



**Autism Spectrum  
Support Group**  
of Southern Maryland

**Web:** [www.autismsupport-somd.org](http://www.autismsupport-somd.org)

**Email:** [info@autismsupport-somd.org](mailto:info@autismsupport-somd.org)

**Twitter:** @autismsomd

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/AutismSupportSoMD](http://www.facebook.com/AutismSupportSoMD)

*Families helping families.*

**September 2013 Newsletter**  
Volume 3, Issue 1

## Calendar of Events

**September 9, 2013 -- Citizens' Advisory Committee For Special Education Support Group Meeting,** 5:45-6:30 p.m. at the Board Of Education Building, Leonardtown. The purpose of the Support Group is "to allow people to openly ask each other questions, share stories and information together."

**September 9, 2013 -- Citizens' Advisory Committee For Special Education Meeting,** 6:30-8:00 p.m. (NEW TIMES!) at the Board of Education Building, Leonardtown.

**September 17, 2013 -- Calvert Special Education Citizens' Advisory Committee for Special Education (SECAC) Meeting,** 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. at the Board of Education office, 1305 Dares Beach Rd., Prince Frederick, MD. **"What Does SECAC DO?"** Donna Riley, Branch Chief of Policy & Accountability Branch at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, will discuss the role of the Calvert SECAC and how we can successfully provide input to the Special Education Department. She will also answer questions.



**September 18, 2013 -- Autism Spectrum Support Group Meeting,** 6:30-8:00 p.m. at the Coffee Quarter, California, MD.

**September 18, 2013 -- Autism Spectrum Support Group Meeting,** 6:30-8:00 p.m. at the Gwynn Center in Charles County.

**September 21, 2013 -- Morning at the Museum,** 9:00-11:00 am at the National Museum of Natural History, Constitution Ave. between 10 and 12th Streets. Morning at the Museum is a project of the Smithsonian Institution's Accessibility Program, the Smithsonian Museums, and a Community Advisory Committee. The project consists of a series of pre-visit materials designed to help individuals with cognitive and sensory processing disabilities and their families prepare for a visit to the Smithsonian Museums. On event days, registered families can enter the museum one hour early. Please join us on a visit to Mammals Hall and have fun experiencing Animal Yoga taught by an OT. RSVP to [access@si.edu](mailto:access@si.edu) or 202-633-2921.

**September 25, 2013 -- St. Mary's Partners for Success Presents "Special Education 101,"** 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Board of Education Meeting Room, 23160 Moakley St., Leonardtown, MD 20650. Missy Alexander, Parent Educator with the Parents Place of Maryland, will present a workshop to share information regarding the special education process and timeline, general information about the IEP (Individualized Education Program) and the 504 Plan. This workshop for parents is free, but registration is required. To register, please contact Susan Shannon at 301-863-4069 or email [partnersforsuccess@smcps.org](mailto:partnersforsuccess@smcps.org).

**September 30, 2013 -- Roundtable Discussion, Part 3,** 5:45 - 8:00 p.m. at the Leonardtown Library, Leonardtown, MD 20650. Join us for the third part of the Roundtable Discussion. The purpose of this meeting is to continue working on courses of action to address problems with educational services in Southern Maryland as identified in the July 29th and August 29th meetings and additional surveys. Even if you didn't attend the other Roundtable Discussions, you are still welcome to attend this meeting. Light refreshments will be provided. Registration is required for this FREE event. Please RSVP to Missy at 301/884-4662 or to Terri at [terri@autismsupport-somd.org](mailto:terri@autismsupport-somd.org), or "Join" the event on our Facebook page. (Please share the flyer attached to this newsletter.)

**October 3, 2013 -- Autism Support Group Meeting in Calvert County.** Parent Connections Support Group of Calvert County and the Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland invite you to attend their first Autism Support Group Meeting of the 2013-14 Year on October 3, 2013, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. The group will continue to meet on the first Thursday of every month at the Hunting Creek Annex, 4105 Old Town Rd., Huntingtown, MD 20639 (in the old school building kitty-corner from the Fire Department). Please RSVP: 410-535-7387 or [parentconnections@calvertnet.k12.md.us](mailto:parentconnections@calvertnet.k12.md.us).



# Roundtable Discussion, Part 2



Part 2 of the Autism Spectrum Support Group's Roundtable Discussion was held on August 29, 2013 at the Charlotte Hall Library. Participants provided more input about positives and problems with autism-related educational services in the three Southern Maryland counties. Patterns were identified, and participants selected areas of interest. Focus groups will meet during the month of September to plan how best to address identified problems. If you are interested in joining a focus group, please contact Terri (terri@autismsupport-somd.org) for topics. The next Roundtable Discussion will be held September 30, 2013, 5:45 - 8:00 p.m. at the Leonardtown Library.

