

# Autkids™

Issue 5  
Autumn 2009  
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Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions

## INSIDE:



### My Little Houdini

How to keep an escape artist safe



What's the best option for your child?



**PLUS**

### Picture Perfect

Top tips for communication

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# Letter from the Editors



**Tori Houghton**  
Co-Editor,  
AuKids



**Debby Elley**  
Co-Editor,  
AuKids

## Hi there and welcome to our Autumn Issue

A special hello to our brand new readers who have subscribed to AuKids magazine having heard about us in the press. We're glad to have you on board and as always are happy to hear of ideas or comments about the magazine. Just send them to [aukidsmag@googlemail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@googlemail.com)

A quick reminder that our winter issue is out in January/February 2010. This will be the first of our subscription-only issues, so if you're a big fan of AuKids don't miss out - apply online now for a print or download version of the magazine. For four issues a year, the print version costs £10 and the downloadable version just £8. If you cannot get hold of the print version because we are over-subscribed, then please do leave your details on our website. This will enable us to assess demand for the magazine and adjust our print run accordingly.

Right, that's the science bit over and done with. A big thank-you to those of our readers who took the trouble to answer our questionnaire last time. The response has been universally appreciative, and comments like "It's nice to know I'm not on my own" and "It's so brilliant - more pages, please!" have made really encouraging reading. After reading our *Ask the Experts* feature on haircutting, one mum to 12 year old twins with autism said: "I just came back from - at last - a successful trip to the barber's!"

At the moment we are still reliant on sponsorship, but as we build the number of subscribers, the plan is - yes - to increase the number of pages and to reach more parents, too.

This issue is full of fab ideas. We know quite a lot of children with autism who are also gifted escape artists. Whilst their skill at ducking and diving can be awe-inspiring, it can also fill parents with gut-wrenching dread when in public places. Ask the Panel focuses on what you can do, and as far as we know none of our experts suggests a strait-jacket...

One of the most difficult choices our readers have to make is on schooling. You want them to thrive but which is best - mainstream, resourced, special school, special unit? Of course, that depends on the nature of your child's condition. We hope that our case studies featuring real success stories will start the ball rolling.


All that plus news, interviews and reviews...Grab a coffee, sit back and enjoy!

**Tori and Debby**

### Winner

The winner of last issue's competition to win a £25 voucher from The Novelty Warehouse is... (quick drum roll as we can't do the dramatic Dancing On Ice-style pause)... Tina Quinney from Whaley Bridge. Congratulations, Tina!

**DON'T FORGET TO SEND US A TWEET ON TWITTER!**  
[Twitter.com/aukids](http://Twitter.com/aukids)




Our front cover star is Ed Bartlett - see celebrity spotlight Page 12.  
 EDITORS: Tori Houghton and Debby Elley • GRAPHIC DESIGN: Jo Miller, Catalyst Video Ltd  
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*The opinions expressed in AuKids magazine are those of the contributor. Please seek medical advice before embarking on any therapy or behaviour intervention. All articles are copyright AuKids.*

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**  
 Orchids are beautiful plants which, much like kids with autism, require very specific conditions to grow. If they get them, they thrive. That's why we called this magazine AuKids. AU is also the chemical symbol for gold.





## Baby Scientists Wanted!

Are you pregnant or do you have a baby between the ages of 0-9 months who has an older brother or sister with autism?

Invitation to take part in the British Autism Study of Infant Siblings (BASIS).

At BASIS, groups of scientists from all over the UK study the development of baby brothers and sisters of children with autism. By working with parents, they hope to find out more about autism in the early years. By knowing more about how autism develops, they hope to be able to identify the disorder earlier and develop more effective interventions to improve the quality of life for children with autism and their families.

BASIS is currently looking for babies aged 0-9 months who have an older brother or sister

with a diagnosis of autism who live in the Manchester area.

This project will take place mostly in Manchester but families must be willing to travel to the Babylab in central London for some visits. Participation is voluntary and they always take a child's needs into consideration during the visit. They reimburse travel costs and hotel accommodation will be available for the London visit.

For more information, contact Janice Fernandes:

Tel: 020 7079 0761,  
E-mail: [basis@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:basis@bbk.ac.uk) or  
Visit: [www.basisnetwork.org](http://www.basisnetwork.org)

## NAS Announces Major New Strategy



Mark Lever, chief executive of the National Autistic Society, has announced proposals for a major new strategy for the organisation.

He explained: "We are at a pivotal moment for autism services and support in the UK. Awareness of autism has never been higher and in recent years we have made great strides in

campaigning for better recognition and support for those with the condition."

The new strategy will be underpinned by a major new fundraising drive to support new and existing activities. It is built around three key objectives - providing pioneering services, building a networked autism community and establishing a centre for autism, which will not only be aimed at those with autism and their supporters, but will also be a focus for the development of professional practice.

For further information, look up the NAS on [www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)



Asperger Syndrome had a high profile earlier this autumn as singer Scott James appeared as a candidate on the X factor. After wowing the judges and audience in the first round, Scott made it down to the final 50.

### STOP PRESS:

We'd like to sneak in a last minute CONGRATULATIONS to our friends at The Novelty Warehouse. We've just heard that our fave sensory toy store is among just five finalists shortlisted in the Best New Business category of the Morgan Foundation Entrepreneur awards 2009. Well done from all at AuKids!

## Dust off your Dancing Shoes!

North Staffordshire Special Adventure Playground, designed especially for special needs kids, is holding a Christmas Ball to

raise cash. Find your fairy godmother in time for December 12<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm at The Waddington Suite in the rather splendid Britannia Stadium, Stoke-on-Trent. Tickets £37.50 per person.

For details call 01782 717612 or email [nsadventure@lineone.net](mailto:nsadventure@lineone.net). To see the reasons why the cash is so important, look up [www.specialadventureplayground.co.uk](http://www.specialadventureplayground.co.uk)

## Research Suggests Sensory Link to Social Problems

The website First Science.com has reported on a study carried out by Durham University suggesting that visual processing problems could be contributing to difficulties with social interaction experienced by people with autism.

