

Aspergers Syndrome Support Group for Families in Macarthur

May News Sheet

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May Meetings

Wednesday's coffee meeting was enjoyed in the autumn sun under the umbrellas at Pete's Café with interesting discussions and contribution from all in attendance. One point raised was how to describe Aspergers Syndrome to people- one used was high functioning autism. Many people have heard of autism and can relate to how it has been portrayed in the media like the movie Rain Man. Whilst High Functioning Autism is a different diagnosis to Aspergers in trying to get people to initially understand it is a reasonable comparison.

The group also floated ideas on how extended families and other adults in a child's life can be consistent with how parents treat their child and how they can contribute to the child's learning experience.

On **Thursday night**, we welcomed a number of people new to the support group and took the opportunity to revisit a number of issues previously covered and the many different situations families find themselves in, in dealing with differing levels of behaviour/social interaction. We were very appreciative of having two high school teachers present to contribute to discussion through both their professional experience and as a mother of a child who is on the autism disorder spectrum.

A common issue discussed was how kids can be very different in their behaviour at school and then at home. It was stated that many kids are good at coping at school and holding onto their stresses and behaviours – they know what is expected of them and know that there is a set timeframe. When they get home, they can explode from unleashing their bottled up energy and anxiety.

Suggestions – leave what happens at school at school; know that they can behave differently in different situations but both have boundaries and rules. Same for what happens at home stays at home. Another suggestion given by families was to let kids have their asperger's time after school where they can just be themselves.

Meetings for June

- **Second Wednesday 13th June** 10am at Pete's Café – behind The Advertise Newspaper office at the Macarthur Mall end of Queen St.
We will be moving to another venue in the future due to the change in operating hours by Pete. Please call before hand to confirm venue in July.
- **Second Thursday 14th June** 7pm at the Harrington Park Community Centre Fairwater Dr next to the shopping centre

Coming along to meetings is a great way of meeting other families dealing with similar issues to you, and is an opportunity to hear other people's viewpoints on issues you are facing or could face in the future. I am always learning something new each time families come together and I hope that others are too.

Autism Awareness Expo

What an opportunity it was on the 12th of May to attend this Expo organised by a group of dedicated families who have a child with autism. Over 30 different organisations had stalls displaying information on their service and a program conducted throughout the Expo allowed people to hear from a range of speakers.

The Expo was well attended by families and I hope some of you were able to take up the opportunity to attend. As usual with me, I picked up a whole heap of information and brought a few more resources for the library. Should have taken my own Showbag and info along to hand out but made a few contacts of people who may be interested in coming along to meetings out here in Macarthur. Will be providing copies of the information gathered at upcoming Support Group meetings.

The organisers made a TV advert to highlight Autism as part of Autism week – did you see it? A great way of letting people know about the extent of autism in all its forms and the impact upon individuals and families.

New Library Resources

The following books and DVD are now available for loan through the small library that we are developing. Purchases made through Book in Hand from Queensland who were represented at the Autism Awareness Expo, and from Sue Larkey's web site.

The Curious Incident of the dog in the Night-time – winner of the Whitbread Book of the year by Mark Haddon. A fictional story about a fifteen year old boy who has Aspergers Syndrome who sets out to find who murdered his neighbour's dog, and confronts many of his fears along the way. I have read it and it is recommended reading for people to gain a perspective of how an Asperger child sees the world in which he has to live and cope. Some course language

The Explosive Child – by Ross Greene looks at the factors contributing to our child's explosions and provides practical advice on ways to overcome them.

Making it a success - 10 Essential strategies for teaching students with ASD at Home and School. A DVD of Sue Larkey's very enjoyable and informative presentation focusing upon primary school aged children.

ASPIE – Aspergers Syndrome Partner Information Australia

A short reminder about this group for adults who have aspergers and their partners. Provides information and holds monthly meetings on adult focused issues. A wonderful supporter of our support group and for many families across Sydney.

Contact Carol on www.aspie.org.au or 0408 817 828

Choice

A common point of discussion mentioned by people at meetings is the difficulty of many people who have aspergers syndrome in making a choice in what many people consider are day to day incidents. What cloths to wear to-day, What will I have for breakfast?

In **Sue Larkey's Newsletter** she gave a quote from one of her colleagues saying "No choice is a good choice for a child with autism spectrum disorder" Sue provided some ideas for students in choice making at school (or in the home environment)

- Give specific information on assignments – rather than 'choose an animal' narrow the topic down to a type of animal or just two animals.
- Instead of giving a whole pack of colour pencils to draw with, provide one or two to keep the child focus on colouring in, not lining up pencils, sharpening them or fiddling about, rather than on the activity at hand
- Have a clear spot/chair/table for them to do their work. Some children will not sit down until everyone else has so they do not have as many places to choose from.
- Remember to only offer a choice if there really is one eg "the bell has gone– its time to go in side" is a rule. "Which ball would you like" is a choice – as long as there is not too many to choice from.

At a training session given by **Brief Therapy Solutions**, the example of the breakfast choice was given. Allow child to choose their breakfast cereal from two or three set types with selection possible before they go to bed at night. This can reduce the anxiety of thinking over night about the choice in the morning, and lead to improved behaviour and time management at breakfast when 10 minutes lost can disrupt the whole day's routine. They can learn that they can change their selection but only from the original tow or three.

Co-operative Web Site – what do you want included?

Families in Partnership is developing its own web site that should be up and running by mid June – www.fip.org.au for a sneak preview.

It will have a page on Aspergers Syndrome to contain information about the support group, links to other web sites and copies of this newsletter. The scale of the site does not allow for any forums or chat areas but links to existing ones will be provided.

There will be opportunities to add information over time, however I would really like your comments on what should be included now. **If you were a parent looking for information on Aspergers for the first time, what would you like to find on our site?**

Starters Kit on Aspergers

The FIP Co-operative has made an application for funding through the ClubsNSW Community Expenditure and Support Program to develop up a kit of information and local contacts for people starting out on the Aspergers road. Many families have stated that there is a gap between getting a diagnosis and then being able to do something about it – more info on the different characteristics of aspergers, what therapist can help and what they do, how do I care for myself, strategies with dealing with an aspergers child, local support and key contact people in Macarthur.

Funding will be announced in July-August and if we are successful, a kit could be ready by the end of the year for distribution to local GP's, paediatricians, school counsellors and community centre. Your input into this proposed resource is important – please let me know of any ideas you may have on what should be included and who should be given kits for distribution to families.

The OASIS Aspergers Syndrome Guide for Teachers – Letter of Introduction

Christy Potter provided an internet link in her recent SW Sydney Aspergers Parent Support Group Newsletter to assist parents inform teachers involved with their child about aspergers and the individual needs of their child. It can be adapted by filling in the various lists and blank spaces and is a good checklist of what type of information teachers need.

Thinking about the information suggested in the Letter is a good way of actually recording what makes your child who they are, their strengths, their way of seeing the world and what interests them. Remember we all change over time and you will need to regularly update the information provided to teacher.

To get a copy of the Letter go to www.pattyrbashe.com/letterofintroduction.htm Those not on the web can contact me for a copy I have adapted for the situation in Australia.

Until next time

Bob Lester

Contact

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