



Dear Parents and Guardians,

With over 140 families in attendance, we consider our fourth Parent Workshop a resounding success. As reflected from feedback forms, I think everyone who attended enjoyed the day and left with some practical tips and memorable stories. We continue to be committed to child-driven, family-centered, community-focused approaches with a commitment to diversity and continuous learning. Thank you for coming, reflecting and having a dialogue with all of us -- parents, teachers & staff, and Rick Lavoie!

In addition to providing hands on information regarding the laws and regulations pertaining to Special Education, Sandy Daigneault and I discussed the themes of collaboration between home and school. Good listening and communication skills were emphasized, including strategies for parents to get the most out of a Team meeting. Suggestions included the use of agendas, writing down concerns prior to a Team meeting, summarizing concerns into questions and more. In addition to the use of data collection for measuring student progress, sharing family stories, providing anecdotes, offering and asking for examples help Teams to better understand a student's needs and provide guidance for educational programming.

We were also honored to welcome Rick Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed. as our keynote speaker. Rick has served as an administrator of residential programs for children with special needs since 1972. He holds three degrees in Special Education and has served as an adjunct professor or visiting lecturer at numerous universities including Syracuse, Harvard, Gallaudet, Manhattanville College, University of Alabama and Georgetown. His numerous national television appearances include CBS Morning Show, Good Morning America, ABC Evening News and Disney Channel Presents.

Rick serves as a consultant on learning disabilities to several agencies and organizations including Public Broadcasting Service, New York Times, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and Girl Scouts of America. He is a member of the Professional Advisor Board of the Learning Disabilities Association.

Rick has delivered his message to over 500,000 parents and professionals throughout North America. He has the distinction of having delivered Keynote Addresses for all three of the major special needs advocacy organizations in the United States (Learning Disabilities Association, Council for Exceptional Children, Children with Attention Deficit Disorder).

Rick has held administrative positions at residential programs for thirty years. These experiences at residential school have provided Rick with a "living laboratory" in which he developed and refined his methods and philosophies related to the education of adolescents with special needs.

Rick is probably best known for his videos "[How Difficult Can This Be?: The F.A.T. City Workshop](#)" and "[Last One Picked, First One Picked On: The Social Implications of Learning Disabilities](#)". These award-winning films have brought Rick's sensitive and compelling message to countless thousands throughout the world. After viewing the videos, former First Lady Barbara Bush stated, "You really wowed us! I only wish that every parent and teacher in the United States today could also see your program." His new video on behavior management is entitled "[When the Chips are Down ...](#)" is now available through LD OnLine. [<http://ldonline.org>]

During our workshop, Rick directed the workshop to both parents and the professional staff who attended with practical strategies from real life experiences.

The more significant themes included.....

The Pervasive Nature of a Learning Disability

When the child has a disability, it impacts on every moment of a child's day supported by research that sleep may be affected as well. This makes coping with social situations all that more challenging. This inability to organize and set up "self-structures" often leads to social isolation and rejection. Everyone assumed that parents have an infinite amount of patience to support their children, but it's actually not a question of coping strategies, but enabling strategies.

Training v. Practice

Typically with children with social difficulties, parents may feel that their children need training outside of school and schedule their children into classes. Instead, Rick suggested increasing practice opportunities across settings. Every opportunity should be seized! As we struggle to prepare the child for the social situation, we must also prepare the situation for the child. Each child has unique gifts and talents. In an example that Rick Lavoie gave hit home -- a child excelled at soccer but had difficulty reading. The soccer coach asked him to read the rules, but the child could not read them fluently. As we prepare the child to enter a social situation by rehearsal and reinforcement, we may want to prepare the situation as well. If the soccer coach knew that the child could not read fluently, there could have been alternatives developed that could have made this situation a win-win social setting for all.

The Importance of Advance Preparation

As mentioned above, prepare the child for the situation, but also prepare the situation for the child. In other words, be transparent about your child's disability and related needs before your child enters the social situation. Sharing what you know about your kid and not assuming that others will know what to do with your child are important steps in helping your child to socially succeed. Assist your child by actual rehearsal of the upcoming situation. That practice is helpful to gain familiarity of the situation as you talk it through with your child. Sometimes, children have difficulty in shifting from one situation to another and generalizing rules. Practice, practice, practice.

The Importance of Social Autopsy

If we examine a "social autopsy" by inspecting a "social error", we possibly can prevent a reoccurrence:

From Richard Lavoie's slide, we learned:

Social skill autopsy: The examination and inspection of a social error to:

- Determine the cause of the error
- Evaluate the extent of damage
- Gain knowledge which will prevent re-occurrence

Rick told a story about a boy in residence who borrowed toothpaste from one of his friends. But, the toothpaste was missing, i.e., never returned, and he consequently got into trouble. *Ask what happened:* He used the toothpaste but a friend of his also used the toothpaste. Since they were all friends, the boy who initially borrowed the toothpaste did not see any problem. *Ask what do you think what was wrong?* Although it seemed perfectly acceptable for the other boy to borrow the toothpaste since all of them were friends, the child responded that he should not have given the toothpaste to the third boy, because the friend who loaned him the toothpaste had given to him alone and he had an obligation to give it back. These kinds of anecdotes help all of us with practical, non-threatening "teaching moments" to assist children enhance their social settings. With encouragement from both school and home, we can assist in teaching new skills.

