

PARENTING AUTISM & ASPERGERS NEWSLETTER  
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This is Dave Angel and Welcome to the sixth edition of "The Parenting Autism & Aspergers Newsletter"

Inside this edition you will find:

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Best Wishes

Dave Angel

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#### Aspergers and Adolescence

In our recent survey one big topic that many of you parents with Asperger's children wanted more information about is coping with adolescence and teenage years.

So we are busy compiling information on this area for you.

But in the meantime I came across an excellent paperback called "Aspergers and Adolescence" by an expert autism psychologist Dr. Teresa Bolik.

She has written this for both parents and teenagers to benefit from, and it's packed full of practical advice and inspiring stories.

If you want to find out more about it just click the link below:

[Aspergers and Adolescence](#)

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## Gaming and Aspergers

Well as I am sure you all know developing the social side of a child with Aspergers is often the number 1 priority to helping them adapt to an often confusing world.

So the natural instinct of many people would be that the idea of their child spending hours playing online games is not a good one.

This would probably conjure up images of solitary time spent alone in the bedroom with only the computer screen for company.

But a recent research paper seems to indicate that there may well be more to it than that.

A teacher in Canada (Shaun Loeppky) was interested to notice that many students with Aspergers were playing a computer game called Runescape (which is a massive online adventure game set in the Middle Ages).

As a result they were beginning to converse much more with other students in the class about the game, than they ever would normally do.

Swapping tips, ideas and views on different aspects of the game quite freely both in and out of the classroom.

Another feature of these games such as Runescape is that they are played by thousands of people across the globe at the same time online.

There are facilities to chat back and forth with other players via text so that players are interacting all the time with each other, again building social skills.

In such games there is a sense of community and human interaction between players that children with AS may at times find more difficult to be a part of in the real world.

Runescape itself is a very sophisticated game that allows the players to basically live in a "virtual" world where they have to make lots of complex decisions about how to react in different situations.

This ability to adapt and role-play specific situations is another feature that can only help a child with AS to improve

their ability to understand and model appropriate social behaviors.

Although obviously social skills in the Middle Ages may not fit so neatly into the modern world today - however games like The Sims are certainly much more in tune with 21st century.

They have a section for example where as the character you have to run business meetings in the virtual world and so need to be aware of all the different social skills and dynamics that you need to be able to do this.

I definitely believe that this can be an excellent and non-threatening way for many children with Aspergers to gain social skills and enjoy a sense of community.

But there always has to be a measure of balance as a child spending 10 hours a day on a computer game is going to be unhealthy both physically (through fatigue, blurred vision etc.) and emotionally.

And for all the useful social skills that can occur in these games - the key difference is that the child does not have to worry about all of those non-verbal skills that they struggle with (like facial expressions, body language, tone of voice etc.)

So they still need the hand-on training at the local store to allow them to be able to use local amenities with comfort and eventual ease.

But as part of an overall package of helping your child to develop and have fun these types of games should be accepted as helpful, and not as a complete waste of time with no real value.

If you want to read the full research paper on this go to:

<http://www.usask.ca/education/coursework/802papers/loepky/index.htm>

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## Autism and Bullying

Last month in the UK moves were made to start putting pressure on Tony Blair and the rest of government to start recognising and helping autistic children in schools who are being bullied.

A number of parents have outlined that their children are being bullied and that a lot of the time this is leading to different types of "exclusion" for the autistic child.

So as well as the trauma and upset of being bullied - the chances are that the autistic child is facing sanctions at the school as well.

Ivan Corea, Chair of the Autism Awareness Campaign who are leading the campaign said: 'Bullying of autistic children is going on in primary and secondary schools.

This must stop, some schools are punishing the autistic child rather than the bully.

We are asking the Secretary of State Alan Johnson to keep specific data of incidents of bullying and exclusion of autistic children and set up a mechanism where parents and carers of children with autism can register incidents of bullying because some autistic children with communication disorders may not even be able to tell their teachers about the bullies.

We need real action on this and Lee Scott MP has already highlighted the seriousness of this issue in his debate on autism in parliament.'

Lee Scott is due to meet with Tony Blair later in the year and will discuss the very serious nature of autism and bullying then.

Bullying is an awful problem with any child but the needs of a child on the autistic spectrum make this even worse.

The lack of understanding of social cues, difficulties in communicating the problems to others, interests and hobbies that often seem a little "goofy" and make the child an easy "target" - to name but a few.

So it is so important that this issue is taken seriously by the government and then hopefully some kind of agenda for change will filter down to teachers, classroom assistants, domestic staff and everyone else in the schools.

As we all know the multi-sensory and often very hectic nature of schools can be difficult enough for children with autism - so they can really do without having to contend with the extra "attention" of playground bullies.

Obviously as parents it is important to ensure that your child has some kind of feedback loop to a trusted person so that any signs of bullying can be picked up.

Whether this is verbal, through some kind of symbol or PECS board, or more creative like "puppet talk" for younsters,

it needs to be crystal clear for the child what is and what isn't acceptable - and then what they should do about it.

The simpler the better with this approach and I guess this is easier for things like physical bullying - as the more subtle types of verbal bullying can be more difficult to explain.

But generally your child's behaviors will be a key to something being not right and then you have the ,often difficult, task of working out what is happening from there.

If you do have the ear of your child's teacher it is worth raising this issue with them and finding out what mechanisms they have in place for your child to communicate if they are being bullied.

There is a useful "bullying worksheet" that you can use to look with your Aspergers child at the issues around bullying.

