



Paragon Autism Services

Newsletter

September 2014

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

IN THIS ISSUE

What's New?

September is here and there are several exciting things happening this month! The first Special-needs Family Fun Night at KD'z Kidz World will take place Wednesday, September 17th from 4:00-6:00 pm, and will be held the same time on the third Wednesday of every month moving forward. 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 Rappahannock Area Autism Council (RAAC) meetings will officially get underway this month, with the first meeting being held Thursday, September 25th at the disAbility Resource Center. The newly formed council will provide leadership and coordination for local agencies and service providers in order to maximize outcomes for individuals with autism in the region. An Autism Lunch and Learn event will follow each meeting to afford families the opportunity to share information and ask questions of a group of area service providers. The provider meeting will be held from 11:00 am-12:00 pm, and the Autism Lunch and Learn will take place from 12:00-1:00 pm. For more information, reach us at: RAACinfo@gmail.com

Additionally, we're very excited to announce that we are expanding and hope to begin delivering services in Prince William County by the end of this year. 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.



Social Skills

In this month's newsletter we will discuss some common approaches to teaching and practicing social skills at various levels, including a couple of things that are probably best to avoid. If this is an area of need for your child please read on, 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 and the first will be held in November. These training events will remain free and open to anyone. More details will follow regarding the November 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

What (Not) to Teach

In many instances, just as important as what to teach is what *not* to teach. There are varying perspectives on each of the following, and there are ethical considerations for each. The information provided here is not meant to be prescriptive, but instead is intended as advice for guiding skill-building.

Eye Contact

Whether and how to train eye contact has been a somewhat controversial element of autism intervention for decades. Early on, it was felt that a child would not be able to effectively receive instruction without engaging in eye contact. Though it now appears that many children with autism can in fact acquire skills with limited eye contact, there are certain skills that explicitly rely on eye contact. Additionally, in social interaction, lack of eye contact or atypical eye contact is very noticeable. However, we would generally advise against explicitly training or requiring eye contact.

In the past, it was not uncommon to see an instructor physically turn a child's head in order to prompt eye contact. It would then be reinforced with extrinsic rewards, which are inappropriate for such a behavior and don't lead to generalized use of the skill. There is no argument that eye contact is an important skill, and though there are specific strategies to increase eye contact that are more naturalistic, this is not an easy thing to do both effectively and ethically. Many individuals on the spectrum report feeling that eye contact is uncomfortable, or very difficult for them. If it happens naturally we can always reinforce with lots of social praise, but it's usually best not to explicitly address or force eye contact.

Sensory-Seeking Behavior

Often referred to as self-stimulatory behavior, or simply "stimming," sensory-seeking behaviors are very common for those diagnosed along the autism spectrum. Due to the obvious and atypical nature of repetitive motor movements or sounds, these behaviors are often considered to be especially socially stigmatizing. For this reason, many are tempted to attempt to decrease or eliminate the occurrence of such behavior. Such attempts, though carried out with the best of intentions, can go very badly.



In Applied Behavior Analysis, when we want to reduce or eliminate a behavior, we generally need to teach and reinforce a replacement behavior. For example, if a child engages in tantrum behavior to escape instruction, we need to teach them how to ask for a break. This replacement behavior needs to be functionally equivalent. In the example above, the tantrum behavior serves the function of escape. Asking for a break also serves the function of escape, just in a more appropriate way. This is functional equivalence, and this is imperative for meaningful behavior change.

Providing functionally equivalent replacement behaviors for sensory-seeking behaviors is very difficult. What often happens is that a child engages in a behavior such as hand-flapping and is prompted to put his hands in his pants pockets instead. The problem is that flapping his hands provides some specific sensory input, but stuffing them in his pockets does not. At this point, we are effectively suppressing a behavior without offering any alternative for the child to get the input they desire.

When this takes place, it often creates a great deal of frustration for the child and may ultimately lead to tantrums, aggression or self-injury. This being the case, it is often best to only directly address sensory-seeking behaviors when they clearly interfere with a child's ability to receive instruction in a key area.

Though there is often a desire to eliminate atypical behaviors when targeting social skills, the best programs emphasize helping an individual develop and maintain functional skills and independence, rather than appearing "normal." In so doing, we increase opportunities for self-sufficiency and happiness, which should always be the true aim of effective intervention.



Playgroup Outings

We plan to hold one more playgroup for the year, which will take place Thursday, October 2nd from 4:00-6:00 PM. Details will follow regarding the location.



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 first event on Wednesday, September 17th from 4-6 PM. <http://kdkidzworld.com/>

Teaching Social Skills

Teaching social skills to children with autism seems like a challenge to many. Luckily, there are many well-established strategies for accomplishing this.

Discrete Trial Training (DTT), a frequently utilized instructional methodology under the umbrella of ABA, can often be a great first step in working towards improving social skills. Though this is an adult-led, one-on-one approach, there are many skills that are best taught and practiced in this context before being expected in a natural social interaction.

DTT can also be useful for those who may have the necessary language abilities but have poor attending skills, and would struggle to receive instruction in a social group. Additionally, DTT can actually be helpful in developing social interest. For those that don't demonstrate social interest or curiosity, DTT can allow for introducing social themes and reinforcing heavily.

Some of the obvious skills to address in DTT would be conversational programming, which often starts with social questions (e.g. "What's your name" or "what's your favorite color?") and continues to reciprocal, topical conversation; advanced emotions programming such as identifying and explaining situation-based emotions, predicting emotions and actions; and perspective-taking tasks. Though they are not actually part of DTT, another tool to use within 1:1 sessions is social stories that demonstrate social scenarios and possible responses.

A couple of strategies that families can implement which are frequently employed for teaching social skills are role playing and video modeling. If your child has the necessary language and pretend skills, role-play, where an adult pretends to be a peer in a situation the student might encounter, can be an effective and enjoyable way to practice social interactions.

Additionally, video modeling, in which videos demonstrating social scenarios with appropriate pacing and instruction are reviewed with an adult, is becoming more popular, and there is a good deal of evidence supporting its effectiveness. Some elect to record their own videos with the child, but there are premade video series available as well.

One strategy that is always a good idea when possible is to set up planned, structured play dates. These are intended to take previously learned skills/language into a more natural context, much in the way that Natural Environment Training (NET) is used to promote generalization for other types of skills learned in DTT.

To do this effectively, you would purposefully choose a peer, have target goals in mind and plan and prepare the materials and environment ahead of time. Select an activity and materials that support your child's skills and goals, and that will be appealing to him. It is frequently said that the last 10-15 minutes of an event is what a child remembers, so try to end on a high note!



HEADS UP!

Stay tuned for more details about our upcoming quarterly community training event in November! Please contact us if you have suggestions for topics you'd like to see.

Paragon Newsletter

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

Upcoming Events

September

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