



Paragon Autism Services

Newsletter

October 2014

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

IN THIS ISSUE

What's New?

In news for October we are excited to announce that Maura Downey, a Training and Services Coordinator here at Paragon Autism Services, is now officially a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst!

On Wednesday, October 15th we'll help host the second monthly Special-needs Family Fun Night at KD'z Kidz World! From 5:00-7:00 pm, the facility will be closed except to those with special needs and their siblings. Paragon Autism Services is very excited to collaborate with KD'z Kidz World and make this a great, monthly event!

The initial meeting of the Rappahannock Area Autism Council (RAAC) in September was well-attended and we are looking forward to increased communication and collaboration between regional agencies and service providers moving forward. The next meeting will be held Thursday, October 23rd at the disAbility Resource Center, with the Autism Lunch and Learn for families to meet from 12:00-1:00 pm. The Lunch and Learn events are meant to serve as an opportunity for families to share information and ask questions of a group of area service providers. For more information, reach us at: RAACinfo@gmail.com

Our second office location in Chatham Heights is now open, and our plans to expand into Prince William County are underway! If you or anyone you know is interested in in-home ABA services in Prince William County, please contact us! We've started our waitlist for the area, so call now to secure a spot.

To keep up-to-date with new events and services we are offering, please "like" us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter if you have not done so already. Updates, details on events, questions for the community and general information are regularly posted on Facebook. Behavior management tips and fun items are posted on Twitter.

If you haven't seen it yet, check out our Facebook online support group page. We hope that this page may serve as an always-on, online extension of our monthly support group meetings for parents of children with autism. Members of the group can post comments and ask questions to the rest of the group. The group is called Fredericksburg Autism Support Group and the address is indicated to the right.



The Importance of Play

In this month's newsletter we will review the importance of play for children and its role in the developmental process. Though it seems counterintuitive, play is often one of the more difficult skills for adults to teach. Many children diagnosed on the autism spectrum may benefit greatly from increases in play skills. We'll provide some tips to get you started, and feel free to contact us if you have questions or are looking for resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Questions:

marc@paragonautismservices.com

Like us at:

www.facebook.com/ParagonAutismServices

Support group:

www.facebook.com/groups/fredericksburgautismsupportgroup/

Follow us:

[@ParagonAutism](https://twitter.com/ParagonAutism)

paragonautismservices.com

Our Services

In-Home Applied Behavior Analysis

Paragon Autism Services provides Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to individuals ranging in age from 2-21 diagnosed along the autism spectrum. Our services include individualized ABA therapy delivered to the client in their home, parent/caregiver education and training, educational advocacy, collaboration with other service providers and assistance in locating resources. ABA is a service provided through Virginia's Medicaid program, covering 100% of the cost for services. Children with a diagnosis of Autism can qualify for Medicaid through the EDCD waiver, regardless of family income level.

Educational Advocacy

Paragon Autism Services is pleased to announce that we are now offering educational advocacy and consulting services as a standalone service to families in Fredericksburg city, Spotsylvania, Stafford, King George and Caroline counties. Our rate for advocacy will be \$60.00/hour and pro bono services will be offered on a limited basis to those with demonstrated need. Contact us for more information.

Parent Support Group

Paragon Autism Services hosts a monthly support group for parents/caregivers of children with Autism. Co-hosted by the Autism Society of Northern Virginia, meetings will take place at Paragon's offices on the second Tuesday of every month from 6-8 PM. Meetings are free and open to anyone, and free childcare will be provided to children on the spectrum. RSVP is required and should be sent in advance to receive childcare.

CPR & First Aid Training

Marc, our Community Outreach and Education Facilitator, is now a certified CPR and First Aid instructor. Paragon will soon begin offering CPR/First Aid courses to area families at a nominal cost. Additionally, Paragon is now offering CPR/First Aid training to local human services and educational agencies at a discounted rate. Please contact us for details

Community Trainings

Free community training events will now be offered on a quarterly basis in a conference format. Guest speakers will be featured and a variety of topics will be offered at each event. Quarterly conferences will take place on Saturdays with the first to be held this winter. These training events will remain free and open to anyone. More details will follow regarding the first conference.

