder of Spring Education Resource Center (SERC), a provider of comprehensive and specialized services to students with learning disabilities and language-based learning issues. He is also Managing Director of Cooperfund, Inc., a family-owned investment company with over 100 investment partnerships, joint ventures, and strategic alliances in the United States and abroad.

We are also thrilled to announce this year's *Pearl H. Rieger Award* recipient as the internationally recognized **Ami Klin, Ph.D.**, Director of the Autism Program and Harris Associate Professor of Child Psychology and Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center of Yale University School of Medicine. The Pearl H. Rieger Award pays tribute to an individual or institution that has made a significant difference in the lives of children.



Ami Klin, Ph.D.

"Pearl's impact on my life is easily the most profound. Without having met Pearl, I wouldn't have any of the most important things in my life today!"

Eric Cooper

Dr. Klin obtained his Ph.D. from the University of London, and completed clinical and research post-doctoral fellowships at the Yale Child Study Center. He directs the Autism Program at Yale, which is one of the National Institutes of Health Autism Centers of Excellence. Dr. Klin's primary research activities focus on the social mind and the social brain, and on aspects of autism from infancy through adulthood. He is the author of over 150 publications in the field of autism and related conditions. He is also the co-editor of a textbook on Asperger Syndrome published by Guilford Press, the third edition of the *Handbook of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders* published by Wiley, and several special issues of professional journals focused on autism and related disorders.

Dr. Klin will join Pearl Rieger for a more intimate public conversation about learning differences and Dr. Klin's work with children challenged by autistic spectrum disorders. Awards Dinner guests may attend this session at the Four Seasons from 5:00-6:00 p.m. prior to the event reception.

We hope you can join us for what promises to be an exciting and educational evening! For more information regarding the RNBC Eleventh Annual Awards Dinner, please contact Pat Hurley & Associates at (312) 553-2000.



Meryl E. Lipton, M.D., Ph.D. and Pearl H. Rieger, M.A.

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Using Executive Functions

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In describing the other key vocabulary in the title, we know that “executive functions” is a term seated in neuroscience and referencing goal-directed behavior. Specifically, it impacts one’s ability to successfully plan (short and long-term) as well as to manage the important aspects of daily life. Applying executive functions to the major transition from summer to fall—the beginning of a new school year—seems like a most natural fit.

Examining the emotional response to hearing the phrase, “back-to-school” is a critical component in our consideration of the title’s meaning. These three words evoke a wide array of responses ranging from excitement and eager anticipation to dread and foreboding. Even if our response is negative, this is a transition we can’t put aside. Much as we might want to ignore the fact that school is starting, the weeks leading up to the first day are filled with back-to-school references and media hype.

As parents we layer our own personal memories and emotional reactions to going back to school with those responses that we imagine our children are experiencing. All parents want their children to start the year in a positive and confident way. Likewise, all students want to have a good year. However, all too often, both parents and students feel ill-prepared to make real this envisioned successful, seamless change to the start of the school year.

Instead, the end of the summer vacation and the beginning of the school year seem to collide like two opposing weather systems vying to claim the environment, but unaware of the other’s presence. In many ways, the summer way of living is the antithesis of the demands of school. After all, success in school is based in large part on achieving consistency (early

bed time), maintaining routine (homework schedule), and creating structure (organizing long-term assignments).

Each of the above-listed school skills hinges on the effective utilization of executive functions. Parents and children need to know how to construct and follow plans to organize and manage school expectations and after-school activities, as well as family goings-on. Applying the higher-level executive functions related to problem-solving and decision-making speaks to the heart of the meaning of “transition.” Pulling from these areas allows us to extend into the emotional arena our understanding of how to make a smooth shift (also an executive function term) from summer to school.

Another way to portray this summer-to-school transition is by characterizing summer as a period for unwinding contrasted with fall and school as a period requiring rewinding. While this state is cyclical and naturally occurring, we often experience it as sudden and stress-inducing. Employing executive functions for setting goals, planning, managing time and materials, as well as higher-order problem-solving can make this transition from summer to the school year work more smoothly.

