

Connecting with Families and Educators



Providing information, support and encouragement to families and educators of children and young adults with disabilities.

Unwritten Rules

By Valerie Wagner

As the mother of two children diagnosed with autism, now ages 16 and 17, one would think by now I would be well versed on how my children think, what they are experiencing, why they behave as they do. Unfortunately, this is NOT the case. My husband and I, products of regular working-class Iowa families, raised our children modeled on our own upbringings while simultaneously having input from various professionals/specialists, but this has not always been adequate in the handling of many episodes during our children's early developmental stages and on into their middle-school years, and now, with adolescence, brand new challenges are rearing their heads.

Nevertheless, the search for more information and assistance is ongoing, and that brings me to the book "Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism" by Dr. Temple Grandin and Sean Barron.

In reading this book, I was halfway expecting some of it to be the same as I had experienced while reading previous books on autism, where I ended up skimming over pages and chapters because, frankly, I did not understand all they were talking about (technical terms/vague techniques for teaching/ various theories/autism itself). This book, however, was very refreshing. After reading each and every page, I found it offering insight into how two very different individuals (the authors) on the autism/Asperger's spectrum, dealt with their everyday ways of thinking and reacting (giving many

specific examples) and conveying this in a way where one could understand and relate. The specific guidelines, rules, and suggestions (e.g. "Rule #6: Not everyone who is nice to me is my friend.") on how those with autism could view and handle various situations were what I really appreciated.

The only part of this book causing me an inkling of concern is that anyone reading it might feel the level of development or conversational skills or intellectual abilities of that of the authors is what one could expect from any child on the spectrum (to me, it would be akin to comparing any neurotypical child's abilities to that of the likes of a Stephen Hawking or a Bill Gates). I feel it is the general insight into autism/Asperger's offered in this book that is valuable across all ability levels.

I found this book helpful to me as a parent in trying to further understand my children, and hopefully, my children will benefit (as we review the rules) from the ideas presented; a "win-win" in my opinion.

Val

Valerie Wagner is the mother of two sons who attend school in our area. Thanks to Valerie for contributing this article for the newsletter. The book referred to in the article, as well as other resources are available through the Family & Educator Connection libraries located in our regional offices in Cedar Falls, Marshalltown and Clear Lake. If you are interested in borrowing materials from our library, contact us at 800.392.6640 (Clear Lake); 800.735.1539 (Marshalltown); 800.542.8375 (Cedar Falls.)



Social Opportunities for Teens with Asperger's Syndrome

Are your teens finding it difficult to socialize and make friends in the high school setting? If you are interested in a social group for your teen that will provide fun opportunities to connect with other high school students who have similar challenges, please let us know. We will have an organizational meeting with parents who express an interest in exploring this possibility to identify the outcomes we might hope to see from the group and the shape it might take.

If you are interested, please contact Sandy Kraschel with the Family & Educator Connection at 800.392.6640 or skraschel@aea267.k12.ia.us by February 20 (deadline extended from November.)

Support Groups

There are a number of support groups across Iowa and in AEA 267. If you would like information about support groups, contact your AEA 267 Family & Educator Connection in Cedar Falls at 800.542.8375; Marshalltown at 800.735.1539; or Clear Lake at 800.392.6640.

Free Basic 2010 Tax Preparation and E-Filing

What: Free assistance in filing your taxes electronically with direct deposit of your tax refund within 8-14 days.

Who: Easy to qualify! You may use this service if your 2010 household income is \$48,362 or less. You may even qualify for an earned income tax credit.

What to bring:

- Last year's tax return
- All W-2s and 1099s for 2010
- Social Security Card and valid photo ID (both spouses if filing jointly)
- Correct Date of Birth for all family members
- Voided check and/or savings account number for direct deposit

The image shows a thumbnail of a 2010 U.S. Individual Income Tax Return form (1040). The form includes fields for Name, Address, and SSN, and a section for Spouse's social security number. It also has a checkbox for the Presidential Election Campaign.

Where & When: The following locations are listed through the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) page on the IRS web site. If you do not find a location in your area, you may want to call the VITA site locator at 800.906.9887.