## OT/PT/Speech Corner

This month the Newsletter features a new section: The OT/PT/Speech Corner. Melanie Lohwater, OTR/L and owner of Personalized Therapy, LLC, writes about dealing with back-to-school stress from an occupational therapy perspective and offers sensory integration techniques to help our picky eaters. Personalized Therapy has locations in St. Mary's and Calvert Counties. For more information, call, email, or visit their website.

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### STRESS!!!

by Melanie Lohwater, OTR/L  
Personalized Therapy

#### ITS BACK TO SCHOOL!!!!

This should be a happy time for ALL kids. They get to see their friends again that they may have lost touch with over the summer or even new friends. They get to take new and exciting classes, learn new things, meet their new teacher, be in a new classroom or maybe even a whole new school!



Sounds exciting, right?? To a child on the Autism spectrum there is nothing exciting about starting a new school year. To a child on the Autism Spectrum it means ... NEW class, NEW teacher, NEW routine and dreadful HANDWRITING which EQUALS ANXIETY and STRESS!

Many of our children on the Autism Spectrum experience increased anxiety and stress during this transition into a new school year. As an occupational therapist I think of ways to help children cope with the anxiety and stress through SENSORY input! Our children on the Autism Spectrum tend to seek increased sensory input during more stressful situations.

The common ways we tell children to cope with stress are counting to 10, taking deep breaths and squeezing a pillow. An occupational therapist may suggest more SENSORY ways to decrease stress. For example, blowing activities, such as blowing bubbles, are calming and organizing to the eyes and mouth sensory regions. Next time your child has an emotional meltdown and cries, have him blow; it is

extremely difficult to cry and blow at the same time. Sucking activities, such as sucking on a lollipop or through a straw, are also calming and organizing to the central nervous system. Babies do this automatically by using pacifiers, bottles or their thumb to soothe themselves when coping with stressful situations such as being tired. Providing the body with increased proprioception (pressure to the body) or increased vestibular input (movement to the body) can be calming and organizing to the kids trying to cope with stress. Rocking, swinging, lying under heavy bean bags, blanket squeezes, weighted belts and vest provide the body with a feeling of being secure. Increase pressure or movement to the body tells the child where their body is in space rather than feeling "all over the place" with movements and emotions. It is similar to that feeling we may experience when we are upset and a loved one gives us a big firm hug and somehow everything physical and mental seems to calm down more quickly.

There are multiple ways to cope with stress and your child probably has a sensory coping strategy that works for him already, you just didn't know it. Children on the spectrum will either avoid or crave SENSORY input whether it is auditory, vestibular, proprioception, visual or tactile input. During this time of transition, children on the Autism Spectrum are more stressed and anxious than normal, but so are the parents! What SENSORY coping strategy will you use?

# SENSORY INTEGRATION TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES FOR “PICKY” EATERS

by Melanie Lohwater, OTR/L  
Personalized Therapy

## **WHAT IS SENSORY INTEGRATION/PROCESSING?**

Sensory processing is the ability of one's Central Nervous System to receive, filter and react to information entering the brain from one's environment. Some individuals have difficulty self-regulating their sensory system thus demonstrating characteristics of decreased sensitivity, increased sensitivity or a combination of the two to stimuli in their environment. Stimuli that impact our body's sensory system include: touch, movement, vision, hearing, taste and smell. Difficulty receiving, filtering, and reacting to the previously mentioned stimuli may impact one's ability to self-regulate, follow directions, coordinate movement and participate in daily living activities. How an individual processes these stimuli may influence eating and how they interact with their environment.

## **The auditory (hearing) component allows one to receive and process information from speech and language.**

During mealtimes, monitor noise levels of the environment. Too much external noises in the environment, such as other kids talking in a crowded lunchroom, can be distracting to your child, resulting in an increase in anxiety during an already “stressful time.” On the other end of the spectrum, children seeking noises to calm their sensory system during meal times may increase their own noise levels. For example, they may constantly hum, sing, or talk while they should be focusing on eating. If you notice your child is easily distracted with external and/or internal auditory input while eating you may try or take away different noise environments and observe physical, emotional and behavioral reactions from kids or provide constant, steady noise (white noise) in the background such as a fan.

## **The proprioceptive component involves information coming into one's sensory system via muscular and skeletal systems, thus interpreting force, pressure, direction, position and movement of body parts. Both the vestibular and proprioceptive systems are essential for the development of body awareness and body and space abilities (where you are in space) and in perceiving and adapting movement of the body.**

Proprioception tells the mouth and oral region the sensations of chewing, biting, and sucking. Proprioception affects eating in the avoidance of foods a child has to chew, causing the child to like pureed foods such as mashed potatoes or applesauce. Children will bite on straws or spoons rather than using teeth because of their decreased cheek strength and decreased oral movements for speech patterns. If you notice your child favoring soft items or biting excessively on eating utensils, blowing activities, such as whistles, pinwheels and balloons as well as sucking activities such as using straws with thicker drinks will facilitate cheek and oral cavity and facial muscles and give them a little workout as well as increasing the sensation of proprioception in the mouth region.