Located in the box adjacent to this article, the Educational Services Department has developed a back-to-school transition plan using executive functions as a guide. We employed a strategy called “backward planning” which means we started at the end (in this case the first weeks of school) and generated the plan backwards, beginning with the weeks just before school starts. Even if school has already begun, this guide can help you discover how you and your child are experiencing the shift from summer’s freedom to the demands of the school year. This plan has been designed to facilitate parents and children working together to achieve a successful transition from summer back-to-school.



TUTORING SERVICES AT RNBC

RNBC offers tutoring in executive function skills for children in elementary, secondary, and higher educational settings. Most tutoring sessions are scheduled individually or in small groups and take place at the Center during after-school hours. Tutoring sessions address issues related to goal-setting, planning, organizational skills and time management strategies.

Give your child the best possible start to the school year! Fall is an optimal time for students to learn and develop better practices in these executive function areas. Space is limited so call now.

For more information, please call Georgia Bozeday,
Director of Educational Services, at 847-763-7959



TRANSITION PLAN FROM SUMMER BACK-TO-SCHOOL		
Steps in Chronological Order	Executive Functions Area	What to Do
1. Comparing/Reflecting Summer with the Start of School	Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List things that made summer fun List what's important for school Describe the differences between summer and school Define what's ending and what's beginning
2. Preparing for the Start of School	Categorizing Planning	<p>Determine which items to purchase according to categories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School materials and supplies Clothes Lunch <p>Purchase items . . .</p> <p>Create a home file system to store class papers, tests, and notes for future referencing</p>
3. Choosing Extra-Curricular Activities	Time Management Prioritization Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine your weekly schedule day-by-day Balance your school requirements with your interests and talents
4. Managing the School Week (during first few weeks of school)	Materials Management Time Management Goal Setting Task Analysis Note Taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize back pack, study area, and school materials Set aside enough time each night for homework and studying Set goals for the beginning of the school year (academic, social, and family) Break down big projects into more manageable pieces When in class, take organized notes to reinforce concepts and later use as a tool for studying

CENTER SPOTLIGHT

RNBC is thrilled to welcome two new professionals . . .



Craigan Usher, M.D.
Child & Adolescent
Psychiatrist

RNBC is proud to welcome **Craigan Usher, M.D.**, Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, from Harvard Medical School's Massachusetts General Hospital/McLean Hospital Child & Adolescent Psychiatry training program. Dr. Usher will take a limited clinical role at the Center over the next year, seeing a small number of patients and families in Skokie and at the Rush University Medical Center (RUMC). Dr. Usher's chief focus will be further exploring neuroscience, expanding his knowledge of Dr. Meryl Lipton's and RNBC's social-emotional

learning paradigm, and understanding the contributions of social cognitive neuroscience to the care and education of children. He will also be involved with both the Departments of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at RUMC.

Dr. Usher brings a unique interest in education, medicine, and psychodynamic and psychopharmacologic psychiatry to RNBC. Upon receiving his undergraduate degree from Walla Walla College, he spent a year teaching elementary and high school students on the island of Yap in Micronesia. Dr. Usher went on to attend Georgetown University School of Medicine and was honored with Georgetown's Francis L. Clark Psychiatry Award.

Dr. Usher has published several textbook chapters and articles on topics ranging from child psychotherapy to psychopharmacologic management in the pediatric intensive care setting. Last year, Dr. Usher was awarded a fellowship to the American Psychoanalytic Association and presented a case conference at its annual meeting. Given his interest in education, an interdisciplinary approach to solving difficult problems, and learning more about neuroscience, Dr. Usher is excited to start work at the RNBC.