Social situations are important for not only our understanding but also our intervention as described above. Verbal communication errors cause others to doubt intellectual ability so the child who has social difficulties and learning disabilities need us to help in organization, self-structure, and enabling activities. Thus, the child will be able to demonstrate his unique talents, skills, and intellectual ability.

This discussion about social situations led us to a discussion about bullying. As you know from previous communiqués, the schools have placed the implementation of safety and anti-bullying policies as a “top priority”. Rick Lavoie addressed and confirmed a few thoughts about this important subject. There are three particular groups involved: the bully, the bystander, and the target. He gave us thoughts from his slides –

Symptoms of the Target

- Change in eating habits
- Irritability
- Lack of focus
- Self-imposed isolation
- Change in sleep patterns
- Torn clothing/missing money

Some Solutions

- Discuss it casually and supportively
- Acknowledge feelings
- Serve as coach
- Brainstorm and evaluate “solutions”
- Look for a specific cause

Rick gave us many strategies to consider and try. But, more importantly, what I walked away with is a sense and obligation to further help children with social difficulties and learning problems by building self-esteem, self-confidence, and enabling strategies in their environment. A child is precious and we value his/her uniqueness. We want to always communicate confidence in the child, reward direction (not perfection), reject behavior (not the child), and support but challenge the child to climb the next rung in the ladder of life.

Sincerely,

Liza Huber

Director of Pupil Services



Co-Chair: Nancy Sherburne (978) 635-0968 nsherburne@mindspring.com

Co-Chair: Bill Guthlein (978) 263-0610 guthw@aol.com

AB SpEd PAC Website <http://www.abspedpac.org>

The following article gives practical tips for the parent/guardian to use during the holiday season. The strategies are concrete and useable by parents. Enjoy!

Home (at yours and others!) for the Holidays

by Richard D. Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed.



The holidays are a wonder-filled time of the year wherein friends and family exchange gifts and visits. Because children with learning differences often have difficulty making transitions, they are often anxious about visiting other's homes, and also may have difficulty playing the role of "host" to holiday visitors.

This article is designed to assist parents as they prepare the child for the holiday festivities. Discuss these important social obligations and expectations with him **prior to** the visits and provide quick "refresher course" hours before the visit begins. By preparing the child and being pro-active, you are less likely to be required to **react** to misbehavior!

Ensure that your child is a welcomed holiday visitor

In order to be a welcome guest, the child should follow these **Do's and Don'ts**:

- **Be punctual**
Arrive on time. If you are unavoidably late, call and explain. If you arrive early, don't go to the host's home until the prescribed time. Take a walk.
- **Dress appropriately**
Whenever we dress, we should consider the following things:
 - Weather
 - Activity
 - Fashion

Your child's apparel for a holiday toboggan party should be very different than if he were attending a pre-Nutcracker reception at Grandma's. Help him to decide what to wear and guide him in this decision.

- **Help the host**
Offer to assist in some way or just join in if folks are moving chairs, setting the table, etc. A guest can also assist a host by circulating and "getting the party moving." Circulate! Hosts always appreciate this.
- **Don't make yourself at home**
Ask permission before using the phone, TV, computer, etc.
- **No snooping**
Reinforce the fact that it is **not** appropriate to look in drawers or cabinets. Also review some appropriate (and inappropriate) questions that the child might ask.
- **Enjoy the food**
But remind him that the food is for **everyone**. Tell him that it is inappropriate to "hang around" the food table. Get your food -- then move away.
- **Leave the function when others leave**
Avoid being the first or last guest to depart. Always thank the host -- even if it is a relative.

Ensure that your child is a gracious host

Holiday time also requires kids to welcome friends and family into **their** home. You will want to review the following points with your child.

- **Always ask permission from mom or dad before inviting a guest.**
- **As the host it is the child's job to introduce the family.**
Review the socially acceptable methods of introduction ("Mom, this is my friend, Danny. He is in my gym class and he lives near the fire station.").
- **The host should explain the "house rules" to the guest.**
Each family has its own culture (e.g., "Nobody is allowed in Dad's workshop" or "Don't feed candy to the dog" or "No food in the living room"). The host should politely explain these rules. Again, this proactive strategy may prevent significant problems.
- **The host should assist with the extra work that accompanies a visit.**
The child should be extra helpful at mealtime, etc., when hosting someone.
- **It's the host's job -- not mom's or dad's job -- to entertain the guest.**
The child should find things to do and should pre-plan the activities.

Download the .pdf version at <http://www.ricklavoie.com/gateindex.html>