The new research showed that adults with an autistic spectrum conditions found it difficult to identify emotions from short video clips of body movements without seeing faces or hearing sounds. Those adults who struggled most with this task also performed poorly when asked to detect the direction in which a group of dots moved coherently on a screen, thought to

be due to visual processing problems.

The Durham study was published in the academic journal *Neuropsychologia*. According to Dr Anthony Atkinson from Durham University's Psychology Department, the strong link between performances on the tests suggests that people with autism have trouble reading body movements because they process some basic visual information differently. The findings will help to explain some of the underlying causes of social interaction problems experienced by people with autism.

## American Professor Wants Parents' Views

A professor at George Washington University in Washington D.C. would like to interview parents or carers in connection with a book he is writing on autism and treatment decisions.

Professor Roy R. Grinker, Ph.D. is both a medical anthropologist and the father of a teenage girl with autism. He wrote the book *Unstrange Minds* (now published in the UK under the title *Isabel's World*).

His new book will explore the complex ways in which people navigate available knowledge on therapeutic interventions for several childhood conditions, but with a particular focus on autism.

Professor Grinker is available to conduct interviews over the phone at almost any time. Parents who are interested can reach him easily at his University e-mail address: [rgrink@gwu.edu](mailto:rgrink@gwu.edu)

## She's a Hot Shot



**ZOOMING IN:**  
AuKids' photographer Jennie Fielden

AuKids' photographer Jennie Fielden has completed her Documentary and Fine Art Photography degree from Liverpool John Moore's University.

Jennie displayed her final degree work at Manchester's trendy Cube gallery. The piece was a collaboration with Delta; a seven-year-old boy with autism.

Jennie's aim was to capture a piece of Delta's world so that others could experience what autism means for him.

Jennie is now a freelance photographer specialising in working with young people with disabilities.

As a special offer to AuKids' readers in the North West, Jennie is offering a discount of 50% off any photography session, meaning you could take advantage of a photography sitting for just £30.

## Dads' Workshop a Conference Highlight

The sixth annual Autism - A Hands on Approach Conference will be held on November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 at Pinewood Education Centre, Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport.

Organiser Tanya Farley told AuKids: "We have a fascinating line-up of speakers and aim to provide a quality overview about ASC. As in previous years, we will have contributions from parent speakers and this always proves exceptionally popular.

"This year we actually have two fathers speaking and a workshop 'Autism - How the Dads Cope' as we feel the male perspective often gets ignored. Charlotte Moore, author of *George and Sam*, is returning to chair the event for us."

Contact Tanya Farley to book a ticket on 07966 399 709.

To find out more, visit [www.picsnmix.com](http://www.picsnmix.com) and quote 'AuKids Photos' or give Jennie a call on 07917 854 057.



# Saved by the Bell

Choosing the right primary school can be one of the most important and difficult decisions for any parent. With autism thrown into the picture, it becomes even more tricky. How do you decide which educational provision is going to suit their needs? **Tori Houghton** looked at four different types, picking schools that are scoring top marks from the mums who chose them.

## CASE STUDY 1 Mainstream

**Five year-old Bobby attends Outwood Primary in Stockport, a mainstream school where he receives 25 hours of LSA support.**

Mum Debby says: 'Bobby has high-functioning autism and is academically quite gifted. It was tricky choosing a school. We knew he'd fit into mainstream, as he doesn't have any behaviour problems that would make a busy environment unbearable. Still, we were looking for a small and nurturing place that wouldn't be too much of a jump from nursery. We needed them to be flexible with Bobby and understand his difficulties. You do hear horror stories about kids with autism in mainstream settings, so I was anxious.'

'As soon as I visited Outwood Primary, I knew I'd found the right place. Headteacher Paul Cunningham immediately asked me to tell him about my son's needs. He prepared a thorough transition plan that involved himself, Bobby's new teacher and Bobby's support assistant making regular nursery visits. Staff prepared a book of photographs for Bobby to look at prior to starting school.'

'Teachers made a visual timeline to help him to navigate the day's routine. They very gradually introduced him to every aspect of school life and asked the (much-loved) Mrs Wilkinson to accompany him in the playground at the dinner break.'

'His learning support assistant, M'lanie, is like a second mum to him. She knows exactly what he can and can't cope with, has helped to push him to make the most of his academic skills and at the same time has worked on his social skills. Bobby's first year has



Bobby and M'lanie

been a resounding triumph – both his language and social skills have improved dramatically.

'On paper, some schools say all the right things. It's only really when you go in and start talking about your child that I think you get a proper feel about whether they genuinely care about being inclusive or not.'

Bobby's Learning Support Assistant (LSA), M'lanie Seton, says:

'In the classroom we found that our timeline benefited not just Bobby but the whole class. We also had three other pictures - eyes, mouth and an ear. On the carpet the teacher, Fran Poppleton, would say 'Eyes looking, ears listening, mouth closed.' Bobby liked that.'

'We would go into the dining room for lunch just before the other children came in so it would be quiet and slowly get noisy. We use books or pieces of apple to help Bobby wait and we take a tray of Play-Doh into assembly. He talks loudly in assembly so we've got a little picture of a mouse and say 'quiet as a mouse!' but he finds it difficult. No one ever comments on it - we just allow him to be himself.'

'He loves the computer so to prevent him from being a bit obsessed we cover it with a blanket and tell him it's having a rest! We give him a certain amount of computer time each day.'

'When Bobby first arrived he was quiet, now his great sense of humour has emerged. It's great to see him get a hug in the morning from a classmate, or a 'high five' from a Year Six.'

## CASE STUDY 2 Autism unit in a mainstream setting

**Five year-old Marcus attends Wilmslow Grange in Cheshire, an autism resourced unit for seven children in a mainstream primary school. The provision has a specialist teacher, two specialist teaching assistants, a midday assistant and a visiting speech and language therapist.**

Mum Tracey says: 'With a Statement already in place, we visited the three options available - a special school, resourced mainstream and mainstream with one-to-one support. On the visits, Marcus responded best to Wilmslow Grange. We felt this would be the best of both worlds - specialist support but also a mainstream experience.'