Michael "Mike" Smith
Educational Specialist

Michael "Mike" Smith, Education Specialist, joined RNBC in July of 2007. Mike is excited to work side-by-side with a team of educators developing and implementing the Executive Functions Curriculum within multiple Chicago area school and after-school sites. Mike will also take the lead in creating and piloting the new Executive Functions College Handbook. In addition, he is an active member of the Social-Emotional Learning Initiative research team, designing and implementing a class-

room-based Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum.

Prior to joining RNBC, Mike was the Theatre Arts teacher at North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School (NLCP) on the west side of Chicago. Over the past six years, Mike created and sustained the Theatre Program at NLCP, where he directed several of the school plays. He was also an integral player in creating and implementing NLCP's Public Speaking curriculum as well as the unique College Prep course.

Upon receiving his Bachelor's degree in Theatre from Skidmore College and spending a year as an actor in Los Angeles, Mike is a proud company member and actor with The House Theatre of Chicago. The House has provided Mike the opportunity to perform in several critically acclaimed and award-winning shows, including the samurai epic *Curse of the Crying Heart*, in which he was nominated for Best Supporting Actor by the Joseph Jefferson Awards Committee.

As an artistic performer and educator, Mike continues to find fascinating connections between his two careers. He is eager to apply his skills and experience as an actor and classroom teacher to the area of Social-Emotional Learning. What he finds most thrilling about education and theatre is that true success can be achieved in both areas through consistent collaboration and imagination.

Rush NeuroBehavioral Center presents . . .

A GROUP FOR SIBLINGS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A support group for brothers and sisters of special needs children. Weekly 1-hour meetings with a trained therapist to provide a forum for siblings of special needs children.

- I am embarrassed by my brother or sister in public.
- Do I have to go to his/her appointment?
- Sometimes I am very angry with him/her.
- Other kids are making fun of him/her at school, what should I do?

This group will help children deal with these issues and provide coping strategies to deal with the feelings they have. It will be informative, and fun for your children.

Back-to-School: Tricks for Transitioning

Dr. Craigan Usher

Going back to school is a lot like taking the Wisconsin Card Sort Test: it's full of surprising, unspoken rule changes! The Wisconsin Card Sort is a test commonly used to evaluate executive function; in this exam participants play a card game in which, unannounced by the examiner, the rules change at various points. Each time the rules shift, the participant has to "catch onto" the process and "switch sets" meaning, discover new ways to match cards while receiving little help from the examiner. Individuals who are free from anxiety or any executive function problems quickly adjust their card playing according to the new rules. Others, perhaps slightly more anxious or executive functionally challenged, experience the task as mildly frustrating, but eventually catch on. Finally, people who, for whatever reason, enjoy less neurocognitive flexibility become frozen or utterly furious with the unannounced rule shifts. With these folks, the game often grinds to a halt.

Each fall students go through the kind of tricky rule changes observed in the Wisconsin Card Sort test. Often, quite unannounced and unanticipated, the physiological, sociological, environmental, and academic rules in place during last school year or over the summer are altered or no longer apply. For example, often unexpectedly, students must retrain their circadian rhythms back into school shape—something their hypothalamuses (the brain's sleep center) do with reluctance, moving bed times earlier in order to get a reasonable amount of sleep and get up on time for school. Meanwhile, peer groups ask kids to be socially caught up with the latest cultural and developmental trends. As such, at the start of the school year, many kids once on the fringe of understanding what was cool may feel like outsiders. For example, while it may have been completely normal to discuss ad nauseum the ins-and-outs of wizardry last school year, talking about *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* may, in a student's new classroom, be taboo akin to uttering the name Voldemort at Hogwarts. Other students may feel alarmed by developments over the summer, discovering that their best friend grew muscles and the rudiments of a mustache or learning that it is now de rigueur to talk to girls.

