Welcome!

Happy New Year everyone! I hope that you all had a wonderful break and were able to spend some quality time with family and friends while also taking some time for yourselves to recharge your batteries.

In light of some well publicized recent events, I wanted to dedicate this newsletter to safety. It is devastating when any child gets lost. When a child who has autism gets lost, there are factors that make it a much more complex matter. Thankfully, the young boy who was missing from Caroline County was found. He had no way to communicate with others and did not have the ability to find his way out of the woods. This did have a happy ending, but it was an eye opener for those that have children with autism and also for those of us that work with students with autism. How can we help them be safe and how can we help them get assistance when needed?

This subject is close to my heart. Twenty years ago, I had a student who was visiting relatives over the summer. He went outside and jumped into what he must have thought was a puddle (he loved jumping in puddles). It turned out it was a pond and he ended up drowning. As you can well imagine, this was a terrible experience for his family and also for me as his teacher.

What could we have done to help him understand danger better? As educators, we are constantly striving to be proactive. Sharing things that we find that work in the classroom can go a long way. It is important to work together as a team to help our students succeed not only in our classroom but in life.

Happy New Year! May you make this one your best yet!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

Parent/Teacher Relations

The Parent Resource Centers (PRC) from Region 1 received a grant from the Virginia Department of Education. The focus of the grant is to empower parents to become active participants in their child’s education. The staff from the PRC’s very creatively developed a DVD: *Recipe for Student Success*. The DVD includes 4 ingredients: success stories, collaboration and communication, special education 101 and frequently asked questions.

Please contact your local PRC to get a copy of the DVD. The information can also be viewed on line at: h t t p : / / v i m e o . c o m / c h a n n e l s / 2 4 8 5 6 1 .

Thank you to all the staff who worked diligently to put this information together in an easy to use DVD.

Inside this issue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual Supports and Strategies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout Outs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming Events</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Lifesaver</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special points of interest:

This issue focuses on strategies to help keep our students with autism safe. Visual supports and strategies are explored along with bus safety and Project Lifesaver.

Articles are always welcomed! Also welcomed are “shout outs” to your peers. If you would like to submit any information for future issues, please contact me at: radiganct@vcu.edu.
Visual Supports and Strategies

Frequently, individuals with autism have difficulty understanding and navigating their environment. What does this mean? It may be challenging for someone with autism to understand daily routines and schedules. They may not have a good sense of the sequence of his/her day. Furthermore, when there is a change in the daily routine, the individual may become frustrated due to the fact that communication is often impacted, so he may be unable to ask questions or seek clarification of what is going to occur.

These difficulties are not unique to school. Therefore, when strategies are found to work in school, be sure to share these with parents so that they can be used in the home environment.

The following are some tips to consider when working with students with autism:

- **Use Visual Schedules** to help students understand what is expected at different times of the day and also where they are supposed to be. This can be an important strategy to use at home as this can help with safety. What does a visual schedule look like? The look of the schedule depends on the child. Here are some examples:
  - A written schedule or a “to do” list may be very effective for someone who can read and comprehend written print. For students who like to feel a sense of accomplishment, this might be a good fit as they can cross off what they have completed.
  - Another form of schedule involves using line drawings or actual photographs. These should be set up in a top to bottom or left to right format. With this type of schedule, each picture will be on it’s own square. You may want to glue the pictures on to card stock and laminate them. This will help them last longer. Ask your students’ parents what their days/evenings look like so you can make them a set of pictures for home so they can have their own schedules in that environment. This will also help with generalization.
  - Some students may need to use objects for some or all of their schedules. For instance, to signify that it is time to use the bathroom, place a toilet paper roll with a little toilet paper on it on a schedule board.
  - A student’s schedule could be any combination of the above. It needs to be individualized according to their strengths. For instance, they may be able to read and understand bathroom but require a picture to understand it is time to go to music. In this case, you could use the written word “bathroom” and a picture of the music room.
  - **Don’t Forget Communication Systems** to assist students’ communication with others or to help them understand what is being communicated to them. This is such an important thing to have in place throughout the day. Students need to be working on communication at a very early age and continue to work on it until they become proficient. Just as with the schedules, communication systems can look very different depending on the ability of the child. Here are some brief examples:
    - Communication books that are put together well can be a very effective way for students to communicate their wants and needs to others. Pictures can be categorized on different pages to help students find the desired pictures more easily.
    - Augmentative communication devices are helpful to some students. These range in price and complexity. One device that is gaining popularity is the IPad 2. This wonderful device can do what many of the more expensive devices can do. They are portable and students have found them to be fun too.
    - Consult with the speech therapist when considering communication needs. Just remember that it is so important to have a communication system in place. And remember to not only teach requesting of desired items but teach how to ask for help when needed.

Use visuals throughout the day. This is sure to help the overall running of your classroom and will help your students be more successful at school and at home.

A Shout Out Goes To!

We are about half way through the school year. So many of the staff from Region 1 Schools have continued to learn more about best practices in educating students with autism. Two more VCU cohorts are finishing up. They are receiving a certificate in autism. Way to go to all of you that have taken the four course series! This shows your dedication both in and out of your classroom.