Marcus

'The specialist staff are very knowledgeable. Teachers in the rest of the school have also been very inclusive. The whole school can't do enough for Marcus, really. He gets full time support in the mainstream class and when things get tricky he can use the ASD base room - the 'Rainbow Room'. The other kids accept him and in fact look after him. He seems quite popular (although he is oblivious to this!) and is involved in all aspects of school life, including sports day.'

## CASE STUDY 3 Autism class in a special school

**Six year-old Aran attends a specialist autism class at Valley School, a special school in Stockport.**

Mum Yvonne says: 'We decided on a class for children with autism when we realised that Aran would struggle coping in a mainstream primary due to the degree of his impairment in communication and interaction.'

'The provision Aran receives is outstanding. The staff who teach him are highly trained to teach children with autism. The environment of the classrooms and the unit is specifically designed for children with autism. It's very secure and classrooms are low-arousal



Aran

with plain walls and minimal furniture – good for children who find too much stimulation hard to process.'

'The playground is the size of a small public park, with a slide, swings and bicycles - excellent for kids like Aran, who love to move about a lot. The care the children receive from staff at Valley School is exceptional.'

'I know that Aran's content because he walks happily towards school every morning, says 'Bye bye' without a fuss and trots down the corridor to find his classroom.'

# CASE STUDY 4

## Special school for children with communication difficulties

Twelve year-old Bethaney attends Ewing school in Didsbury, Manchester, which is a specialist school for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties.

Mum Sue says: 'I chose Ewing School for Bethaney because I felt it was a good middle ground between a special school and mainstream. Bethaney had attended both types in the past and neither had been right for her. Ewing School is a special school, but focuses equally on life skills and education. There is also an emphasis on building confidence, which is key when learning social skills.

'Ewing is not specifically dedicated to autism. The children there have a range of social, emotional and educational challenges, which means there is a large scope for children to learn from each other. There is special emphasis on speech, language and communication. I also felt that it was important for Bethaney not to be in a school that focused purely on autism because I wanted her to meet children who had typical social skills. This way I felt she could learn from tricky real-life situations, with staff supporting her in understanding them and learning how to tackle them for herself.

'Central to Ewing's success is structure, boundaries and consistency. No one is stereotyped according to their condition. Everyone is taught to accept others as they are and to learn to help each other, developing social relationships in the meantime. This works well to combat the anxieties and stresses that young people with social difficulties often experience.

'The school participates a lot in community activities and hosts



Bethaney

events such as 'Ewing's Got Talent' and themed days. Their education is not purely focused on textbook learning, it's an all-round education.

'I am a realist - Bethaney may well need a lot of support when she is an adult and may not have the ability to live her life typically, but I want her to have the best shot at both life and education that she can. That's why she attends Ewing!

Bethaney says:

'I have friends at Ewing and I like maths, science and free choice lessons. Ewing School staff understand me and what I find hard and help me understand. I think it would be cruel for the government to shut the school down because it has helped so many children with their lives and is helping me with my life as well.'



*\*Ewing School is currently under threat of closure, with a proposal to shut it down in 2012. A petition on behalf of PACE, Parents Against the Closure of Ewing School, signed by 10,576 people, was submitted to the House of Commons by Liberal Democrat MP John Leech. Among those backing the parents are TV actor Max Beesley and former Coronation Street star Angela Griffin. You can help by joining the Facebook group Save The Ewing School Didsbury Manchester.*

## Do Your Homework!

- Visit all relevant schools at least twice and take your child at least once.
- Make a list of pros and cons for each provision.
- Listen to your instincts - and to your child's.
- If you are considering a special school - ask about their links with mainstream schools.
- Get a real feel for how the school functions by being at school during lunchtime.
- Prepare questions in advance and don't be afraid to ask any of them.
- If your child has a Statement take it with you and ask the school how they can meet its requirements.
- Produce a portfolio of your child detailing all aspects of his/her needs to show potential school staff. For help in making a portfolio, contact the children's charity Cerebra at [www.cerebra.org.uk](http://www.cerebra.org.uk) or call them on 01267 244200.
- Last but not least, don't judge a book by its cover - or a provision by its title. Get to know the school and ask other parents about it. We want our children to be approached as individuals, so perhaps that's how we should judge a school.

## Further Information

- Further information about different types of provision can be found at [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)
- The National Autistic Society (NAS) publish a leaflet titled Schools, Units and Classes for Children with Autism and Asperger Syndrome, available from its online shop [www.autism.org.uk/pubs/education](http://www.autism.org.uk/pubs/education)
- An Independent advice service for parents of children with special educational needs, the National Parent Partnership Network (NPPN) offers support in finding the right school for your child at [www.parentpartnership.org.uk](http://www.parentpartnership.org.uk)
- The NAS Advocacy for Education Service gives advice to parents on aspects of education and tribunals. Call 0845 070 4002 or look up [www.autism.org.uk/advocacy](http://www.autism.org.uk/advocacy)

If your child's school scores top marks, we'd love to hear from you. Drop us a line at [aukidsmag@googlemail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@googlemail.com) with a jpeg of your little one in uniform and tell us what they do so well.



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# Ask the Experts

“ **My child is an escapologist. Wherever we go, he's trying to find the nearest exit, running away from me or climbing where he shouldn't be. What can I possibly do to prevent him from getting into danger?** ”



**Dr Paul Holland PhD  
C.Psychol. AFBPsS**

Paul is a Chartered Psychologist based at the Department of Psychology, City University, London.

He is also a columnist for SEN magazine - the Journal for Special Needs.

your son to walk nicely with you (in a guaranteed safe location) for a very short amount of time. When he does this provide a lot of verbal praise (including labelling the behaviour e.g. “That’s really good walking”) and even other types of treats. Gradually increase the amount of time that you expect your son to walk nicely with you, remembering to praise and reinforce him. Once this is established in a safe environment, move to a more natural setting (e.g. a very quiet road). Again, always remember to praise and reinforce.