Classroom rules and schedules also vary tremendously from year to year, such that even the most mundane tasks, such as going to the bathroom or knowing when and how to ask questions require concerted cognitive effort. Confirming this, a third-grader sheepishly shared with me her early school dilemma: "I just couldn't remember, was I supposed to walk up to Mrs. Johnson's desk and just take the bathroom pass? I really had to go (to the bathroom). Like, bad. But I couldn't remember and didn't want to interrupt (to ask) 'cuz I was afraid kids would laugh at me."

There are, plainly, millions of other silent rule changes that occur when children and teenagers start each school year. Again, it is difficult for everyone, but particularly for those that suffer neurobehavioral constraints, to pick up on these "secret changes" and adapt to the new "rules." Listed below are some strategies for mitigating the surprise factor of going back to school and alleviating transitional stress.

ANTICIPATE CHANGES

- Examine with your son or daughter the extent to which things will be similar and different from last school year. How will their social circle be similar or different? What is the reputation of their new teacher(s) and how does he/she compare to your child's last teacher(s)? What new challenges are ahead in terms of athletics and academics?

FAMILIARIZE YOUR STUDENT WITH THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

- Do a "dry-run" to school. For the particularly anxious child who may be going to a school, riding the bus, or (for the teenager who) will be driving to school for the first time, take them on a pre-son trip to school or the bus stop. Familiarize them with the route and where to go to class.
- For the child nervous about using a locker for the first time, have them memorize the combination early. If it is the type of lock that is built into the locker door, this may mean asking your school which locker is your child's. Otherwise buy a lock early and have your son or daughter practice using it at home.
- Buy school binders and organize materials early.

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT PHYSIOLOGY

- Many children on stimulants go on "medication holidays" over the summer. Rather than re-starting medication on the first day of school, talk to your doctor about resuming medication treatment a week before school so that a child can grow comfortable with the medicine.
- Children and teenagers often establish a new sleep-wake cycle over the summer, usually involving going to bed late and getting up early. Try establishing new bed times one week before school resumes, so that your son or daughter can adjust.

MAINTAIN/CREATE SOCIAL CONNECTION

- Amid family vacations and far-flung summer camp adventures, help your son or daughter make or maintain connections with other kids who will be in their class next school year.
- For those kids who may have a hard time with unstructured "hanging out" time, pick an activity where communication between your child and his/her friend(s) is not of utmost importance. For example, it can be helpful to go to the movies together; this puts less pressure on kids to come up with things to talk about; after the film they can go for a snack or meal to discuss what they just saw.

CELEBRATE

- We often celebrate graduations, but can be laissez faire about beginnings. Your enthusiasm about change will be contagious. Make buying new school clothes and materials fun. Throw a back-to-school party. Even if you are nervous about the new school year, emphasize how exciting it is for you to watch your son or daughter grow and take on new challenges.

RNBC Offers CLINICAL SCHOLARSHIPS FOR CHILDREN from Partner Chicago Public Schools

RNBC staff, Advisory Board and supporters are thrilled to announce the launch of the Pearl H. Rieger Scholarship Program, established to provide the resources necessary to promote academic and social success for underserved children struggling with social-emotional learning difficulties. Participating children will be assessed and evaluated on their social-emotional learning abilities, followed by school-delivered treatment tailored to each student's needs.

The program will focus efforts on the community of schools we currently serve through our Executive Functions Program. By delivering services at school, we will improve the ability of teachers, social workers, and other school faculty members to recognize and intervene with children who may have brain-based social-emotional difficulties. Thus, we augment the environments and knowledge base of those who are already committed to supporting the children in our underserved communities.

RNBC would like to thank our generous supporters for making this tremendous opportunity a reality. We hope to continue to expand this program and enhance the quality and scope of patient care.

Endings Are Important

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Endings happen a lot. The school year concludes, and with it relationships with teachers and school mates cease. Over the summer, your child may have lost friends and school mates through family moves or new fall classroom assignments. Friendships evolve and change, sometimes due to relationship difficulties and sometimes just because kids grow in different directions. Death also causes children to lose grandparents, extended family members, or even a friend, teacher, sibling or parent.

