



A Piece of the Puzzle

As an Early Intervention provider in Allegheny County, The Early Learning Institute's (TELI) therapists have seen a growing number of children diagnosed with Autism in the past several years. Debbie Fekos, OTR/L, an occupational therapist with the agency for nearly 14 years, has experienced this as well, but points out that the

Autism puzzle has many pieces. For example, often times Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) and Autism are seen as one in the same, though, they are different.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a separate condition in which individuals have difficulty processing the sensations in their environments in order to function within their daily lives. Sensory issues, however, may occur along with other diagnoses such as Autism and can actually be a very important piece to the puzzle of Autism. With an Autism diagnosis, children typically have delays with language, personal/social skills, and other issues. Individuals with SPD or sensory issues present with a variety of challenges and to varying degrees. Individuals may avoid touching certain foods or even holding someone's hand. Wearing certain clothing may be extremely uncomfortable. Standing around other people or in line next to people can be difficult. Playing on playground equipment such as swings may feel scary. A classroom with lots of children or the grocery store may be overstimulating. A child may avoid being cuddled by his mother. Individuals may avoid eating certain foods. These are just a few examples of sensory issues.

Another added layer to the complexity of diagnosing these disorders is that many children can exhibit certain behaviors such as the above from time to time, though that does not necessarily mean that they have SPD or Autism. Some kids may just be picky eaters, don't like the tags on their clothes or standing line. But, when these behaviors interfere with their overall nutritional intake, growth and well-being, it may be time to further investigate.

Families with questions or concerns should contact their local Early Intervention Service Coordination Agency or an Occupational Therapist who evaluates and treats individuals with SPD or with sensory issues. The key is to not jump to any conclusions, but to gather as much information as possible, so the proper diagnosis and treatment can be administered.



For more information about **The Early Learning Institute**, visit www.telipa.org.

The ABCs of Child Behavior and Why Inclusion Helps Children with Autism

Just about everything we do can be described as a behavior. A behavior is a specific action that can be observed. Children learn social behaviors primarily through their interactions with adults and other children. Behavior can be analyzed by looking at the following example:

Maria and Carlos are playing together, taking turns pushing a car down the ramp. Their teacher notices they are cooperating in their play together. She comes over and says to them, smiling, "You two are taking turns and sharing well!"

Antecedent: the situation that comes before the behavior. Maria and Carlos are playing with the cars.

Behavior: the actual behavior that is observed. Maria and Carlos take turns and share.

Consequence: what happens immediately following the behavior. Teacher praises Maria and Carlos.

This is the ABC process. When looking at specific behaviors, one has to look at the antecedents, behaviors and consequences. Antecedents are studied to determine what may trigger a behavior that needs to be changed. Consequences can strengthen or weaken the behaviors they follow. Reinforcing consequences result in the behavior happening more often. If Carlos had acted inappropriately by taking all the cars and pushing the cars down the ramp by himself, for instance, the teacher would have removed Carlos from that activity and redirected him to a less preferred activity while allowing Maria to continue playing with the cars. The desired result of this consequence would be for Carlos to play appropriately with Maria in the future.

It is important to understand the ABCs of behavior when looking at how children with autism interact with their same age peers. Add Adam, who has autism, to the above example. He approaches Maria and Carlos and the teacher hands him a car (Antecedent). Adam watches Maria and Carlos take turns pushing the cars down the ramp. The teacher tells Adam to do the same, and he pushes his car down the ramp and laughs along with the other children (Behavior). The teacher praises all three children for playing together (Consequence).

By understanding the ABCs of behavior, we help children who have varying levels of ability interact and learn social behaviors.

The Watson Institute's LEAP Preschool is a nationally recognized preschool program that provides early intervention services to preschool children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder and their typically developing peers.



For more information on **The Watson Institute**, call **866-893-4751** or visit our website at www.thewatsoninstitute.org.

Reiki and Autism

By Leslie Booth

Our family became involved in Reiki training and healing in the fall of 2001. I read an article in the *Post-Gazette* Health and Science Section which featured Nancy Murray of Key Stone Reiki and described Reiki as a form of energy therapy.

It was a defining moment for me.

Both of my children had been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder a few years before. PDD is another (in my opinion – ugly) way of saying that your child has Autism. Doctors told my husband and I that there was nothing they could do medically and that this was a lifelong disability.

I was trying many different alternative therapies at the time that I met the Key Stone Reiki crew, some of them very invasive and upsetting to the dynamic of the family, and the kids didn't seem to be making any progress. I was desperate, worn out and very depressed about the fate of my family.

Enter Key Stone Reiki. I called Nancy; we talked for about ten minutes. I told her everything about my situation and how I felt that I was "supposed" to be trained in this method.

My first instinct was to learn Reiki and use it to address what I thought their healing needs were. It's tempting to do so when working on loved

Key Stone Reiki is an alliance of practitioners based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, trained in the Usui System of Reiki Healing. They are available to help you explore this effective and versatile approach to healing. Key Stone Reiki has offered Reiki treatment and training in the greater Pittsburgh area and beyond since 1994.

Visit our web site at www.KeyStoneReiki.com or call **(412) 727-1731** for an introductory, discounted appointment.

ones, especially between a mother and her children. But I learned in Reiki Level 1 that the energy has all the control. It will go to where it needs to go. How freeing it was for me to allow that process to happen.

My kids are more focused and calm after treatments. If they get hurt they will come to me and expect my hands to go to that particular spot like a band-aid.

Reiki didn't take away their autism, but my children are introspective and creative and healthy. In the past they have asked if every family practices Reiki. I told them no, not everyone, and that's really a shame.

In our particular case it has brought us all closer together, creating a bond that is meant to be in a family. What could be better than that in your home?

Leslie Booth is a wife, mother and Reiki practitioner living in Pittsburgh's northern suburbs. She has been interested in and exploring the use of complementary medicine and alternative approaches to healing for decades.