This is a problem experienced by many parents. There are several strategies that have been suggested ranging from using reprimands to verbal reprimands. Regardless of the strategy employed, it is important to realise that children often run to be chased. Without generalising too much, children on the whole like the attention that they get when they run off and do things that they should not be doing. First and foremost, we must ensure that your son receives more positive attention when he walks with you nicely than he does when he runs off.

But how do you get him to walk nicely in the first place? I like to use a strategy called ‘Shaping’. Start by teaching

But what happens if he then runs off? This is one of the very few situations in which I would use the word ‘No!’ I like to save this word for situations where danger or aggression to others is involved. If your son runs off, shout “No”, collect him, and return home immediately. This way your son will eventually learn that he only gets a lot of attention, praise and other treats when he walks nicely, and that if he runs off, he is told “No” and is taken immediately home.

Other suggestions:

- Increase physical activity and opportunities to run freely.
- Introduce a Social Story\* about walking nicely with mum and dad or another adult.

\*The words ‘Social Story’ are trademarks owned by Carol Gray.

The views reflected in these columns are the panel’s personal opinions and may not be relevant to all children with ASC. Parents should embark on intervention programmes only after following the advice of their child’s paediatrician and/or occupational therapist.





Luke Beardon

Luke is a Senior Lecturer in Autism at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Contact him at l.beardon@shu.ac.uk

Running off can be for a plethora of reasons - one of which might be a sense of pure enjoyment with the act of running and, in particular, being chased. If this is the case then there may be something that can be done. If a child loves chasing games then the key is to change the perspective of reward from being chased to being the chaser; the idea is to get the child to enjoy chasing (and catching) more than

running off. Ingredients: one child with autism; one (or more) fit and healthy other/s; rewards (specific to the child). Start by chasing and rewarding the child when s/he is caught - this is important, to establish that it is the catching that provides the reward, not just the chasing. Do not try too hard to catch the child either. Then turn the game around and encourage the child to chase you - make it easy at first to catch you, and provide a reward for catching you. It may be that you get someone else to chase and catch you to start off with, to demonstrate the reward system to the child. Do this as much as possible - and involve as many others as possible. The goal is to get the child to enjoy chasing and receiving the reward for catching you. The idea is that the child gets the stimulation from running but does so in a more controlled manner than if s/he simply runs off. It also teaches the child that it is good both to chase others - and to be 'caught' when they have been chased.

# Supporting you now, and in the future.

Printing AuKids newsletter is just one way of expressing our commitment to the communities we work in.

[www.standardlife.com](http://www.standardlife.com)

## Hints and Tips



### HELLO...IS IT ME YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?

Make sure your child has a name tag/phone number somewhere on them. At [www.iceideas.co.uk](http://www.iceideas.co.uk) there's some great tips to make sure that your child has their identity and a contact number on them including some temporary tattoos.



### PRACTISE MAKES PERFECT

Role play with your child what to do if s/he gets lost, making sure they know where to find you, how to present their identification card and what to say.



### DRESS CODE

Dress them in something distinctive and bright, particularly if you are in a crowded place.



### SAFE HAVEN

Make sure you have a safe place - somewhere they can run but not get out.



### LOCATION, LOCATION

For peace of mind with little escape artists, get a child locator. The child can press a panic tag if they lose sight of you, or you can activate it and it will locate them. Look up [www.loc8tor.co.uk](http://www.loc8tor.co.uk) for more details. The Loc8tor Plus costs £99.99 and includes a panic alarm that your child can activate if they find themselves lost.



Paul Birks

Regional Officer for Cerebra  
[www.cerebra.org.uk](http://www.cerebra.org.uk)  
Parent support helpline  
0800 328 1159

For all parents, not knowing that your child is safe can be a nightmare. For most families it is an occasional one. For families with an autistic child it is in many cases a frequent, but unpredictable event.

One of the key causes of flight is anxiety. There are three areas of action to be looked at:

- Managing your child's anxiety.
- Identifying and managing likely triggers.
- Encouraging behaviour that makes the flight itself more manageable.

Managing the anxiety is a skill that takes a long time to develop, and each parent knows their child

better than anyone. However, most of us benefit from assistance in managing emotional responses from good advice and professional assistance if it is available. Support may well be available through Health or Social Services.

Some families do achieve a level of success in predicting or preventing stress-related flight. Try assessing the likely trigger points and having a prepared plan to manage them before going on an expedition is worthwhile.

Where we encourage them to run too for 'safety' can be just as important as trying to catch them. Managing the flight by 'manipulating' where the child will choose to run to is an option. If the child can be convinced when in public that being in the car is the safest place, then flight towards the car or to the person who has the car keys can be a managed form of behaviour.

The above points make a good checklist of things to do and try but equally important is taking the risk in going somewhere new as gaining experience and visiting new places might just open a door of possibility that they might otherwise miss.



Do you have a question for Ask the Panel?  
E-mail us at [aukidsmag@googlemail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@googlemail.com)

*"What I did with Mark was play a game - he was always going to run. The important thing is that he stops when you shout, so we made it into a game of 'run and stop'. He knew he got a hug for stopping when I shouted, so he did. That means he 'should' always stop when I need him to."* Rick, father of Mark, aged 5.

# Interview



IT TAKES TWO: Sue Broaders (left) and Tina Davies (right).

## Taking a Leaf from Bernie's Book

**IT'S said that one good turn deserves another. This is the story of how a support centre dreamed up by one Manchester mum provided the setting that a generation later inspired two other parents to rise above their own challenges and help other families.**

By Debby Elley

Thirty years ago, mum Bernie Wood, whose adult son has Down's Syndrome, took the initiative to do something positive for other parents who had children with disabilities. She opened Talbot House in Harpurhey, a drop-in centre offering support, information, advice and perhaps most importantly, hope. Over the years, Talbot House has become a lifeline to families in the Manchester area who still use it to gain vital information as well as sharing their experiences with others in a sympathetic setting.

Eight years ago, this was the venue where two mums sought refuge from difficult times and kindled an enduring friendship. Sue Broaders and Tina Davies both had toddler daughters with special needs. Sue's daughter Bethaney, now 12, has high functioning autism. Her condition was originally misdiagnosed as moderate to severe mental retardation.