County	Where	When	Contact
Black Hawk	University of Northern Iowa 224 Curris Business Bldg Cedar Falls	Feb 7-April 13 Mon & Wed 5-7 pm (Except March 14 & 16)	Walk in No appointment needed
Butler	ISU Extension 329 N Main St Allison	Feb 3-April 13 By Appointment only	888.408.6606
Cerro Gordo	ISU Extension 2023 S Federal Mason City	Feb 3-April 13 By Appointment only	888.408.6606
Cerro Gordo	North Iowa Community Action 1190 Briarstone Drive, Mason City	Feb 3-March 17 Thursday evenings 5:00-7:30 pm	Walk-in No appointment needed
Cerro Gordo	Iowa Works North Iowa 600 S Peirce Mason City	Feb 2- March 18 Wednesday Afternoons 12:30-4:00 Friday Mornings 8:30-Noon	Walk-in No appointment needed
Franklin	ISU Extension 3 First Ave NW Hampton	Feb 3-April 13 By appointment only	888.408.6606
Hancock	ISU Extension 327 West 8 th St Garner	Feb 3-April 13 By appointment only	888.408.6606
Winnebago	ISU Extension 183 First Ave N Thompson	Feb 3-April 13 By appointment only	888.408.6606
Worth	ISU Extension 808 Central Ave Northwood	Feb 3-April 13 By appointment only	888.408.6606
Wright	ISU Extension 210 1 st St SW Clarion	Jan 29-April 2 By appointment only	515.532.3453

New Materials Available Through the Family & Educator Connection Libraries

A few new items have been added to the Family & Educator Connection library and are available for your use:

Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum, A Parent's Guide to the Cognitive, Social, Physical, and Transition Needs of Teenagers with Autism Spectrum Disorders written by Chantal Sicile-Kira; A practical guide for parents and others with strategies to help children with Autism as they progress through the teen years. Topics include potential health risks, practical self-care and social skills for puberty, teen emotions and sexuality, and transitioning to adulthood.

Learning Outside the Lines, Two Ivy League Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD Give You the Tools for Academic Success and Educational Revolution written by Jonathan Mooney and David Cole; Personal stories are coupled with insights and strategies for academic success. This is a good read for high school students and adults.

Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships, Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism written by Dr. Temple Grandin and Sean Barron; Using their personal experiences, the authors explain the unwritten rules and patterns of social relationships and provide guidance for living and working with others.

Unthinkable, A Mother's Tragedy, Terror and Triumph Through a Child's Traumatic Brain Injury, written by Dixie Fremont-Smith Coskie; This book is a personal account from a mother whose 13 year old son suffered a traumatic brain injury. The journey takes the reader from injury to recovery and a new reality.

The Essential Guide to Psychiatric Drugs, revised and updated fourth edition, written by Jack M. Gorman, M.D. A comprehensive guide to medications typically prescribed to treat mental health problems. Written in language that is easy to understand.

Mental Health Medications for Children written by Ronald T. Brown, Professor of Public Health, Pediatrics and Psychology at Temple University; Laura Arnstein Carpenter, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the Medical University in South Carolina; and Emily Simerly, Clinical Director of the Mental Health Unit at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison in Jackson, Georgia. This book is designed for educational teams who work with students who are being treated with psychotropic medications. This book includes guidelines for monitoring and documenting beneficial effects and adverse side effects. The appendix includes reproducible forms and documents that may be useful in this process.

To borrow materials from the Family & Educator Connection library, contact the FEC at 800.392.6640 (Clear Lake); 800.735.1539 (Marshalltown); 800.542.8375 (Cedar Falls.)



Order Alternative Format Textbooks Now for Next Year!

This may seem early, but it cannot be stressed enough. The Department for the Blind, the Area Education Agencies or the school needs this much time to process all the orders by the start of school next year. Alternative formats include Braille, large print, audio and digital text.

It may not be possible to order all of the textbooks now, but the school should order as many as possible. The school can easily order the textbooks for students' grade related classes, like 4th grade social studies or science. The middle or high school student might not have their schedule yet, but they will know many of the classes they will be taking. So for example, the American History textbook could be ordered even if the student doesn't know which class period. For electives, it could be a reasonable accommodation to confirm electives so alternative textbooks could be provided in a "timely manner" to students who need them. Remember, the Iowa Department of Education has defined "in a timely" manner as the same time as other students.