A big thank you goes out to Hanover County Public Schools for hosting the ADOS training in November. Also, thank you to Henrico for helping to set up the venue for a training by Scott Bellini, Ph.D. who spoke on social skills in December. Lastly, thank you to Adam and Staci from VCU/ACE for conducting a staff development on Verbal Behavior. Dinwiddie County Schools hosted this informative training.

Thanks to all!
Upcoming events

The fall months were very busy for the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium. So far this year, we have welcomed Roger Cox, Ph.D. and Susan Boswell from TEACCH, UNC-Chapel Hill who spoke on structured teaching. Adam Dreyfus and Staci Carr of VCU-ACE conducted a staff development on verbal behavior and how to embed research based strategies into your classroom. In November, Donald Oswald, Ph.D. trained staff on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS). Lastly, Scott Bellini, Ph.D. from Indiana University and the Indiana Autism Research Center conducted a one-day staff development on social skills. This event took place on December 1, 2011 in Henrico at the Henrico Theater.

The Consortium is excited to announce that Mark Sundberg, Ph.D, BCBA-D will be training staff on the implementation of the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP), an assessment tool that he developed. Dr. Sundberg is coming to us from the San Francisco Bay area where he is a licensed psychologist in private practice who consults with school divisions. This two-day workshop will cover the basic elements of the verbal behavior approach to language assessment and intervention for children with autism. The dates of the workshop are January 30-31, 2012 from 8:30-4:00pm at the Henrico Theater.

On February 17, 2012, Donald Oswald, Ph.D. will be conducting a training on the Autism Diagnostic Interview - Revised (ADI-R). This training is very limited in number. It will be held in New Kent County from 8:30-4:00pm. This is a great opportunity for staff to be trained in this assessment tool as staff will be able to observe Dr. Oswald as he conducts the diagnostic interview with a parent.

All of the above mentioned staff development opportunities are offered free of charge to staff members of Region 1 Schools. More information will be available on the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium website www.soe.vcu.edu/aec. Please contact Carrie Radigan at (804) 828-4501 or radiganct@vcu.edu if you would like to register for any of these events or if you have any questions.

Resources

There are numerous resources available. Here is a brief list of some of them:

- T/TAC has a plethora of information on various disabilities. You can go to www.ttaonline.org or www.vcu.edu/ttac.org.
- VCU’s Autism Center for Excellence, www.vcuautismcenter.org

Here are some other websites that you may find helpful:

- www.doe.virginia.gov
- www.autismspeaks.org
- www.asacv.org
- www.autismva.org
- www.dotolearn.com
- www.mayer-johnson.com

- www.researchautism.org
- www.tonyattwood.com.au
- www.lindahodgdon.com


Project Lifesaver

Project Lifesaver has been in existence for the past ten years or so. It was developed to assist those that have Alzheimer’s, autism and other related conditions. Project Lifesaver works with locally trained staff. In Region 1, most of the local police departments are a part of Project Lifesaver.

How it works:

Individuals who join Project Lifesaver get a transmitting device that they wear on their wrist or ankle. It emits a tracking signal. There is a cost for the device of a couple hundred dollars. Police officers visit monthly to make sure the device is working and also to change the batteries. If a child is missing, the caregiver notifies the trained emergency team. They then go to the area where the child is missing. Project Lifesaver stated that on average they are able to locate the missing individual in 30 minutes. In some cases, the cost of the device has been covered by insurance. For more information, please contact your local police department to see if they offer Project Lifesaver. You can also go to www.projectlifesaver.org.
The Region 1 Autism Education Consortium established the Board of Directors in June of 2008. The Consortium’s guiding principles are as follows:

1. The Consortium will assist participating school divisions in designing and implementing a comprehensive program of instruction which utilizes evidence-based practices that will result in documented outcomes for students with autism spectrum disorder.

2. The Consortium will support the implementation of high-quality services for students with autism spectrum disorder in member school divisions.

3. The Consortium will recognize that comprehensive educational programs for students with autism spectrum disorder will require that all professionals working with these students to participate in on-going professional staff development activities.

Bus Safety

Have you ever had a student who was having some difficulty on the bus? Transportation has complained numerous times because of behaviors that your student has been displaying while on the way to/from school. What have you done to help alleviate the problem? Here are some ideas that you might want to try:

- **Take data of the behavior.** What does the behavior look like? Is he being aggressive toward a peer, staff or himself? Is he getting out of his seat? Is he throwing things? Regardless of what the behavior is, it is extremely important to find out when it is occurring, with whom and how often.

- **Look at where the student is sitting.** Is he toward the front? Back? Next to a window? Is it noisy where he is sitting? Is he in a seat all by himself or seated next to a peer?

- **Is there an extra adult on the bus?** It may be necessary to have an adult on the bus to make sure that everyone is safe. This adult could sit with or near the student. He could occupy the student if that is found to be effective.

- **Have “fun stuff” for the ride.** It might be helpful to have a bag of reinforcing things for the ride. This could include favorite books, and iPod or MP3 player, fidget toys, etc. These items should be given before any negative behavior occurs. Use a choice board or give a choice of a couple preferred items as soon as the student gets on the bus. Be careful not to give items that will be thrown if the behavior includes throwing as this can be dangerous on a moving bus.

- **Consider using seatbelts or other approved devices.** If your student is getting out of his seat and sitting next to him does not stop this from occurring then you may need to use an approved safety device. Remember that this is not a punishment and should not be used as one.