

EXTRA SPECIAL EDITION

Parent Newsletter

Spring 2019-2020

Welcome to the **Spring Extra Special Edition Newsletter**. Each issue contains information for parents and caregivers for children in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs.

Silent Tragedy in Homes Part 1 adapted from article by Luis Marcos, Psychiatrist

There is a silent tragedy developing in homes today which is affecting children. Many of them are in a devastating emotional state. Over the last 15 years, researchers have given us more and more news about children with mental health problems, including an increase of ADHD, adolescent depression and even an increase in the suicide rate in children ages 10 to 14 years.

Children are being stimulated with material objects, but they are being *deprived* of the basic concepts of a healthy childhood such as:

- Emotionally available parents
- Clearly defined limits
- Responsibilities
- Balanced nutrition
- Adequate sleep
- Movement in general, but especially outdoors
- Creative play
- Social interaction
- Unstructured gaming opportunities and unstructured play
- Boredom spaces.

If we want our children to be happy and healthy individuals, we must get back to basics. Many families see immediate improvements after a few weeks of implementing the following recommendations:

- **Set boundaries** and remember you are the “captain of the ship” - children will feel safer knowing you are in control
- **Ensure** your child gets enough sleep
- **Provide** a balanced lifestyle full of what they NEED not just what they WANT
- **Say no** if what they want is not what they need
- **Provide** nutritious food/limit junk food
- **Spend** at least one hour a day outside doing activities such as bike riding, hiking, walking, fishing, bird/nature watching
- **Enjoy** a daily family dinner without phones or technology—talk to each other about the day’s happenings
- **Play** age appropriate board games as a family

Teach children to: say hello, say good morning, respond when spoken to, take turns, share, say thank you (even write thank you notes), acknowledge error and apologize when appropriate

Connect emotionally - smile, hug, kiss, tickle, read, dance, jump, play or crawl with them.

Be a good role model for your children! Teach them to be a model of all these values!

Parents, put down your phone and other technology! Give your children your full, undivided attention.

In This Issue

- Silent Tragedy in Homes—Part 1
- What it is Like Living with Autism
- FIN
- Parent Survey
- McKay Scholarship



“Believe you can and you are halfway there.” Unknown



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What It Is Like Living With Autism adapted from article by Tehrene Firman

According to the Center for Disease Control, one in 59 children have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (more so in boys than girls). But considering it's such a common condition, there are still plenty of stereotypes about autism. There's a range of how ASD affects each individual's communication and behavior. Some people are so high-functioning that it's hard to tell they have any challenges, while others need much more support in their daily lives. It's difficult to put yourself in the shoes of someone with autism and fully understand what they're going through but getting a better idea of what it's like to have the disorder will help. Here's what living with autism looks like, according to those who live with it and have researched it.

Emotions Are Perceived and Communicated Differently

There's a long-permeating myth that those with autism can't feel or express emotion, and that couldn't be further from the truth. They just communicate and perceive emotions differently. According to *Autism Speaks*, those with autism can't always understand expression. So when someone is sad, that might not be detected through body language. While recognizing and expressing emotions can be difficult for some, that's not the case for everyone.

Bright Lights and Noises Are a Challenge

When you're walking through a store or sitting in a restaurant, you might not think twice about what's going on around you. For those with autism who have sensory issues, that's a different story. Hypersensitivities to sights, sounds, smells, taste, and touch are common—especially bright lights and loud noises—which can make someone with autism feel very overwhelmed. That also includes hypo sensitivities due to under-responsiveness to signals that help control balance and coordination, which can lead to clumsiness.

Meltdowns Are Common

When someone with autism is overwhelmed due to hypersensitivities to the stimulus around them, they may experience a meltdown. According to the *National Autistic Society*, when these meltdowns happen, the individual temporarily loses control of their behaviors, which is either expressed verbally, through shouting, screaming, and crying; or physically, through kicking, lashing out, and biting. Sometimes, the meltdowns can be both physical and verbal.

It's Hard to Change Routines

For people with autism, it's very important to have a consistent routine. If anything goes off-course from the norm, a meltdown could be triggered due to the panic they feel about an unexpected change, even a small change. If a change must be made, it needs to be communicated in a clear, descriptive way in order to make them feel comfortable and calm throughout the process.

Bluntness Can Be Misinterpreted as Being Rude

Sometimes those with autism are mistaken for being rude, because of how brutally honest and blunt they can be. Even though they're just saying what they're thinking or feeling, the direct nature of their statements can be interpreted as insensitive and possibly offensive, even if that's not at all what they meant.

Being Touched Can Be Unpleasant

With the sensory issues that come from having autism, some individuals have a very strong sensitivity to touch. Because of that, being touched can be a very unpleasant experience—even a hug or a pat on the back.

Making Eye Contact Is Challenging

Making eye contact is a common way many people show interest while having a conversation, but it may be challenging for those with autism. According to *Autism Speaks*, eye contact can actually make those with autism less able to focus on what's being said.