Tina's 11 year-old daughter Aemmee has severe learning disabilities, but it was only when she was nine that she was also given a diagnosis of autism.

Sue had grown up knowing about the autism

spectrum. She has a brother and cousin with the condition and five family members are affected by it to some degree. By the time that Bethaney was born, she felt that she'd had her fair share of autism and was exasperated that life had handed her yet another challenge.

Says Sue: "We both came to Talbot House on a regular basis. Tina was very much on the floor and I was the *really* angry one. I had a proper chip on my shoulder – *why has it happened to me?* We were at opposite ends of the scale."



Although the two mothers had very different personalities – Tina was calm, Sue feisty – they had similar challenges to overcome. Their daughters attended the same assessment unit, both mothers had to face education tribunals to move their children from unsuitable schools and both had the unpleasant experience of inaccurate early diagnoses. From the start, they learned how

to battle. Even now, Sue is fighting the proposed closure of Bethaney's school – Ewing School in West Didsbury, Manchester, which she says would leave parents without a viable alternative.

When their daughters were both nine, the pair started to talk about creating a service for other families who were living with autism.

"We kept saying to each other 'We've got a role in life, we've got to do something,'" says Sue. "Two years ago I said to Tina 'I know it's bad,' - we were both going through difficult times - 'but if we don't do it now we'll never do it.' So we applied to the Princes Trust for a small amount of money to get things started."

The result was Autism Social Care, a not-for-profit organisation specialising in providing one-to-one support for children and adults affected by autism.

Sue and Tina start by developing tailored packages to help people develop specific life skills.

Tina explains: "The action plans are really person centred. We tend to focus on behaviour, communication and social interaction, and the service is evaluated and monitored to check our progress. We work with schools and care providers to make sure that our methods are as consistent as possible. Sue and I carry out the assessments and develop the plans, and we employ 20 support staff to carry them out.

"The interview process for support staff is very rigorous. Sue and I have a parent's perspective - that's the difference. We will not employ anyone who we wouldn't feel would be right for our own children."

The service has gone from strength to strength, and earlier this year Autism Social Care was presented with a cheque for £16,000 from the Department of Health, and has been able to open new premises in New Moston.

Autism Social Care is now contracted by Bolton County Council and is in the process of being approved by both Manchester and Bury Councils. Referrals can also be made privately through families themselves or via third parties.

To book the services of Autism Social Care, the minimum requirement is two-and-a-half hours a month and a charge of £15 per hour is made.

"This is not about doing things for people - it's about teaching them how to help themselves," says Sue. "That's the most valuable thing we can offer."

## Further information

- Autism Social Care runs a support day from its base in New Moston every Wednesday for families of children with autism. The support days are divided into two sessions. From 10am-noon there are one-to-one appointments available for people who wish to speak in confidence, have some emotional support or help in dealing with paperwork. Advance booking is required for the morning appointments - call 0161 684 9924. From noon onwards, the setting is a

drop-in centre open to any parent, carer or family who can meet other families and gain tips, advice and support from each other.

- AUTISM SOCIAL CARE 2a Greengate East, New Moston, Manchester, M40 0JL  
Tel: 0161 684 9924 or 07530 073342 / 163888 E-mail: info@autismsocialcare.org  
Web: www.autismsocialcare.org
- TALBOT HOUSE Monsall Street, Harpurhey, Manchester M40 8QF.  
Tel: 0161 203 4095  
Email: info@talbothouse.info

- As part of the Aiming High initiative, Autism Social Care is running a family fun day on December 5<sup>th</sup> at Leverhulme Park in Bolton from 11am-5pm. The day is open to all children with disabilities and costs just £1.50 per person. Staff and volunteers will be on hand to offer plenty of support and there will be trampolines, a bouncy castle, bouncy slides, wrestling, graffiti and dancing among many activities going on.

For further info call Sue or Tina on 0161 684 9924 or look up [www.autismsocialcare.org](http://www.autismsocialcare.org)



# Talk at the Touch of a Button

So your child doesn't talk yet. You're not alone. Many autistic children are late talkers. However bright they are, processing language doesn't come easily to them. Not knowing when or even if your child is going to speak is an immense source of anxiety to a lot of parents. It needn't be, though.

Verbal communication may be the most common method of getting your point across, but it's not the only way. Giving your non-verbal child alternative means of expressing themselves can reduce the behaviour problems associated with frustration.

Rather than replacing verbal skills, communication aids can be a stepping

stone on the way to achieving them, encouraging kids to interact, request and begin to understand how a conversation works. All this is great training for when their words start to emerge. In many cases, alternative methods of communication can actually prompt speech to start.

There are plenty of great tools out there to help your little one communicate.

ACE Centre North (for details of the south centre, see below) has given AuKids some top tips for introducing visual systems to support communication. Hopefully our taster will inspire you as you develop a system of interacting with your child.


**1 Motivate**

Motivation is the key to communication. Children don't communicate if they are not motivated to do so. Make sure that all the messages that you use are motivating – a favourite song, story, joke, or an action that can be requested again and again.



**4 Use Them Yourself**


Children hear language all around before they start to speak. Use the visual system yourself to show that the symbols carry meaning. Point to or show the 'symbols' as you use spoken language. You can even draw your own symbols.



**2 Be Creative**

Build in opportunities to communicate – stop before the next line of a song, put the glue out of reach when making a model, get the 'wrong' item when your child points...but make sure that your child has the right visual 'symbol' to hand so that they can express what they need.

For more on the Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS, commonly used to help support communication in individuals with autism, look up [www.pecs.org.uk](http://www.pecs.org.uk)



**5 Empower Them**

Don't just choose favourite toys, objects or foods for your child's vocabulary. Words such as 'more', 'stop', 'go' and 'mine' are very motivating and powerful. They can be used in almost any situation again and again.



**6 Start Easy**


Communication aids can be paper based and have no voice output (low tech), have recorded speech output (light tech) or have synthesised speech output (high tech).

