



April/May 2011

Dear Parents and Guardians,

On April 8th our fifth annual parent workshop, **Social Action and Interaction – *Where does my child fit in?*** drew quite a crowd. From the verbal feedback we received from parents and guardians, this workshop was a remarkable success and gave helpful tips about social interactions and harmony.

As I reflected on this workshop, I felt that I had come away with some valuable information that I can use as a parent, as an educator, and as an adult. I thought it might be helpful to share them with you as I describe the workshop and the presenters. I always look for your feedback, your thoughts on this workshop, and what you feel is your take away message.

⇒ ***Integrating lives, culture and language in the Information Age***

Onyen Yong, an Assistant District Attorney and Director of Information Technology for the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office, described the world of technology today. Comparatively, this age of cell phones, lack of regulations, and the social medium for our children is relatively young and sometimes is feared (by us). This social medium includes instant messaging, social networking, chat rooms, webcams, interactive games, cell phones {texting, sexting, video}, You Tube, Webkinz, etc. We all know and have experienced that students have their own language that appears to be a "secret code". Yet, as a monitoring aid, we can learn that language by going to Google to help us interpret the "kid code".

We should not fear this age; we need to embrace it. When your child is playing, you monitor. When your adolescent goes out with friends, you monitor. When your child is on the Internet, you do the same – monitor. Assistant District Attorney Yong gave us some examples of sending photos on a camera phone and webcams. Webcams can be disabled. For example, SpectorPro for \$99 is a program that records everything, even keystrokes. It's a resource, but it is essential that you only put it on a computer that you yourself own.

I took away several messages: Internet safety, including cyber-bullying, is not a parent problem, a school problem, or a law enforcement problem, in and of themselves. As parents, we are responsible for our children's safety. We set rules and logical consequences to behaviors. We work as a team.

Indeed, the Information Age is exploding; imagine the generations that will follow us – how the challenges and assets of technology will affect their lives. We do our best; we embrace our fears; we learn with our children. The computer age has changed our lives, our culture and language.

⇒ ***Emphasizing the positives – addressing the pockets of challenges***

The aforementioned workshop helped me to conceptualize the next workshop: Social Thinking. **Pamela Ely** is the Chief Executive Officer/Owner of the Ely Center.

As a speech and language teacher, Pamela gave us some practical tips and take away messages to help facilitate language processing and social communications issues for all students. I walked away with a remarkable statement: Each child has his/her own interests, strengths and pocket of challenges. This child is mixed in a group of other children who have different interests, strengths and their own pockets of challenges. Explicit and targeted teaching and offering ideas that are age appropriate will help children with the challenges of social communication by “modeling up”. Other students may already know these social cues – intuitively.

Pamela Ely shared with us an interesting slide on the essential skills of social communication. *All of her slides are available in hard copy. Please feel free to pick up your copy at the Pupil Services Office.*

ELY CENTERS Essential Skills of Social Communication

EYE CONTACT	FACIAL EXPRESSIONS	BODY LANGUAGE	PERSONAL SPACE
Whole Body LISTENING	STAY ON TOPIC	TAKE TURNS	SPEAK CLEARLY
EXPECTED	UNEXPECTED	BUBBLE THOUGHTS	MIND FILING SOCIAL SPY

ASD Training/Ely Center 2005 | 41

ELY CENTERS BUBBLE THOUGHTS

A bubble thought can be a thought that is off topic, and therefore, not expected within a particular conversation, or it can be a thought that is mean, unkind, or simply a “red alert” topic (i.e. someone’s age, weight, or other topic that is personal in nature).

Would this be “expected?”

Would this be nice to say?

Is this an on-topic question, comment, or compliment?

ASD Training/Ely Center 2005 | 18

Students with social difficulties may have challenging pockets of sensory deficits (lighting, noise, movement, proximity to others, and seating), executive functioning (flexibility, impulsivity, organization, planning and inhibition), and language processing (taking notes, following directions, reading text, storing facts, calling up words, facts, and concepts, answering/explaining answers, writing reports, taking tests, etc.)