It's Hard to Relate to Others

Individuals with autism often have trouble relating to others. "You try to act like other people do, you try to blend in with their weird little social rituals. You try to understand why they do what they do from their perspective, ideally, but you can't necessarily relate to why they do what they do," says D.G. Swain, who has autism. "You do your best to mimic them and go through the motions, and you can pass as them for a little while, but it's hard."

Having a Job Can Be Difficult

Having a career can sometimes be tough with autism. Not only is it hard adjusting to new routines and a work environment, but it can also be tricky dealing with co-workers and a boss—especially if they're not familiar with the disorder. If they don't understand autism, it can be a real challenge to work well together and meet each other's needs.

What It Is Like Living With Autism (continued) adapted from article by Tehrene Firman

Sarcasm Is Hard to Understand

When someone's being sarcastic to you, you probably pick up on it fairly quickly. For someone with autism, that's not the case. They take things more literally and are unable to read body language that indicates a joke is a joke. "They don't understand things such as sarcasm, irony, euphemisms, or any expression that's a different way of saying what you mean," says Michael Barton, who has high-functioning autism.

Facial Expressions Can Be Less Natural

Past research has found those with autism usually display facial expressions that don't always mirror the emotions they're feeling—some of which can be "overly intense and unusual." Though they experience emotion and have expressive faces, the facial expressions showcasing those emotions tend to be seen as less natural than those who don't have autism.

You Become Very Fixated on One Thing

People with autism often become fixated on one thing, and in that moment, nothing else matters—it's the most important thing in their life. "It could be how the towels are folded—one of my big ones—or how the pencils are aligned, or putting all the little cars in a row, or only eating the vowels out of the Alphabits cereal," says Swain.

Having a Special Interest Is Common

Those with autism are known for being single-minded, and something that typically comes hand-in-hand with that is zoning in on a special interest. This could be a hobby they love, a career they enjoy—basically anything that captures their attention and makes them want to spend all their time on it. According to Ambitious About Autism, these interests can also turn into obsessions.

Anxiety Can Be an Issue

Anxiety issues are common with those who have autism, whether they're children or adults. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), it's not a core feature of the disorder, but it's not an uncommon one and presents itself through things like phobias, compulsions, social anxiety, and separation anxiety. There can also be a lot of anxiety around food and eating.

Impulsivity Is Common

Those with autism can be very impulsive. It's not uncommon for them to act on a whim, not thinking about the outcome or consequences of those actions. Unfortunately, especially with children, quickly doing something without thinking things through beforehand can have a negative outcome, like injury to themselves or those around them.

Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)

What Does the Research Say About Inclusion? 30 years of research shows that students with mild to significant disabilities in inclusive settings:

- gain social and communication skills
- develop meaningful friendships and a sense of belonging
- increase participation and independence
- have more academic objectives in their IEPs
- increase academic achievement
- develop positive behaviors
- take part in more school activities
- have fewer absences
- better prepared for college, career and community living



The Florida Inclusion Network offers many resources to assist parents. Visit the FIN website at www.FloridainclusionNetwork.com or contact your FIN Facilitators, Caren Prichard and Emily McCann, at 850-638-6131 x 2206 or email: caren.prichard@paec.org or emily.mccann@paec.org.

Parent Survey

Calling all parents of students with Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The Florida Department of Education wants to hear from you. Make your voice heard!

Take the survey on the web at:

<http://www.esesurvey.com>

or request a paper survey from your child's school.



McKay Scholarship

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We would like to inform you that your child **may** be eligible to participate in the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, commonly known as the McKay Scholarship Program. This program was created to provide educational options to parents of students with disabilities. Currently, more than 30,000 Florida students are participating in this program.

By participating in the McKay Scholarship Program, your student may be able to attend a different public school in your district, attend a public school in an adjacent district or receive a scholarship to attend a participating private school.

To be eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program, a student must apply for the program prior to withdrawing from public school. The student must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or 504 Accommodation Plan issued under s. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (with duration of more than six months), and

- Have been enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school (Grades K-12) for the school year prior to applying for a scholarship (foster students may be exempt from this requirement); or
- Have been a pre-kindergarten student who was enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school during the school year prior to applying for a scholarship; or
- Have received specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program from an approved provider pursuant to s. 1002.66 during the previous school year; or
- Have attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind during the preceding school year's student membership surveys (Grades K-12).

To find out if your student is eligible, you may apply for the McKay Scholarship Program on the School Choice website at www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/ Select the **McKay Scholarships** link, then **Parents**, and then the link titled **Apply for a McKay Scholarship**.

To learn more about your child's educational options, please contact your school district's Parental Choice Office. You may also contact the Florida Department of Education, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice Information Hotline at 1-800-447-1636, or visit the School Choice website at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/> and click the **McKay Scholarships** link.

The McKay intent to participate for the 2020-2021 school year is now open. To potentially be eligible for the full scholarship amount (100% of your state generated funding) at an approved private school, the intent must be filed by July 3, 2020.

****Please note this serves to notify you that your child may be eligible to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program. This does not guarantee your student's eligibility.**



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Serving Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Walton, and Washington counties



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