



# Paragon Autism Services

## Newsletter

### April 2014

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

IN THIS ISSUE

## What's New?

It's officially Autism Awareness Month! There are a lot of events taking place in the area this month intended to increase awareness and raise funds to assist families directly, as well as to provide for further resources and research. We are honored to be involved in many of these events and hope to see you there too!

In other exciting news for April, we are proud to announce two promotions this month! Joshua Farrow is now a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and will take on the role of Director of Intensive ABA Services. Additionally, Tina Bialecki is now a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) and will take over as the Assistant Behavior Analyst on our first team. Please help us in congratulating them and welcoming them into their new positions!

On Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, our preschool playgroup will officially begin. We hope you'll come and join us for this opportunity to meet other families and allow the kids to play as they wish. Also, with summer rapidly approaching, don't forget to contact us if you're interested in intensive social-skills training for your child. We hope to begin our social-skills groups in June. See below for more details on each.

Paragon Autism Services is now in full-swing as a provider of educational advocacy services. Marc and Nicole each bring a great deal of knowledge and experience in advocating for appropriate placement, services and goals for special-needs children, and have a strong track record of achieving results for families in the area. We offer comprehensive advocacy and consultation services to address any difficulties a family may face.

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.



### Challenging Behavior

The theme for April is Challenging Behavior, something many families of children diagnosed on the spectrum are familiar with. It is frequently speculated that the vast majority of inappropriate behavior that occurs with autism is directly linked to communication deficits. Like the disorder itself, such behavior ranges from mild to severe. No matter the severity of the behavior you face, there are well-established procedures that can improve the situation. Read on for some of the basics.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Questions:

[marc@paragonautismservices.com](mailto:marc@paragonautismservices.com)

Like us at:

[www.facebook.com/ParagonAutismServices](http://www.facebook.com/ParagonAutismServices)

Follow us:

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

[Paragon Autism Services](http://ParagonAutismServices.com)

# The ABCs of Behavior

In behavior analysis we frequently talk about the ABCs of behavior. This is a critical concept for understanding behavior, so let's first identify just what the ABCs are. A is for antecedent, which is what happens immediately prior to a behavior. Sometimes we call this a trigger when the relationship between the antecedent and the behavior is perfectly clear. In instances where this isn't the case, we're simply identifying what happened right before the behavior. If you hadn't already guessed, B is for behavior. When we're trying to change a behavior, we'll have identified our target behavior and defined it specifically. The C is for consequence, which, in this context, is simply what happens immediately following the behavior (reinforcement, punishment, ignoring, nothing). Although the word consequence is often used to mean punishment, here we use it to describe any event that follows a behavior, including reinforcement.

So why are the ABCs important? There are many behaviors that are perfectly transparent and easy to understand. For

example, you may know to expect a tantrum every night after dinner because your child doesn't want to take a bath. In other cases, understanding why a behavior happens may not be so easy. When this is the case, we look at the antecedents and consequences over time and determine the function of the behavior, which answers the "why" question.

There are four functions of behavior. EVERY behavior has a function, and the function will always be one of the following four: 1. Escape/avoidance, 2. to obtain access, 3. attention, 4. sensory stimulation. To change behavior we must understand its function. The consequence we will deliver in response to a behavior is developed specifically according to the function of the target behavior. A person will abandon a behavior that no longer meets its intended function,



which means that if I want to change an attention-seeking behavior, I have to make sure that attention is no longer received when this behavior occurs. There is of course much more to changing behavior than this, but the idea is to begin thinking about behavior in terms of what it accomplishes for the child. If a child reliably receives attention when he throws a tantrum, as far as he's concerned a tantrum is a perfectly reasonable tool for getting attention. It is our job to show him otherwise.



## Our Services

### Social Skills

To better address the social needs of children diagnosed along the spectrum in the area, Paragon will soon begin two new socially-oriented programs. The first, which will take place the first week of May, will be planned playgroup meetings for preschool-aged children. 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.

In the summer we plan to begin formal, intensive social skills training groups that are

intended to develop and strengthen fundamental skills of social initiation and interaction through facilitation and reinforcement. Each group will have eight meetings that each build on the prior session. In order to help us better estimate need, contact us now if you are interested in social skills training for your child.

### Educational Advocacy

Paragon Autism Services is pleased to announce that we are now offering educational advocacy and consulting services for families in Fredericksburg city, Spotsylvania, Stafford 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.

### Community Trainings

Our free community trainings have begun! For the next three months we'll focus on helping families with common problems. The topics for April, May and June will be, respectively, *Changing Challenging Behavior*, *Communication Strategies*, and *Toilet Training 101*.

