

Family Engagement Newsletter

Siblings of Children with Autism

By Wendy Overturf

Raising a child with autism can place some extraordinary demands on parents and on the family as a whole. Among these demands is the lack of enough hours in the day to do all one wishes. Specifically, the time involved in meeting the needs of a family member with autism may leave parents with little time for their other children. Research indicates that the majority of brothers and sisters of children with autism cope well with their experiences. That does not mean, however, that they do not encounter special challenges in learning how to deal with a sibling who has autism or a related disorder.

Not all siblings will experience these stressful issues, but here are some to be aware of:

- Embarrassment around peers; jealousy regarding amount of time parents spend with their brother/sister
- Frustration over not being able to engage or get a response from their brother/sister
- Being the target of aggressive behaviors
- Trying to make up for the deficits of their brother/sister
- Concern regarding their parents' stress and grief
- Concern over their role in future caregiving ([Autism Society Resource](#))

Research by Susan McHale and colleagues (1986) found that siblings without disabilities viewed their relationship with their brother or sister with autism as positive when: 1) They had an understanding of the sibling's disability; 2) They had well-developed coping abilities; and 3) They experienced positive responses from parents and peers toward the sibling with autism.

Research supports the idea that siblings need to understand what autism is about. The rule of thumb: Do it early and do it often! It is important that siblings of children with autism know about autism and that the information given is appropriate for their developmental age. From early childhood, they need explanations that help them understand the behaviors that are of concern to them. For the preschool-age child this may be as simple as "Rick doesn't know how to talk," while for an older child, it may involve a more in-depth conversation.

Although each family situation is unique, parents may want to read an article on The Autism Society website entitled [Sibling Perspectives: GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS](#). The article has important information and practical suggestions for helping and supporting siblings. Additionally, "Autism Speaks" has a [Siblings Guide to Autism](#) on their website that might be helpful for siblings.

The [Wisconsibs website](#) is another resource parents may want to investigate. Wisconsibs is not specifically just for siblings of a child with autism. However, for more than 20 years, they have been serving siblings of people with disabilities through peer support programs, education and networking opportunities, leadership development, and more. The [WisconSibs resource library](#) is located in their Appleton office. It includes books and videos that focus on the blessings and challenges of having a brother or sister with special needs. If this location is not convenient, some digital resources are available as well. If interested, [contact Wisconsibs](#). They also distribute a great activity book created by the [Organization for Autism Research](#) (OAR) called *Autism, my sibling, and me*.



A Parent Resource: Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

(From National Association of School Psychologists)

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. While it is not known how long this health emergency will last, it is known that it is contagious, that the severity of illness can vary from individual to individual, and that there are steps we can take to prevent the spread of infection. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

[Click](#) to read the full article.

See page 2 for additional resource information on COVID -19.

RESOURCES: COVID-19

Typically, this section highlights upcoming state-wide conferences. However, at this time, most of the upcoming events have been cancelled or postponed. This month, the focus of this section of the newsletter is on information and resources related to COVID-19. Please check out our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for continued updates.

From the Wisconsin of Public Instruction Website (DPI)

Many parents may have questions about their child's IEP services during the school closure period. The DPI has developed a web page to address some of these concerns-[Extended School Closure for Students with IEPs due to COVID-19 Special Education Question and Answer Document\(Revised 3/20/2020\)](#). The guidance may be revised periodically, so be sure to check back for most recent revision.

From the U.S. Department of Education

Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children With Disabilities During The Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak

[This Questions and Answers document](#) outlines states' responsibilities to infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities and their families, and to the staff serving these children.

[Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities](#) (March 21, 2020)

From the Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

On March 17, 2020, the OCR at the U.S. Department of Education released a [webinar](#) on ensuring web accessibility for students with disabilities for schools utilizing online learning during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In addition, OCR published a [fact sheet](#) for education leaders on how to protect students' civil rights as school leaders take steps to keep students safe and secure.

Save the Date!

Endless Possibilities Conference: A Closer Look at Invisible Disabilities

Keynote: Christina Irene, author of "Talking Splat: Communicating About Our Hidden Disabilities." Registration to open in mid-April.