You can find it at [http://autism.about.com/od/theautismcommunity/a/bullies\\_2.htm](http://autism.about.com/od/theautismcommunity/a/bullies_2.htm)

I would also love any feedback from parents of how you tackled this problem to share with others.

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#### Parenting Tip - Changing Schools

We recently received an email about a success story from Sharon Hills who is the parent of a child with Asperger's.

It really illustrates the point that as a parent you are your child's number 1 advocate when it comes to helping them solve problems.

Here's what Sharon wrote:

"Hi I just thought I'd let you know.

For the last 2 years I was having problems with my youngest son at school.

The school was saying he was just a bit below average ability and ignoring the fact he has ASD.

2 weeks ago he got so upset with a teacher saying "look at me while I'm talking to you. How do I know when your listening if your looking at the floor?"

I changed his school.

After 10 mins with the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) she announced that he has ultra sensitive hearing and smell which must have caused him huge problems in the class.

As he had been put in a class of 30 and 12 of them had ADHD, because he was in the lowest set which was set 9.

He is now in a class of 9-12 for hard subjects and 25-30 for easy subjects.

Within 3 days she had put him back on his IEP (Individual Educational Program) the last school had taken him off it, had a risk assessment done for science as he had been burnt 3 times in the previous school and she is having him statemented after 3 months,

Now I collect a happy 12 year old as he has no pressure to perform or to act the same as others, he can look at the floor she doesn't mind, he can tap his legs, its fine, and his targets have been lowered to more reasonable ones that he can achieve.

I would just like to say to all parents, don't give up your child's happiness it depends on you fighting for them.

Thanks

shazza"

So thanks again to Sharon for that little inspiring story and advice - I would encourage any other parents to write in too if they have stories or ideas that could benefit other people with their Aspergers child. We love to share them in the newsletter.

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Thomas McKean

Now Thomas may not be a household name to the world (although he has appeared on Oprah!) but he has certainly been very influential in the world of autism.

Thomas was born in Ohio in 1965 and went to mainstream school until he transferred to Special ED. Schol in 3rd Grade.

He was diagnosed with autism in 7th Grade and then spent 3 years in a psychiatric facility.

Following this he graduated high school, worked in insurance and then attended Columbus State Community College (to study mental health and journalism).

He then spent 5 years on the board of the Autism Society of America and began to talk at conferences and offer support to families and schools about autistic children.

Thomas also spent years learning martial arts and wrote a biographical book called "Soon will come the light".

The book was awarded the ASA national award for literary excellence that year.

Since then he has built his own website with lots of great information on it about autism (I'll include the web address at the end of the article).

In 2001 he appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show and still writes, and talks at conferences on occasion.

Thomas now lives in the small town of Bedford, Virginia with his 2 cats Reiki and Terri.

Thomas' website is simply <http://www.thomasamckean.com/> and it's well worth a browse.

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Transporters DVD update part 4!

Technology - aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!

I have tried my best to find a way of uploading the Transporters DVD to the web.

But to no avail sadly.

So I am really at a loss what to do.

The only thing I can do is ask if any of you kind readers out there have the skills to be able to do this.

I have the DVD and will gladly post it to you if you are able to find a way of uploading it to the web for all to benefit from.

Anyone who can help please drop me an email and I will be very grateful.

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Social Skills - I came across a really excellent forum thread today all about helping your child to develop social skills by using TV shows, games, toy animals and loads more.

Which I thought may be of interest to many of you. To read it just go to

<http://www.aspergerinfo.com/forums/ubbthreads.php?ubb=showflat&Number=75043#Post75043>

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With the growing number of blogs and forums out there I was wondering about doing this for the newsletter.

If I was able to get a blog on the web this would allow other people to comment and perhaps grow this "community" of parents to help one other more with advice and tips.

A blog would be quite easy to manage (I think!) but the other option would be a forum.

A forum would need some kind of moderators as unfortunately in the world there are many people who thinks it is fun to post all kinds of inappropriate comments and spam on forums.

I would love to hear your thoughts on either of these ideas - and whether there are any parents out there prepared to commit some time to help moderate a forum.

So please email me to let me know your thoughts.

Well that's all for this edition and I hope you enjoyed it.

And the next edition of the newsletter should be due in mid-May.

And as ever.....please send in any inspirational stories that you know of, any questions that you would like our team of experts to answer, any topics that you wish to be discussed and news stories that you want to share.

We will publish as many as we can.

Until next month.....

Best Wishes

Dave Angel

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P.S. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to your friends.

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The write of the material present in the “The Parenting Autism & Aspergers Newsletter” believes that a multi-disciplinary approach to parenting aspergers children is of extreme importance. This means combining the approaches of a wide variety of disciplines involved with aspergers children and their parents such as social workers, nurses, teachers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, speech therapists. Also it involves using the knowledge and information of parents them selves. The author recognizes that within scientific, educational, social and medical fields there are widely divergent viewpoints and opinions. This material is written for the express purpose of sharing educational information gathered from the experiences of the author and other people in the areas mentioned above. None of the information contained in this email is intended to diagnose, prevent, treat, or cure aspergers, nor is it intended to prescribe any of the techniques, materials or concepts presented as a form of treatment for aspergers. Before beginning any practice relating to aspergers it is highly recommended that you first obtain the consent and advice of a qualified health, education or social care professional. Should you choose to make use of the information contained herein without first consulting a health, education or social care professional, you are prescribing for yourself, which is your inalienable right. However, the author assumes no responsibility for the choices you make after your review of the information contained herein and your consultation with a qualified health, education or social care professional. None of the statements in this article or in the book have been evaluated by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), or the American Medical Association (AMA). This

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