**POINT OR PRESS: Smart/Speak (bottom) £695, Dynavox V (top right) £6,500 and a low-tech personal organiser.**



**3 Be Flexible**

All visual communication systems use a 'symbol' to represent the spoken word – an object, photograph, symbol or written word. Some children work better using objects or photos at first, moving on to symbols later.



## When thinking about trying a communication system, here are a few points to consider...

**7 Low Tech Versus High Tech**

How much vocabulary do you need and how complicated is the system?

Low tech books and boards can be organised however you like – for specific activities, or containing personal vocabulary for your child. Their design can be customised to suit your child's needs; a personal organiser, key ring or ring binder can all be very portable.

**BOOK OF WORDS: Low tech systems can be a good place to start, and are the cheapest option.**



**8 Wired For Sound**

How much vocabulary do you need? Too much too soon can be confusing. Light tech and high tech devices can have from one message to hundreds of messages..

High tech devices - those with synthesized speech - contain words stored as dynamic screens which change at the touch of a button.

Light tech devices, such as the Go Talk machines, which you can use to record your own words, are less complicated. To hear the pre-recorded word the child simply presses the relevant button.

**CHATTERBOXES: Q1 (top left) £2,000, LITTLEmack (bottom right) £85, GoTalk 9 (right) £100.**




**9 One Size Does Not Fit All**

Systems are always individual...what works for one child may not be as useful for another. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is sometimes used for teaching autistic children but is not the best system for everyone.

Some children respond better to learning sign language systems such as Makaton. For further information on Makaton look up [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)

**VELCRO VISUALS: PECS books like the ones shown help children to initiate conversation by teaching them to physically exchange messages by tearing out an image and giving it to another person.**



**10 Back Chat**

Talking Photo Albums can be used to store holiday memories. Talking Tin Lids and Talking Points are also fantastic gadgets for storing single messages.

**TAP LESSONS: Talking Photo Album (back) £20, Talking Point (bottom left) £4, Taking Symbols Notepad (bottom middle) £50 for 3, Talking Tin Lid (bottom right) £20 for 3.**




# Reviews



## ONE DAY COURSE

**Getting Kids In Sync: A Sensory Processing Approach to Challenges Associated with Autism, ADHD, Learning and Behavioural Disorders.**

Held at The Moor Suite, Heaton Moor Road, Stockport, July 10<sup>th</sup>.

Presented by international speaker Genevieve Jereb, Australian Occupational Therapist specialising in sensory integration issues.

I haven't attended many courses where the audience are asked to do monkey impersonations. Most professional courses I've signed up for on behalf of my autistic twins have simply required that I kept my eyes open until 3pm.

Gen Jereb's Getting Kids In Synch workshop was unlike any other, though. About half an hour in, Gen announced that she didn't expect many of us to stay awake all day, and so was to highlight the best bits for us by referring to them as 'golden nuggets'.

There really was no need for golden nuggets, though. Gen's expert knowledge of the senses meant that she knew precisely what to do to keep her audience from being bored out of them. Never have I heard a lecturer sustain delegates' interest for so long through humour (at times this was more stand-up than sit-down) and pinpoint accuracy when it came to aiming her subject matter directly at an audience's heads rather than over them.

Sensory integration\* is often a large part of autism and yet is still overlooked when it comes to managing the condition. If you've got a child who craves movement, welcomes noise and bright lights, loves tight squeezes and doesn't mind eating Play-doh, you may well have a sensory seeker on your hands.

If your child covers their ears, objects to certain tastes or textures and reacts in a fashion that may seem 'out of synch' to their surroundings, you may have an over-responsive child. One type can't seem to get enough stimulation, the other seems to reach overload at the slightest thing. Both may have a sensory processing disorder.

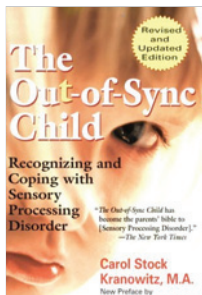
Delegates were asked to explore how we sub-consciously used sensation in order to control our level of comfort. She defined the term Sensory Processing Disorder before explaining the symptoms of the most common types of SPD. By the afternoon she had begun to cover some of the techniques used to help youngsters with integration issues. They included exercises to regulate breathing and physical play, which when conducted in the right manner can be very organising for the brain.

If you were unlucky enough to miss the course, go to Gen's website at [www.sensorytools.net](http://www.sensorytools.net) for your chance to sign up for the same seminar online. You must have broadband, and although you can split the seminar into manageable chunks, you must complete it between November 1<sup>st</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>.

The fee is £118, but I can guarantee that by the end of it you'll be unbeatable in your understanding of sensory issues.

Debby Elley

\*sensory integration - the brain's ability to process sensory input effectively.



## BOOK

**The Out-of-Synch Child**

By Carol Stock Kranowitz

2005

Published by Perigee

£15.95

ISBN 978-0399531651

## BOOK

**The Out-of-Synch Child Has Fun**

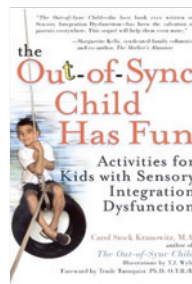
By Carol Stock Kranowitz

2003

Published by Perigee Trade

£15.95

ISBN 978-0399528439



ONE of the first things I learnt about autism was that some people with the condition experience hyper (over) or hypo (under) sensitivities. Hyper-sensitivity can account for symptoms such as anxiety experienced when entering bright or noisy places. Hypo-sensitivity - being under sensitive to sensory

stimulation - is less talked about. Some people can experience both at the same time, being hyper-sensitive in some areas and hypo-sensitive in others.

I've since learnt that these phrases only very roughly describe what's going on when a child has a Sensory Processing Disorder. In Carol Kranowitz's 'The Out-of-Synch Child', Kranowitz goes into great depth to describe the full range of symptoms that can suggest a sensory processing disorder, helping parents and professionals to identify exactly what a child is experiencing.