In the schools, we emphasize these social interactions in our curriculum by capitalizing on the application of executive functioning and social language

processing, always being sensitive to the child's sensory deficits. It makes me think how we apply Pamela's thoughts to application and practice. Even the smallest step counts – find one friend; find one special interest. In our school based friendship groups, described below in the next section, we use the same principles illustrated in Pamela's slide.

Underlying any interaction with another or other individuals, is the Friendship Game. When one plays the friendship game, he/she will:



- Be nice
- Cheer each other on
- Give positives
- Stay w/group
- Take turns
- Think about others
- Help each other

⇒ *Empowering children for a life long journey*

With these issues in mind, knowing about the issues of the Internet, the explosion of the Information Age and the pockets of challenges that exist among some of our students who present with social difficulties, especially in the areas of sensory, executive functioning and language processing, our last speaker, **Carol Wintle** hit home with her discussion about empowering children to help stop bullying at school. Carol has almost four decades of experience as a Bullying Prevention and Conflict Resolution Specialist, Child and Family Behavioral Health Clinician and consultant, teacher, trainer, and author of [Empowering Children to Help Stop Bullying at School](#).

Students who get bullied are kids who may (but not always) have these characteristics:

- Have special needs
- Are not considered as the “cool kids”
- May be shy and quiet and usually are not assertive
- May have passive behaviors in their talk or actions
- May have few or no friends
- May be physically weaker (usually for boys)
- May be less attractive (usually for girls)

Although not all special education students are vulnerable, some are.

Preschoolers have an innate ability to tell their peers to stop when their peers' behaviors are inappropriate. This self-advocacy seems to disappear, as students get older and more sensitive (and subject) to peer pressure. Older students need role-playing and words to deal with bullying.

Students who typically bully are desperately seeking nurturance, need discipline, and profit from assertiveness training (they don't know how to behave differently). Carol Wintle shared with us that the school environment is a common place for bullying to occur. One child usually initiates it but others join in. Statistics show that

peers are present in 85% of all bullying incidents, but someone only intervenes 10% of the time. When a bystander intervenes, it is *effective within seconds*. Peer actions are the most powerful way to stop bullying.

It gave me opportunity to think through how we are helping children in our schools. Coordinated by the school psychologist, we customize our friendship groups that offer a mixed group of students who have similar skills, the opportunity to bond (make a new friend{s}) and develop new strategies for their social interactions (for example, taking turns, initiating conversations, how to compliment the other person, how to include others, etc.). This type of setting is important in learning and reinforcing social pragmatics. The school psychologist works with the classroom teacher and other specialists to add students to the group who would act as role models. This “modeling up” is salient in the reinforcement and teaching of social skills.

Our schools emphasize the school home partnership. This dyad facilitates the opportunity for the parent/guardian and teacher/specialist to brainstorm who may be a good friend for your child. Then, the parent/guardian may seize the opportunity to invite the new friend(s) to events, not just home. It’s manageable since interactions are easier because the focus is on the event, not each other at the home setting.

Talk (talk sensitively, patiently, and openly in a trusting relationship), explaining the rules (taking turns, being respectful, manners at the table, doing chores, etc.), using body language along with eye contact (turning away, saying “no”, etc.) are all ways to enhance social interactions. It’s a challenges, a 24/7 job for parents, but the schools are your partners – we are open for discussion and offer our help for all students, both in general and special education.

Bullying, cyber-bullying, and social thinking (taking the perspective of another) are the identified issues in this workshop. It gave us a moment to reflect on some of the challenges for social action and interaction with a few thoughts from our speakers as well as a few take away messages. I always try to take away one or two of these messages to add to my “tool box” as a parent, educator, and adult. Thank you for taking the same opportunity.

Liza

Liza Huber
Director of Pupil Services



Co-Chair: Nancy Sherburne (978) 635-0968 nsherburne@mindspring.com
Co-Chair: Bill Guthlein (978) 263-0610 william.guthlein@verizon.net
AB SpEd PAC Website <http://www.abspedpac.org>