Parents should ask their child's teacher or IEP team to order the textbooks for next year so there is a smooth transition to the next grade and classes.

Training After High School, What Families Can Do

Whether students are considering postsecondary education through a traditional or non-traditional path, there are steps that families can take to prepare for that important transition. For instance, the HEATH Resource Center (2009a) describes how parents or family members of a transitioning high school student can actively participate in transition planning; they can:

- Encourage, guide, and mentor the student to be directly involved in his/her IEP planning, including leading the meeting;
- Work with teachers, counselors, and others to identify skills to reinforce at home to foster greater independence;
- Meet with adult service agencies and attend planning sessions;
- Insist on measurable postsecondary outcomes with supports and services; and
- Work with the school counselor, special education teacher, community agencies, and others on the transition team to envision a course program for the student's remaining years in high school that will prepare the student to be able to work independently toward his/her goals.

The Postsecondary Educational Research Center (2007) provides these tips for families:

- Talk about what college is and how it is different from high school. There are no bells, no study hall, and no principals. Students are expected to do what they need to do with little supervision or assistance.
- Examine how college is a place where the student decides what they want to learn, not their teachers or parents. Students have the opportunity to choose to learn about a topic or subject that interests them.
- Visit a local college - or two. Eat lunch there, go to the library, and talk with some students. If you can, sit in on a class or two to see what it is like. Try to get a feel for the culture and where the students 'hang out' and spend time together.
- Look at the different types of continuing education courses that are available for all students.
- Encourage your child to take a college class while still in high school to see how the adult learning experience is different from high school.
- Discuss the things that your child would like to learn about. Although these things may not be academic, they may certainly be meaningful to them. See if a local course is available on this topic.
- Help your child make the connection between her learning goals and her life: a cooking class could help them become more independent in the kitchen; a cake decorating class could help them get a job in the bakery at the local grocery store; a Microsoft Office class could help them get a job in an office; classes taken just for fun could help them meet people who have similar interests.
- Find out what accommodations are being provided in high school to help your child succeed.
- Work with your child to help practice asking for support in different environments from people your child doesn't know. If your child has difficulty communicating, help create other appropriate ways to indicate a need.

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Funding Available to Support Training for Parents and Students

The Family to Family Iowa Network (F2F) has money available to help support family members or individuals who have disabilities attend training, workshops or conferences related to special needs.

Trainings may be provided through the Family to Family Iowa network, your local Area Education Agency or any other organization. Many opportunities are listed at the disability training web site www.disabilitytraining.org.

A maximum of \$350 per family per year is available. Conference registration fees will be paid directly by Family to Family Iowa and hotel, mileage and meals will be reimbursed upon receipt of a reimbursement request with original receipts.

You may obtain an application for funds or more information about this offer by contacting Erica Zito, Co-Program Coordinator for Family to Family Iowa at Erica-zito@uiowa.edu or 319.356.7741.



Support for Accommodations Request (SAR) Refresher Trainings February & March

If you are working with a high school student who plans to attend college or vocational school after high school, the Support for Accommodations Request (SAR) is valuable documentation for the student as he/she connects with the college to request accommodations.

A high school special education teacher or guidance counselor and the student complete the SAR. The document provides basic information that any college or university needs when considering eligibility and appropriate accommodations for the college setting. If a SAR is completed, this fulfills the requirement of the Summary for Post Secondary Living, Learning and Working.

If you have never completed a SAR form or need a refresher of what to do, please join us at one of the refresher sessions hosted by colleges in our area. All sessions are scheduled from 4:00 -5:30 and include light refreshments.

Monday, February 21 at Waldorf in Forest City
Tuesday, March 1 at University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls
Monday, March 14 at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls
Monday, March 21 at North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City
Thursday, March 31 at Marshalltown Community College in Marshalltown

For specific location or more information, contact Ann Lupkes, AEA 267 Work Experience /Transition Coordinator or Sandy Kraschel, Family & Educator Connection Coordinator at 800.392.6640 or alupkes@aea267.k12.ia.us or skraschel@aea267.k12.ia.us.

Have an IEP Meeting Coming Up?

At least once each year, every student who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) has a planning meeting. IEP meetings can be great opportunities for communicating, planning and building relationships. They can also be stressful and frustrating.