Playgroup Outings

We have begun our playgroup outings for children with autism/Asperger's. These meetings will take place at local recreational facilities and are designed to foster increased social contact between children and allow for a friendly environment in which they can play as they wish. Playgroups will provide a casual, free-play event. The only costs for playgroup meetings will be admission fees charged by the planned facility. Playgroups will be open to any child with autism and their siblings. Though these meetings will be open to children of any age, we anticipate most participants will be between two and eight years old.

Social Skills Training

Additionally, we are still interested in providing intensive social skills training as a separate service, but must have appropriate peer pairings in order for participants to derive the most benefit. If you are interested in this service for your child, please contact us.

Lending Library

We recently began a lending library at our office, and though it's a humble beginning, we hope to see it grow quickly. There are books on many autism related topics, including education, special education law, behavior analysis, skill development, as well as memoirs. Please take a look the next time you're here. Any donations will also be graciously accepted!



WHY ABA?

ABA is the science of changing behavior through the manipulation of environmental factors. Through the use of ABA strategies our team brings about positive and meaningful change. ABA strives to increase and teach socially acceptable behaviors through skill-building and the reduction of inappropriate behaviors to include aggression, self-injurious behaviors, tantrums and elopement. ABA is a scientifically validated approach for the treatment of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We help reduce inappropriate behaviors to include aggression, self-injurious behaviors, elopement and noncompliance.

We help clients build functional skills including:

Language and conversation skills

Socialization and play skills

Self-help skills to include grooming, toileting, and eating skills

Replacement behaviors for and reduction of undesirable behaviors

Cooperation and compliance skills

Play and Why it's Important

Though professionals from different disciplines may discuss play and the components of play in varied ways, we'll cover some broad descriptions of types of play and the peer relationships that develop during childhood. The first type of play is sensory play, which is centered on sensory input. This is the stage at which mobiles, sound and light toys enthrall infants. The next type of play to develop is manipulative play. In this stage children explore the environment and begin to manipulate objects. Children become curious about spaces, toys, and common objects, and will physically manipulate them to better understand them. This stage is where functional object use begins. It requires, and subsequently further develops, imitation skills, which are foundational skills for all learning. Skills of spatial reasoning, pattern recognition, and problem solving also begin here.

From here, symbolic and imaginative play develop. In this stage children begin to purposefully use one object or action to represent another (e.g., pretends a block is pizza), and to engage in pretend activities, such as a tea party. This will become more complex over time to include fantastical or impossible scenarios. Many children with autism have difficulty developing these play skills. For those that engage in appropriate, functional use of toys, it may still be a leap to substitute one item for another, or to create a scenario purely from imagination. However, these skills allow a child to depart from the literal and physical confines of what's in front of them, and are the basis for creative thinking.

Neurotypical children develop skills of imitation without training. These skills are applied to play, which then leads to increases in the scope and complexity of each. Children exercise their skills of learning through play, which is why academic, language, and play skills all become more complex together. When these deficits appear in autism and go unaddressed, we limit the avenues of learning and development. Play must be part of learning!

Additionally, there are stages of play regarding social engagement. Some children on the spectrum may develop appropriate play skills, but lack the cooperative, interactive social component of play. There are four commonly discussed peer-play



stages. The first is solitary or independent play, in which a child plays alone, regardless of whether peers are present or not. The child does not seek play partners, and is uninterested when they are already present. In typical children, this stage is generally quickly outgrown.

The next step towards peer interaction is parallel play, which occurs when a child plays with the same toys, or engages in the same activity as others around him, but independently of them. For example, two children playing with the same type of blocks in the same space, but not interacting with each other, could be described as engaging in parallel play. This is also a common stage among typical children, and is frequently taught as an intermittent step in teaching children with autism to play with peers.

Following parallel play is associative play, in which children are interested in each other, and possibly in the toys or activity being played, but do not cooperate or work together. However, there is typically a great deal of interaction that may or may not involve the activity at hand.

In the final stage of play, cooperative play, children work together towards a goal within their play. Roles are identified and objectives laid out. This type of play is organized and requires at least crude efforts at conflict resolution. While this is the final play stage, it of course grows in complexity with age and maturity, and provides the framework for all cooperative interactions in the future.