According to Dr. Stephen Nowicki, "Endings are the most important part of a relationship; it is the time when you can often learn what you did right and what you did wrong. And you can apply that knowledge to the next relationship." So how can we help children to understand more about endings, how to be aware of them, plan for them and learn from them?

By age six or seven, many youngsters can be coached to consider, anticipate and plan for endings. At home, you can talk to your kids about how to make the most of endings. For example, have a conversation with your child about what they did this summer—whether it was day camp, summer school, an overnight experience or family vacation. Ask and discuss questions such as:

- What do you think went well this summer?
- What areas do you think still need improvement?
- What positive experiences did you have with others—both adults and peers?
- What situations posed the most challenges?
- What might you do differently next time?

School is another important place to learn about endings. Goodbye is a built-in element of the school year. Many of our kids do so much better when they are able to anticipate what is coming next. So, how about putting a note on your calendar to

start planning in the early spring to make the upcoming end of the school year more predictable. Involve your child in keeping track of the number of days left in the school year. This allows them to anticipate when relationships will formally conclude and be better prepared for the inevitable ending.

You might also suggest that your child's teachers build a curriculum unit about planning for the end of school. Students can generate ideas about the "Best Ways to End School Relationships." They can fill diaries with their thoughts about their relationships with teachers and classmates. They can develop a personal timeline to review how the year went. A class timeline might also include all the holidays, special events and projects. From these activities, students will gain perspective about what has happened, what they've learned from the relationships and that the end is predictable and coming closer. It will also provide valuable information that can be applied to ensuring a successful beginning the following year.

Even for children without behavioral problems, relationship endings are often associated with negativity and anger. Dr. Nowicki suggests that it is easier to become angry with those you are separating from than to feel the pain of ending a meaningful relationship. Developing a healthy skill set for ending strong relationships includes:

- Learning to feel the sadness of separation;
- Recognizing the positives and negatives in the association; and
- Applying that information to developing new relationships or deepening existing ties.

Finally, remember that endings don't just happen at the close of the summer or school year. They happen all the time and are a healthy part of the maturation process and life cycle. Endings can be a positive force for change and growth if you are able to interact with your child to explore each significant ending and to come to appreciate those endings as positive experiences that provide learning opportunities.



Pearl H. Rieger, MA
Psycho-educational
Diagnostician

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Pearls of Wisdom: A Conversation about Psycho-Educational Diagnostics with Pearl H. Rieger, M.A.

Pearl H. Rieger, M.A. a renowned learning disability specialist received her bachelor's degree in speech and language pathology and audiology from the University of Michigan. She went on to receive a master's degree in educational psychology, psycho-educational diagnostics, and language and learning disabilities from the University of Chicago. Over the past thirty-five years, Pearl has defined the standard for what it means to be an extraordinary psycho-educational diagnostician. She has deeply affected the lives of thousands of children with her hands on approach to assessing and evaluating learning disabilities.

As a co-founder of RNBC and head of the RNBC Pearl H. Rieger Fellowship Training Program, Pearl has shared her methodology and successful strategies with numerous clinicians, social worker, postdoctoral fellows and educators. She emphasizes the importance of working extensively within a child's world; interfacing with his/her parents, teachers, and tutors to ensure that learning issues are properly identified and addressed.

When do you suggest a parent or guardian consider psycho-educational testing for their child?

Diagnostics is a serious event for young children. I do not recommend a child to be tested for testing's sake. It should only be done if the child displays REAL developmental delays. It is vital to get to know the child well and understand them through their work cognitively and academically.

Children who exhibit developmental issues and sensory integration and language processing problems can truly benefit from early interventions. Language and occupational testing can be administered at a very early age. This early testing provides professionals, parents, and teachers with the tools necessary to work on processes and develop readiness skills for children as they mature.

What advice do you give educators working with children with learning differences?

