

Can you Teach “Free Play” Skills to Children with Autism? YES!

Wherever they are on the wide range of the autism spectrum, few children with autism have any real friends. They have no clue what they need to do to make and keep friends. They cannot just ‘go out to play’ anywhere in an unstructured setting without caregivers worrying about the unexpected things they know will happen.

Play myths - Kids like to ‘just play’, right? Just put them together and they’ll figure out how to play games, and get along with each other successfully, right? WRONG! For children with autism, unstructured play or ‘free play’ time is just a confusing nightmare. They are not successful. We teach them how to play with *objects*, but we also need to teach them how to play with *people*.

What is ‘free play’? Organized, adult-led structured games are NOT free play. Free play means children as peers are interacting with each other in a ‘dance’ of willing give and take. It seems magical that typical kids ‘just know’ how to work at free play, or at least they try different things and then figure it out. When they come to adults and say ‘no fair’, they know exactly what part of the free play process has broken down.

Kids with autism or other social-cognitive challenges cannot figure this out, AND they will NEVER figure it out on their own. They need to be TAUGHT all the steps involved. Free play is a SKILL that has a specific process and sequence of steps to follow. The best news is that this CAN be taught, and with it comes a greater understanding of social obligation and friendship. Come and find out how to help children with autism be more successful at play with peers. You can help older youth benefit from learning how this works as well, since the same friendship skill process works for conversations and ‘hanging out’.

Playing with People

“As a functional adult (with Asperger’s), one thing troubles me deeply... many descriptions of autism and Asperger’s describe people like me as “not wanting contact with others” or “preferring to play alone”.

I want to be very clear about my own feelings. I *did not ever want to be alone*. And all those child psychologists who said this about me were dead wrong. I played alone by myself because I was a failure at playing with others. I was alone as a result of my own limitations, and being alone was one of the bitterest disappointments of my young life. The sting of those early failures followed me long into adulthood.”

John Elder Robison, p 221 from Look Me in the Eye, My Life with Asperger’s, 2007.

“Teaching Free Play Skills to Children with Autism” - June 2011

Sunday, June 5th

10:00 am – 12:30 pm

or Wednesday, June 8th

6:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Held at **École Noël-Ritchot School – Gym Entrance**

45 Ave de la Digue (down Pembina Hwy just south of Perimeter in St.Norbert)

This is a 2+ hr PowerPoint presentation format to adults, not a play session with children. Extra time is available afterwards to answer questions. The desire is to support direct training for those interested in working with children with autism and other social-cognitive challenges.

Presenter: Bennetta Benson, BA (Hons Psy), MPA, has worked with children and teens at all levels of the autism spectrum for the past 13 years. She is Program Director for the registered charity OHEYS, which offers a 1-1 summer camp for children (age 6-12) and a Jobs & Sports camp for teens (age 14-17) with autism/Asperger’s. She received the YMCA/YWCA “Woman of Distinction” 2004 for her work in this field. She presents workshops/training on autism and learning to school resource, TA’s, families and community groups.

PER SESSION: \$20 per person. \$10 for 2^{nd+} family members or students, tutors or respite workers.

To register: Please email or call to confirm, as material will be copied. You can pay on-site. Receipts/Certificates are issued on-site. email (preferred): bennettabenson@mts.net or call: 275-1498

Location: **École Noël-Ritchot School - Gym** 45 Ave de la Digue

Supported by: Winnipeg Optimal Health Early Years Sports Club -- Registered Charity #86117 9083 RR0001
OHEYS Summer Camps for Children/Teens w/Autism Website wikispaces: <http://optimalhealthearlyyearsportsclub.wikispaces.com>

Teaching & Learning Teen Issues in Autism/Asperger's

Teens with autism/Asperger's... is this a tidal wave coming to middle and senior schools from early years programs? Yes, but it will swamp us only if we are unprepared. We now know a lot more about what autism/Asperger's is and what it 'looks like' in terms of diagnostic criteria, social skills, language and behaviour. So... how do we continue to teach individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through the teen years? Our responsibility to reach and teach each individual with ASD is no small feat when each person presents with such unique characteristics and challenges, and looks and behaves so differently. When they hit the teen years, there are so many other social factors to consider including hygiene, social maturity, physical development, peer pressure and friendship networks. Bullying is always a clear and present danger. The teen's involvement and cooperation in solutions to help him or her becomes more of a necessity.

Teens with autism/Asperger's present different challenges than children in the early years, thus understanding the social thinking process and behaviour motivations underlying the disability is the key to effective teaching strategies. This session offers a more detailed review of the social thinking perspective on understanding and teaching teens with autism/Asperger's, describes in detail the difference in how these teens vs typical peers think and learn, outlines strategies on how proactively to create a supported school environment in which learning can occur, and offers suggestions in the potential transition to adulthood/employment for youth on the Autism Spectrum.

"Teen Issues in Autism" (as presented at the
GETCA Greater Edmonton Teachers Conference in March 2011)

Wednesday, June 15th 6:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Held at **École Noël-Ritchot School – Gym Entrance**

45 Ave de la Digue (down Pembina Hwy just south of Perimeter in St. Norbert)

PowerPoint presentation. Extra time is available afterwards to answer questions.

The desire is to support a greater understanding of the challenges faced by teens with autism and other social-cognitive challenges.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT...

*John Elder Robison (author/Aspergian
to fellow Aspergians):*

"In school, a lot of emphasis is put on identifying your weaknesses and improving them. That's important if your weaknesses are holding you back, but it is not the path to greatness. Greatness happens when you find your unique strengths and build upon them. Building up a weakness just makes you less disabled. Building a strength can take you to the top of the world."

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