**The Out-of-Synch Child** by Carol Stock Kranowitz, which I read after attending Gen Jereb's course, is a fantastic guide for anyone who's new to sensory disorders. Each disorder is described in detail, complete with accompanying case studies to illustrate it.

For what to do next, read Kranowitz's **The Out-of-Synch Child Has Fun**. This is packed with activities and ideas for children with sensory processing disorders. Clear instructions are given on each, as well as variations for different levels of ability and explanations on each game's benefits.

Some of the ideas require lots of materials - even some skill in the woodwork department! - but there are enough simple ones to keep a parent inspired, and teachers will find some good material among the more complex ones.

Debby Elley



## THEATRE

**Something in the Air**

By Oily Cart productions

Special needs theatre production

Contact Theatre, Manchester

Part of the Manchester International Festival 2009

Oily Cart provides multi-sensory theatre for young children and people with complex disabilities including autism. As part of the Manchester International Festival this July, the theatre company presented Something in the Air. I went along to support my five-year-old friend Alec. Audiences are kept tiny so that the entertainment is shaped for the individual, so Alec's mum answered plenty of questions beforehand and was even supplied with a story to prepare him for the show.

Entering the forest-like setting and sitting in our own cushioned 'nest' and 'leaf' chairs, Alec and I looked at each other rather doubtfully. Helped by the gentle rocking of the chairs, we soon settled. Slowly and calmly, soothing music rose from the background and one of the cast appeared playing a clarinet.

Brightly-dressed acrobats swung rhythmically on a trapeze. The audience span, bounced and twirled in their own 'leaf' chairs in time to the visuals, providing a genuinely shared sensory experience. Leaves fluttered down, balls bounced and lights shimmered around the auditorium. The play finished with the entire cast singing a personalised song to each child. It was a wonderfully creative, mesmerising experience.

For more information about Oily Cart visit website at [www.oilycart.org.uk](http://www.oilycart.org.uk)

Tori Houghton



## FILM

**Adam**

Written and Directed by Max Mayer

Stars Hugh Dancy and Beth Byrne

Currently showing at selected cinemas. DVD will be released on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2010.

Adam (Hugh Dancy) is a 29 year-old man with Asperger Syndrome whose ordered and predictable life is turned upside down by huge life events. Then he falls in love with Beth (Rose Byrne), his new neighbour. Beth, armed with plenty of baggage from a previous relationship, quickly falls for Adam's quirky, endearing manner and is intrigued by his frankness.

Two very different people are thus brought together to overcome their own separate challenges.

It's a love story that addresses how the difficulties in social and emotional understanding experienced by people with Asperger Syndrome can affect relationships and cause both anxiety and frustrations.

As Adam, Dancy is believable, likeable and (ahem) rather gorgeous! He researched the role by talking to adults with Asperger Syndrome and this understanding and sensitivity is obvious.

You'll leave the cinema with a better understanding of Asperger Syndrome... and maybe just a little bit in love with Adam.

(A love-struck) Tori Houghton

Send in your reviews of a book or DVD to [aukidsmag@googlemail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@googlemail.com) You can also review items from your child's point of view - older children may like to write their own reviews. No more than 150 words, please.

# The Last Word



## Teething Troubles at the Dentist

By Debby Elley, journalist and mum of twins with autism.

Recently, our five year-old twins Bobby and Alec visited the dentist. In the past this has been uneventful. All we've had to do is tickle them profusely, allowing the dentist a quick scan of their pearly whites, retrieve the reward sticker from Alec's jaws and wave goodbye.

But since our dentist decided to take us off the NHS (nice one), we've had to find a new one. Bobby doesn't like it. Last time, he screamed blue murder from the moment he caught sight of the upstairs surgery.

On this occasion we have warned Bobby that we're going to the dentist.

Hurrah! He doesn't remember a thing. As I wander upstairs with Alec and catch sight of our friendly dentist, probably already bracing himself for the onslaught, I announce confidently: 'Bobby's matured a lot in the last six months. You won't have a problem this time.'

Now why did I say that? At this stage Bobby is climbing the stairs quite keenly, but then he

catches sight of the surgery, remembers where he is - this is the place that makes Hell look tempting - and hotfoots it down the steep flight as fast as his legs will carry him. Gavin catches him on the way down and tries to walk him back up again with soothing comments, but he grabs hold of the banisters like someone dangling over a cliff in a Bond movie.

There's a brief, ugly grappling moment during which a little parental force is starting to look embarrassingly like abuse. Then Gavin adopts the parent-who's-tried-everything tactic of carrying his son sideways under his arm up the stairs whilst Bobby wails and I give the dentist an awkward 'I stand corrected' look.

Alec is first in, says 'Ahhh' with a little encouragement and wanders back into the waiting room without a murmur. Bobby, meanwhile, has remembered EVERYTHING about the dentist. "No open wide!" he tells us. "No Ahhhhh! Bobby DOESN'T WANT ANY DENTIST."

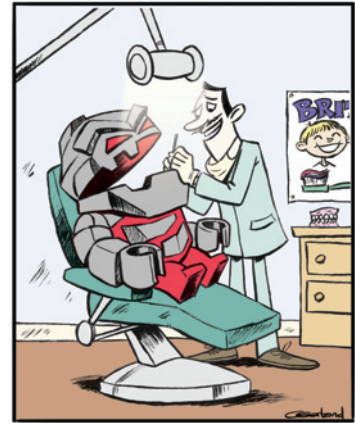
Our dentist is a patient bloke. He realises that it's the surgery environment Bobby objects to and is refusing to take this personally. He comes into

the waiting room and obligingly inspects Bobby's favourite Lego® Power Miners rock monster for any signs of tooth decay. It's improbable that a Lego® character will need root canal work, particularly as this one has no teeth, but he makes a passable go at an examination. He then gives Bobby his mirror.

Eventually Bobby allows a brief inspection of his teeth, but then he tries shoving the mirror

down the dentist's throat. It's a bit like watching Michael Parkinson with Emu.