I firmly believe that all educators should have a background in learning differences. There are so many resources that teachers can use whether it be conferences, classes, or workshops. If a teacher doesn't have a real knowledge about learning differences, it is not helpful for the developmental growth of a child.

I have never thought of myself as the only player in the academic success of my clients. There are so many wonderful therapists, educators, tutors and clinicians whose contributions mean so much to the development of a child. Teachers must know that working together with everyone is key to the success of every child.

What would you say is the key to your success with your young patients?

My success comes from conveying warmth to each child and making testing fun. The numbers should not be what we live by, which is very difficult in our current society that is full of so many quantitative guidelines. I try to get around that and that is my goal. Children should not have to live with a number. They should feel good about themselves no matter what. Whether the number is 90 or 120 they should walk away with the same feeling.

The greatest strategy is making the child feel "smart." If they feel good about themselves, their self-esteem will take them a long way. It is pretty exciting when you see a child overcome a serious problem through their own self-confidence. I try to make every child feel very special and help them recognize that they have great strengths.

In addition to understanding their strengths, a child must admit and understand why they are working on an issue. The children must be participants in the process. I always do a feedback with the child and explain their profile to them. I do it gently, draw bell curves, show them charts, etc. It's important for them to understand their learning style as well as their strengths and weaknesses.



Clark McKown, PhD
Research Director and
Assoc. Exec. Director

Social-Emotional Learning Matters

As many of you know, we are deeply interested in children's social lives, and particularly in understanding what factors shape children's social success and failure. We all know intuitively that some people keenly understand the social world—they can read others' facial expressions, gestures, and cues about social situations and guess with astounding accuracy what others are thinking and feeling. Others have a harder time accomplishing these tasks. We call the group of mental processes the social brain uses to perceive, appraise, and reason about the social world social-emotional learning ability. Despite the critical importance of these abilities to success in school and life, there is a noteworthy absence of strategies for assessing children's social-emotional learning ability. We are working hard in the RNBC Research Department to change this by adapting, developing, and evaluating the usefulness of a wide range of tools for assessing children's social-emotional learning ability. Our ultimate goal is to develop ways of assessing children's social-emotional learning that can be used to develop targeted treatments for children who struggle socially. Since the last newsletter, there have been several exciting developments in the Research Department.

For example, we continue to learn about assessing children's social-emotional learning skills. This spring, we finished collecting the first year of data as part of a partnership with a local school district. For that project, we collected information about children's ability to read nonverbal cues and solve social problems. We also collected information about children's peer relationships. One of our goals is to evaluate whether children's social-emotional learning abilities are related to their peer relationships. Another immediately practical goal is to screen participating children and use what we learn to identify appropriate strategies for promoting social-emotional health.

We have begun to look at the data. We have learned that many of the tests we administered to children are correlated with children's social status and friendships. In other words, children who do better on these tests are better regarded by peers and have better quality friendships. We have also learned that the tests reflect three broad areas of social-emotional competence, including basic awareness of social cues, the ability to make meaning of social information, and the ability to reason about complex social information. Furthermore, children's social-emotional skills early in the year are related to their social success in the spring. Finally, in addition to social-emotional skills, interfering behaviors, particularly impulsivity, negatively affects children's social success. In other words, our preliminary analyses suggest that the tests provide useful information that may help us understand why a child is struggling socially.

It took us several months to learn which tests reflect meaningful indicators of children's social-emotional skills. When we did, we shared what we had learned about each child with teachers and parents. Teachers and parents told us that we had accurately captured their children's social-emotional strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, they reported that the information was useful as a kind of social-emotional "checkup."

Where do we go from here? There are many exciting possibilities—we could collect more data on typically developing children. We could evaluate the use of our assessments in the clinic. We could research effective treatments for social problems. We could develop social-emotional programs in schools.

New and Upcoming Projects

Until now, we have had to choose from among many exciting possibilities. Fortunately, we don't have to choose, thanks to a generous grant from an individual donor that will support the continuation of ongoing work and expansion into several new directions.