Associative and cooperative play are frequently difficult for children diagnosed on the spectrum. When play is developing, and the skills and language for meaningful social interactions are present, social skills training can be effective in helping a child increase meaningful social engagement.



Playgroup Outings

In addition to the monthly special-needs night at KD'z Kidz World, we'll be resuming indoor monthly playgroups soon for the fall and winter. Check our Facebook page or contact us for more information.



Support Group

The positive response to our parent support group in collaboration with the Autism Society of Northern Virginia has been overwhelming. There is a clear need for more centralized information on resources and services in the area, and we hope that these meetings can be a first step in establishing this. We welcome any feedback or suggestions you can offer. Meetings will continue on the second Tuesday of each month. Childcare is provided for children on the spectrum. RSVP required.

AROUND TOWN

KD'z Kidz World and Paragon Autism Services host a monthly special-needs night on the third Wednesday of each month. The facility is only open to children with disabilities, their siblings and other family during these events. Come out for our next event on Wednesday, October 15th from 5-7 PM. <http://kdkidzworld.com/>

Early Play Skills – Where to Start

Play must be fun! If it isn't fun, it isn't play. The function of play in typical children is multi-faceted, but they simply aren't interested if it isn't fun. Remember that what's fun is highly individual. It can be difficult, especially with a child with autism, to identify what is fun and can be targeted for appropriate play. What you enjoyed as a child, or what your nephew or neighbor's child finds fun simply may not work here.

While it may be difficult if your child has limited interests, there is always a way! If one activity doesn't work the way you expected, try another. It may take time, but it will be time well spent. If you're not sure where to start, simply pay close attention to your child when playing alone. What do they go to most often? Make a list, and brainstorm many different play actions that would be appropriate for each toy. If you've ever done a reinforcer assessment for your child as part of therapy, this is a great place for ideas!

You'll want to ensure that your child has basic imitation skills to get started, as so much of play is imitation-based, and it's probably best to start with adults. It will be much easier to teach play skills 1:1 with an adult when starting from scratch. You'll need to plan for reinforcement. Though the play itself is supposed to be fun, teaching frequently isn't. Set aside high-value reinforcers to deliver for good attempts at actions you've modeled. Be careful not to place too many demands on play initially, or the toys and activities you child likes will quickly become associated with work!

What do you do when your child has only sensory interests in toys? For example, some children may only want to hold the train and watch the wheels as they make them spin. In

such instances, we can try something related to the items the child is using. We can put together a track and roll the train on the track. It's best to start small and occasionally allow for stimulatory behavior at first.

What if he doesn't like the tracks? Try rolling the trains around the room on the floor. He doesn't like rolling them anywhere? Let's learn train noises. We can talk about who's riding the train, or where they're going. He doesn't like train noises? No one is onboard? Let's give the trains names from Thomas. Hook together as many as we can to make a long train. He doesn't like Thomas? Well, you get the idea, right?

Materials should be chosen carefully, avoiding those that represent work, especially at the start. If you try many different actions with a single toy, or if you've switched toys and are still having difficulty getting good responses, you may have to get silly. One frequently effective strategy is to simply do the activity/actions yourself, and make it very clear (through your body language, expressions, actual vocalizations) just how much fun you're having. This model may prove enticing when other strategies haven't.

It's important not to get ahead of yourself. For activities such as a board game or sports activity, the child must be able to understand and follow rules, take turns, and understand winning vs. losing. If you're just starting out, keep it simple. Meet the child where they are now, and attempt the next step. The goal must be achievable in order to make progress.

Determine which play types your child currently demonstrates, and either begin to expand this type, or introduce the next step. Jumping ahead may set you back in the long run.



HEADS UP!

We'll be hosting another IEP workshop in November to provide families the opportunity to come in with questions or concerns regarding their child's IEP and get advice from one of our educational advocates. The workshop will be free and by appointment.

Paragon Newsletter

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Paragon Autism
S E R V I C E S
Making a Difference Together

Upcoming Events

October

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 Parent Support Group 6-8PM	15 Special-Needs Night at KD'z Kidz World 4-6PM	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23 RAAC Meeting 11AM-12PM Lunch & Learn 12-1PM	24	25 Sensory Friendly Movie at AMC Tysons & Potomac Mills Book Of Life 10AM
26	27	28	29	30	31	