Eventually we depart the dentists' with a sigh, about half a stone lighter. It's not the end of the saga though. Once home, we realise that Bobby has lost his Lego® Power Miners crystal, which was stored inside rock



"MMM, LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN EATING TOO MANY CRYSTALS AGAIN."

monster's head. The 'crystal' is a red piece of plastic and about quarter of an inch long. The waiting room carpet, conveniently enough, is also red.

That does it as far as Bobby is concerned. The dentist is not merely a sadist, he's now an evil Lego® crystal thief, too. There is no salvation.

Alec, meanwhile, has happily polished off his reward sticker. Then he gives me that look. The one that says 'Any seconds?'

He catches sight of the surgery and remembers where he is - this is the place that makes Hell look tempting.



Cygnet Health Care

## Springside Autism and Asperger Syndrome Services

**Innovative, specialised services exclusively designed to meet the needs of young people with autism and Asperger Syndrome.**

SPRINGSIDE SPECIALIST AUTISM/ASPERGER SYNDROME SERVICES AVAILABLE:

- **Outreach Support** for people aged 5-64 with autism/Asperger Syndrome.
- **Residential Short Break and Shared Care Services** for young people with autism/Asperger Syndrome aged 5-17 years old.

SPRINGSIDE'S OUTREACH SERVICE IS NOW REGISTERED WITH THE CARE QUALITY COMMISSION - THE GOLD STANDARD FOR OUTREACH SUPPORT PROVIDERS.

For more information about any of these services, please contact Amy Stanion, Services Coordinator, Springside House, 1 Brownsville Road, Heaton Moor, Stockport SK4 4PE. Telephone: 0161 443 4060 Email: [amystanion@cygnethealth.co.uk](mailto:amystanion@cygnethealth.co.uk)

# Readers' Page

## Celebrity Spotlight



Ed - aged 8

**Diagnosis:** Autism, diagnosed at the age of three.

**My family:** I live with my mum Katie, dad Martin, sister Emmy, Grandma Margaret, Milly the cat and Eddie and Pansy the fish.

**School:** I have just started Pownall Green School (mainstream) in Year 3 having been very happy at Valley School since nursery.

**I love:** My main passion is movies, especially Disney Pixar ones - particularly the trailers and the credits.

**I hate:** Vegetables - YUCK!

**If I were Prime Minister:** Film studies would be part of the National Curriculum.

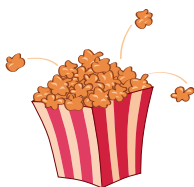
**Song that most describes me:** *Don't Get Me Wrong* by The Pretenders.

**Personality in four words:** Happy, lovable, funny, determined.



**My favourite films:** *101 Dalmations, Ratatouille, The Incredibles, Dumbo, WALL E, Charlie Chaplin, National Treasure, Toy Story, Lion King, Lady and the Tramp, Ice Age, Madagascar, Bee Movie, Flushed Away, Peter Pan, Aristocats, Shrek...the list is endless!*

Ed collects movie posters. If you have any spare, send them to AuKids and we'll pass them on to him.



Bethaney - aged 12

**Diagnosis:** Autism.

**My family:** I live with mum, dad and little sister Kayden aged five.

**School:** Ewing School, Didsbury.

**I love:** Art and craft (I love to draw), swimming, Nintendo DS, trampolining in my garden, sensory rooms, rock climbing, SpongeBob Square Pants and my fairly odd parents.

**I hate:** Dogs because they bark! Balloons (they terrify me), sudden unexpected noises, funny smells, circuses, supermarket shopping (it's too crowded), being touched lightly, not being spoken to clearly as I don't understand when people speak too fast for me, being misunderstood and not being able to sleep properly.

**Song that most describes me:** *Glamorous* by Fergie from the Black Eyed Peas because my mum and Joanne say I am.

**If I were Prime Minister:** I would keep Ewing School open and not have to leave when I am 16 years old, I want to leave when I'm ready and make people learn about people like me.

**Personality in four words:** Honest, caring, stropky (sometimes) and inquisitive.

**Ambition:** To work with my mum at ASC (Autism Social Care) and also be a teacher for special needs children.

**My favourite films:** *Liar Liar, SpongeBob Square Pants the Movie, Labyrinth, Tinkerbell and Spiderwick Chronicles.*



Want your little star to appear on our Celebrity Spotlight page? Send your own answers with a jpeg picture of your child in action to: aukidsmag@googlemail.com

P.S.

Do loud noises upset your child? Don't want them to miss out on fireworks' night? Try indoor fireworks. Harmless and fun, these mean that you can have your own Bonfire Night atmosphere without getting freezing cold toes! Look up [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) for indoor firework collections including indoor sparklers.

This Christmas you can put a grin on your child's face and donate to the National Autistic Society at the same time. Buy a personalised letter from Santa at [www.getaletterfromsanta.co.uk](http://www.getaletterfromsanta.co.uk) - complete with wax seal and North Pole postmark - and a percentage of the cost is donated to the NAS. Website owner Christina Crane has a daughter with autism. You can even buy letters from the Dummy Fairy and Tooth Fairy! Letters start from £3.99

Marie Love, who has a son with ASC, has opened a sweet shop in Falkirk, Scotland, selling sweets for kids with food intolerances, including those that are sugar, dairy and nut free. The good news is that Granny's Sookers has its own website at [www.grannys-sookers.co.uk](http://www.grannys-sookers.co.uk). The website is still under construction but you can e-mail an order or enquiry to [info@grannys-sookers.co.uk](mailto:info@grannys-sookers.co.uk)

  
Find Mr. Clown

Mr Clown's Fun Zone, a fantastic children's play centre in Hadfield, Derbyshire, is offering one lucky AuKids reader the chance to win a free session at their sensory suite. The suite comprises two rooms and is available for use alongside Mr Clown's huge indoor soft play centre. Just look back over this issue and see if you can find where we've hidden Mr Clown. The winner will be chosen at random from correct answers received before the end of November. (Whisper - if you get really stuck we've given you a clue. Read it on our website at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)) For details on Mr Clown's Fun Zone look up [www.mrclownsfunzone.com](http://www.mrclownsfunzone.com) or call 01457 865650. Editor's decision is final. No cash alternative.