At Home Learning Strategies

International Children's Book Day-April 2

To encourage reading and promote the love of books for children. The best and fastest way to develop our young children into intelligent human beings is by teaching them to read. Instilling a love of reading promotes a lifetime of learning and enjoyment. Libraries celebrate this day with storytelling hours and other events for young children. You can celebrate today by giving a new book to each of your kids. If they are too young to read, spend time reading stories to them. It is a great and memorable bonding time for you and your child. Check out this [list of books](#) that you may want to read to your child.



[April Early Literacy Activity Calendar](#)

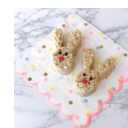
Sweet Spring Treats!

Following a recipe with your children is a great way to practice reading and measuring skills. A fun activity with a tasty reward!



[Birds Nest Cupcakes](#) [Krispy Bunny Treats](#)

[Marbled Egg Sugar Cookies](#) [Easter Egg Rice Krispie Treats](#)



Rhyming Easter Egg Hunt – For this activity you will need plastic eggs and the cut out images from [rhyming worksheets](#) that can be found online. Place one image inside each egg, making sure each egg/rhyme has a match. Then hide them around the house. Have your child search for the eggs and once all eggs are found, open them. Then work together to make the rhyming matches.



April 22nd, 2020 officially marks 50 years of celebrating Earth Day.

What better way to celebrate Earth Day than by getting out into nature! Go for a hike in the woods or walk to a local pond or lake to look for wildlife and enjoy the scenery. Be sure to bring along a camera to capture some of the beautiful sights you see along the way. Get the kids to take some photos too, and maybe even have them put together a nature album or collage.

[Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Activity Guide](#) Activities and crafts that will inspire kids to take care of the planet every day!



[Find the Facts Equation Search Puzzles](#): This is a unique way to work on multiplication facts--it's like a word search, but for math!

Real Life Add & Subtract Decimals Lesson: Next time you go order on-line from a restaurant have your child add together the cost of the items that they order.



[Skittles Pattern Cards](#): Children love using skittles to explore math concepts. This set of printable pattern cards help kids explore a variety of patterns, and extend the patterns using Skittles candies. You could also make your own patterns with m&m's or other colored candies.

[Fairy Tale STEM Challenges](#): This set of challenges will teach your kids problem solving, engineering and math with items you already have around the house.

Online Resources



[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

This site has an extensive list of links to information relating to autism.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

Find eligibility criteria for autism, information about trainings, and links to archived webinars. Links to additional resources are also included on the site.

[Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin](#)

The Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin exists to provide a community for individuals affected by autism, their families, and professionals who serve them. Their goal is to increase the quality of life for those affected by autism and respond to the emerging needs of the autism community.

[Autism Society of Southeastern WI \(ASSEW\)](#)

ASSEW works to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocate for appropriate services for individuals across the life span, and provide the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy.

[Autism Navigator](#)

This website features a unique collection of web-based tools and courses that integrate the most current research in autism with an interactive web platform and lots of video footage showing effective evidence-based practices. It's intended for professionals as well as families.

[Autism Source](#)

The Autism Source™ Resource Database, a product of the Autism Society of America, is the most comprehensive database of its kind. ASA employs a nationwide network of affiliates and collaborates with other autism organizations and professionals throughout the U.S. to ensure that the database continues to grow and is kept current with resource listings.

[Autism Speaks](#)

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. They do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.

[My Autism Team](#)

A social network and online support group for parents who have children with autism.

[IRIS Center Modules](#)

The first module provides information on the early signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as an overview of the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational determination of ASD. The second module highlights strategies that have been shown to be effective in teaching appropriate behaviors and skills and decreasing inappropriate behaviors with children and youth with ASD.

SIBLINGS OF AUTISM



This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at woverturf@wifacets.org.*



Contributions to the Newsletter

Upcoming newsletter topics: May: Mental Health

June: ADD/ADHD

July: Speech & Language

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to woverturf@wifacets.org. If unable to access form, you may send information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

***The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter
can be found online at:***

<https://servingongroups.org/resources>



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