If you have an IEP meeting in your near future, here are some things you might want to do to make the most of the meeting:

- Review the current IEP and discuss how accommodations and instruction are working for your student. Talk about what accommodations are being used, which ones help and which ones don't. Find out what the student thinks is the best approach to his/her learning. Does it help to read material aloud? Does it help to sit closer to the front of the classroom?
- Think about questions you may have about the current IEP and how it is being put into action.
- What are your concerns? Are there some issues you have not discussed with the school that you think are important? If you would like to discuss a problem, be as specific as you can in describing it, and be open to suggestions made by others at the meeting.
- What are your priorities for next year? What would you and your student like him/her to accomplish by this time next year?
- What do you think needs to happen to help your student achieve those goals?

Many people find it helpful to take notes in preparation for the meeting and to keep the notes with them during the meeting so they don't have to remember every thing off the top of their heads.

Remember, the IEP meeting is a team meeting, with a number of people who have different perspectives. Teamwork results in the best outcomes for students.

If you have questions about the IEP process or would like some assistance in preparing for an IEP meeting, contact the AEA 267 Family & Educator Connection. Andy Lawler serving the Marshalltown and surrounding area at 800.735.1539; Deb Paton serving the Cedar Falls/ Waterloo and surrounding area at 800.542.8375 or Sandy Kraschel serving the Clear Lake/ Mason City and surrounding area at 800.392.6640.

Iowa Youth Leadership Forum: YLF

The Iowa Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) is a five-day leadership training for high school students who have disabilities. Students must have completed the 10th, 11th or 12th grade and be interested in learning more about themselves and others, and exploring possibilities for their future education, employment and involvement in the community.

This year's forum is scheduled July 10-15 on the Iowa State University campus in Ames.

At the forum students will:

- Learn about developing self-esteem, choosing a career, the history of disability issues, resources that are available and assistive technology.
- Identify barriers to personal and professional success and develop plans to deal with those barriers
- Meet professionals who have disabilities as possible mentors
- Develop a personal leadership plan to use when they return to their communities
- Be empowered to reach goals in education, employment and community

Students will meet state and local leaders, and other students from across the state. Students will have opportunities to get to know each other through both learning and recreational activities.

YLF staff supervise participants during their stay on campus. YLF pays for expenses such as lodging and meals, and as needed, personal attendant care, interpreters, and alternative format materials.

This is a fun and educational opportunity sponsored by the Office of Persons with Disabilities, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Iowa Department for the Blind. There is no participation fee.

Applications are available through the Division of Persons with Disabilities at 888-219-0471 (V/TTY), www.state.ia.us/dhr/pd. Application deadline is February 25, so apply soon!

Transition Workshop

Transitioning from High School to College for Students with Disabilities

Location: North Iowa Area Community College

Monday, April 18th, 2011

Beginning at 9:30 am

Open to high school students, teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators who work with students with disabilities.

Sponsored by: NIACC & AEA 267



Save
the
Date!

Transition Fair 2011

The North Iowa Transition Advisory Board will host the 2011 Transition Fair "REALITY" on Thursday, March 10 and Friday, March 11, 2011 at the AEA 267 Clear Lake Regional Office from 9:00 AM- 2:00 PM.

Students from local area school districts will have an opportunity to attend interactive sessions that focus on job seeking and job keeping skills. Session topics for the day will include: team building, online applications, interviews, job soft skills and careers.

At the conclusion of the day, students will hear from a panel of local employers and also engage in a question/answer session.

For further information or if you have questions, please contact: Ann Lupkes, AEA 267 Work Experience/Transition Coordinator,



Calendar

February

Sunday-Tuesday, February 14-16

Disability Policy Seminar

Washington, DC.

Sponsored by the Arc. For more information go to <http://www.thearc.org/seminar>

March

Thursday, March 10

Work Incentive Seminar

12:45-4:00 p.m.

Grinnell

Information on how individuals can benefit from Social Security Work Incentive programs, including Ticket to Work.

Intended audience: Individuals who receive SSI and SSDI and their family members and those who work with them.