- In the coming year, we will expand our school-based assessment project. We are currently seeking another partner—a school (K – 8) or district—with whom to work. If you are a principal or superintendent with an interest in monitoring and supporting your students' social-emotional well-being, and you would like to discuss working together, please contact Clark McKown at (847) 763-7957.
- In the fall, we will begin to offer our social-emotional learning assessment in the clinic to eligible patients. We will use the data to learn more about how to do the best possible social-emotional assessment, and we will share what we learn with our clinicians to use as part of their comprehensive evaluations. If you are a parent and you are interested in having your child participate in this study, please contact Laura Wood at (847) 763-7946. Let her know you are interested. When the project is fully underway, she will contact you with more information.
- In the winter, we will pilot a study of our social skills group interventions. The goal will be to assess the impact of the group intervention on children's social skills, and to study what the "active ingredients" of the groups are. If you are interested in having your child participate in the research social skills group, please call Adelaide Walker at (847) 763-7936. Let her know you are interested. When the project is fully underway, we will contact you with more information.

Throughout the next year, we will work with a local school district to develop and pilot social-emotional learning lessons for deliver in classrooms to all students. We continue our quest to sharpen our understanding of children's social-emotional learning, to provide insight into each child's strengths and weaknesses, and to intervene to promote children's social-emotional development. We hope you will join us on that quest.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PARENT CONNECTIONS

2007 Schedule:

September 19 • October 17 • November 14 • December 12
Wednesdays from 1:00–2:30 p.m.

Rush NeuroBehavioral Center
4711 West Golf Road, Suite 1100
Skokie, Illinois 60076

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. There is no fee to participate in this program.



Sulzer Regional Library
4455 N. Lincoln Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

Wednesday, September 26, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

“Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, the Media,
and the Heart: A Stimulating Debate”

Craig Usher, MD

Tuesday, October 23, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

“Managing Meltdowns: A collaborative approach that works . . .
for parents of children with neurobehavioral problems”

Joshua F. Mark, LCSW

Tuesday, November 27, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

Topic TBD

Lori G. Tall, Psy.D.

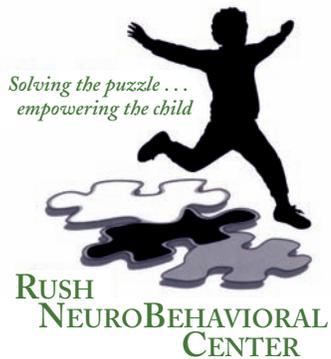
**Please check our website at www.rnbc.org for any updates and additional information.*

RNBC is committed to increasing knowledge and awareness about neurobehavioral disorders through community outreach. A partnership with the Chicago Public Library (CPL) has been a successful way to disseminate accurate information and resources to people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to learn about neurobehavioral issues and how they impact children/students. These events are free and open to the public. For information call Adult Services at 312-747-4252 or Cate at 847-763-7933. CPDU credits are available.

OTHER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

October 11–12, 2007

Dr. Meryl Lipton and Dr. Georgia Bozeday will be presenting at the 21st Annual Conference of the Illinois Dyslexia Association at Drury Lane Conference Center, Oakbrook Terrace, IL. For registration information, please see website: <http://www.readibida.org/>



Save the Date

Friday, February 29, 2008

Practical Strategies to Help Children with Brain-Based Social-Emotional Challenges



EMILY RUBIN
MS, CCC-SLP

A full-day symposium focusing on High Functioning Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Nonverbal Learning Disability, and other Social-Emotional Learning Disorders. Hosted by Rush NeuroBehavioral Center and Oakton Community College, Des Plaines, IL.

For more information contact: Rush NeuroBehavioral Center, 4711 W. Golf Road, Suite 1100, Skokie, Illinois 60076, (847) 763-7933.

Back by popular demand! — detailed brochures will be mailed this fall!