We will continue with at least one free monthly community training to be held on the third Wednesday of each month from 6-8PM. Some additional topics for upcoming trainings will be long-term planning for special-needs children, and safety skills for children with autism.

### 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!

### 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.

### AROUND TOWN

#### FRAAG Meetings

The Fredericksburg Regional Autism Action Group (FRAAG) meets on the fourth Thursday of every month to assess and address local needs in the autism community. Meetings are from 1-3PM at the dRC. For more information contact Kim Lett:

[klett@cildrc.org](mailto:klett@cildrc.org)

#### Autism Acceptance Walk

The Autism Society of Northern Virginia (ASNVA) is holding their annual Autism Acceptance Walk on Sunday, April 27, 2014 at the Fredericksburg Fairgrounds from 1-4PM. The walk is intended to foster increased acceptance of autism and to fundraise for the ASNVA's Intervention Assistance Fund, which offers mini-grants to help cover the costs of necessary treatments and services. You can help support the cause by creating your own team to walk and fundraise, or by simply joining us to walk. Paragon Autism Services has created a team to walk and fundraise, and will have a table set up for the vendor fair. There will also be a sensory-friendly carnival put on by Helping Hands. We hope to see you there!

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email: [info@autismacceptance.org](mailto:info@autismacceptance.org)

[www.autismacceptance.org](http://www.autismacceptance.org)

[Paragon's Team Page](#)



### Preschool Playgroups

Come join us for our first preschool playgroup on Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at Splitsville Lanes from 2:00-4:00 PM. The only cost will be the standard bowling and shoe rental fees.



### 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.

# Why Behavior Matters

Parents of children diagnosed on the autism spectrum frequently encounter a difficult decision regarding behavior: Is it more difficult to invest the time, energy and emotion necessary to change the behavior, or to simply *deal* with the behavior?

The real problem with approaching the situation in this fashion is that it ignores the two critical considerations that must be taken into account in these circumstances. The first is that no matter how serious the behavior, the situation can be improved when handled correctly. This doesn't mean stopping an isolated instance of behavior, but reducing the behavior in the long term. It's true that in the short term, this can mean a child that is more upset, or a difficult situation becoming more difficult, but on the other end is the possibility of the inappropriate behavior being eliminated, and a more functional replacement behavior occurring regularly. The math of weighing the effort to change the behavior or simply deal with the behavior falls apart. The short term increase in frustration can lead to no frustration in the long term (in regards to the specific behavior).

Additionally, the emotional impact of a more upset child in the short term is outweighed by the long term benefit. It's not just the parent that benefits from lasting behavioral change. When an inappropriate behavior is successfully reduced and replaced with a more functional behavior, we increase the possibility of happiness for the child. This is best illustrated when the issue is one of communication. A child who lacks the tools to express his wants and needs is absolutely

going to experience a great deal of frustration, which in turn results in challenging behavior. When we give this child the tools they need to engage in meaningful communication, we replace the short term frustration of behavioral intervention with years of satisfaction in being able to ask for what they need.

The second consideration, and one that is sometimes neglected completely, is that we must consider the impact a child's behavior has on their ability to participate in the wider community over a lifetime, rather than just the impact of challenging behavior on the here and now. It is often the case that a family feels they can handle a child's problematic behavior, and as such, no further action is warranted. However, when it comes to inclusion in the community, the single biggest obstacle an individual will face is the barrier created by engaging in inappropriate behavior. More severe behaviors, such as aggression towards others or self-injury, will limit a child to the most restrictive and segregated environments so long as the behaviors persist. Even for a child whose family can handle the challenges created by inappropriate behavior, they will face limitations elsewhere as long as inappropriate behaviors remain a part of the child's behavioral repertoire. In order to increase participation in the community and the likelihood of more independent living, behavioral issues must be addressed. The sooner the better.



## HEADS UP!

Paragon Autism Services will be closed the week of July 4th. In order to better plan for summer schedules with minimal interruption to services, we have decided to plan for this week with no services while maintaining our normal schedule for the rest of the summer.

## Paragon Newsletter

312 Progress St., Suite 300  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401



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

# Upcoming Events

April

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6 Spotsylvania Sheriff's Autism Awareness Day	7	8 Support Group 6-8PM	9	10	11	12 Spotsylvania Little League Opening Day Ceremonies & Day of Learning at Helping Hands
13	14	15	16 Free Community Training <i>Changing Challenging Behavior</i> 6-8PM	17	18	19 Sensory- friendly movie at AMC Potomac Mills - Rio 2 10AM
20	21	22	23	24 FRAAG Meeting at dRC 1-3PM	25	26
27 Autism Acceptance Walk 1-4PM	28	29	30	1 Preschool Playgroup at Splitsville Lanes 2-4PM		