For more information contact Iowa Work Incentives Planning & Assistance Project at 1-888-409-0283 or www.iowawipa.org

Thursday & Friday, March 10 & 11 Brain Injury of Iowa Best Practices Conference

West Des Moines

For more information go to www.biaia.org

Thursday, March 24

Autism Advocacy & Awareness Day on the Hill

Iowa State Capitol, Des Moines

An opportunity to advocate for individuals affected by autism

Registration and refreshments begin at 8:00 a.m. followed by a rally at 8:30 and meetings with state legislators from 9:00-1:00. Register by March 1, and receive a free tee shirt.

For more information contact the Autism Society of Iowa at 888.722.4799 or asigovinfo@aol.com or www.autismia.org.

Wednesday, March 30

Advocating Change Day

Iowa State Capitol, Des Moines

This is a free event featuring advocacy training, opportunities to interact with state legislators and a rally.

For more information visit ID Action web site at www.idaction.org.

April

Friday & Saturday, April 15 & 16

Sixth Annual Autism Intervention Conference

Columbia, Missouri

Intended audience: Educators, parents, medical professionals, therapists vocational counselors

For more information contact the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders 573.882.0987 or <http://muconf.missouri.edu/AIC2011/Index.html>

Saturday, April 16

Dancing for Downs 2011

6-10 pm

Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, IA

Designer Genes Down Syndrome Group presents an event that is fun for the entire family. A DJ will provide music, and the evening will include a general raffle, silent auction, snacks, and cash bar. Proceeds support outreach of the support group.

Admission is \$5 per person; those who have Down syndrome get in FREE. For more information call 319-404-0396

Monday, April 18th

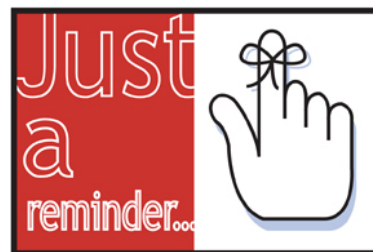
Transition Workshop: Transitioning from High School to College for Students with Disabilities

North Iowa Area Community College, Mason City

Intended audience: High school students, teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators who work with students with disabilities.

Sponsored by: NIACC & AEA 267

For more information, contact Lisa Vance with NIACC at VANCELIS@niacc.edu or 641.422.4296



Remember to check the Disability Training Information calendar at www.disabilitytraining.org/ and the AEA 267 Professional Development web site at www.aea267.k12.ia.us/pd/ for information on more learning opportunities.

COMING SOON...



The Family & Educator Connection

The AEA 267 Family-Educator Connection provides information and support for families and educators around disability related issues. Whether you would like to talk about family adjustment issues with a new baby or newly diagnosed disability, home-school communication issues, questions relating to understanding a disability, or parenting strategies, we are happy to take your call. We have quite a library of resources available for loan and a number of highly qualified people to consult. If you have a question, we will do our best to help you find the answer. We are available by phone, mail, e-mail or by appointment, in-person.

Cedar Falls/ Waterloo Office

Deb Paton

3712 Cedar Heights Drive

Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

Ph. 1-800-542-8375 or 1-319-273-8265

dpaton@aea267.k12.ia.us,

Clear Lake/Mason City Office

Sandy Kraschel

Mason City Airport Grounds

9184 B 265th Street

Clear Lake, Iowa 50428

Ph. 1-800-392-6640 or 1-641-357-6125

skraschel@aea267.k12.ia.us

Marshalltown Office

Andy Lawler

909 South 12th Street

Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

Ph. 1-800-735-1539 or 1-641-844-2469

alawler@aea267.k12.ia.us

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3712 Cedar Heights Drive
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613-6290
www.aea267.org

FAMILY-EDUCATOR

COORDINATORS

Cedar Falls/Waterloo Region

Deb Paton

3712 Cedar Heights Drive

Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

Ph. 1-800-542-8375

or 1-319-273-8265

dpaton@aea267.k12.ia.us

Clear Lake/Mason City Region

Sandy Kraschel

9184 265th St, Ste B

Clear Lake, Iowa 50428

Ph. 1-800-392-6640 or 1-641-357-6125

skraschel@aea267.k12.ia.us

Marshalltown Region

Andy Lawler

909 South 12th Street

Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

Ph. 1-800-735-1539 or 1-641-753-3564

alawler@aea267.k12.ia.us