**The tactile (touch component) of one's sensory system allows individuals to distinguish between the many properties of objects (smooth, rough, hard, soft, etc.) and identify pain and temperature. Tactile sensation has many important functions as it influences body awareness, motor planning and fine motor skills. The**

oral cavity is the most tactile sensitive part of the body. Foods can be calming or alerting to the whole body. For example, foods or liquids that are crunchy and/or cold are alerting to the sensory system. Foods or liquids that are calming can be hot in temperature and soft in texture. Children who have sensitivities with tactile input during eating may have difficulties with mixing textures such as adding sauce to pasta or soups with vegetables. In order to desensitize the mouth to tolerate different foods or drinks, you have to overstimulate the oral cavity and/or facial region. Using a therapeutic Z vibe, which you can purchase online, or a NUK brush or a vibrating toothbrush, both found in local stores, may provide enough stimulation to desensitize the mouth.

## **The gustatory sensory input is why most of us eat: for a yummy taste that entices our taste buds. This input consists of how an individual interprets and processes stimuli via the mouth. How an individual processes these stimuli may influence eating and how they interact with their environment.**

Each individual's interpretations of tastes, including, bland, spicy, sour, sweet, peppery and salty, vary. A suggestion to desensitize a taste is through the use of smells. Providing your child first with smells of a particular food they may be avoiding will help desensitize their reactions to the food's taste. There are smelling games you can find online!

## **The vestibular component is influenced by changes of one's head positioning that are monitored by the inner ear. By interpreting movement from the head, this system allows an individual's body to move smoothly and efficiently throughout space.**

Some children on the spectrum cannot sit still long enough to eat a meal. Their vestibular system is telling them to move at all times, making it difficult for them to interpret their gross and fine motor coordination for sitting and eating. Constant fidgeting at the table is a sign that their systems crave movement. Movement activities, such as mini trampoline jumping, jumping jacks and theraball bouncing, prior to eating will provide the child with the movement they are craving while not interrupting their mealtime.

## **The visual component of the sensory system consists of the movement of the eyes as well as processing and interpreting visual information.**

Children on the spectrum can become visually overwhelmed with food on their plates. Food in general is visually overwhelming and stimulating, causing decreased attention to the task of eating. Added to the various colors, shapes and textures of the foods on a plate is the visual aspect of the foods that are touching each other. Coupled with rigidity of a child's behaviors and the increased visual stimulation, eating becomes even more complicated to them. In order to decrease the visual stimulation during mealtimes, use a solid color plate. Plates with characters on them can be visually distracting. Presentation of one food at a time may also assist with decreasing the visual stimulation. Also, decrease the visual distractions in the surrounding environment; for example, turn off the television in the background during mealtime.

# Spotlight on Websites

Each school system in Southern Maryland maintains a website -- some more user-friendly than others, and all with a Special Education page. Below are the links and information provided by each school system related to services for students with autism spectrum disorders as of September 3, 2013.

## Calvert County

<http://www.calvertnet.k12.md.us/departments/specialed/directory.asp>



The Autism Facilitators and Behavior Analyst provide support to the Intensive Structured Learning Environment Programs pre-school to age 21 and students with autism.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Contact Info</u>
Judy Buckler	Autism Spectrum Facilitator	410-535-7414
Becky Haring	Autism Spectrum Facilitator	443-486-4268
Mellisa Farrell	Behavior Analyst Specialist	410-535-7414

*Descriptions of Calvert's programs for children with ASDs may also be found in their Special Education Program Descriptions download. The 2013-14 document is not yet uploaded; the information below came from the 2012-13 document.*

### **INTENSIVE STRUCTURED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT -1 (ISLE- 1)**

This program is a multi-grade, self-contained environment designed primarily for students who have been diagnosed with autism or autistic-like characteristics and whose IEPs require a highly structured program emphasizing routine, clarity and consistency. Its programming incorporates eclectic approaches and methodology as well as visual supports, language development and social skills, and moves the student to increased independence. There are currently one-and-a-half "ISLE PreSchools", three elementary, two middle, and two high school ISLE-1 programs.

### **INTENSIVE STRUCTURED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT -2 (ISLE- 2)**

This program is a multi-grade, self-contained environment, designed primarily for secondary students who are diagnosed with, or have significant characteristics of students with PDD-NOS, Aspergers Syndrome, pervasive language-learning disability and / or a severe auditory/ visual processing disability. Students have typically not responded to the shorter intervention times provided in 'regular special education' settings and in this setting are provided larger chunks of intensive, integrated instruction. In addition to the regular academic curriculum, it includes a high level of structure, individualized scheduling and work tasks, visual supports, organization and clarity for executive functioning needs, and a social skills curriculum. There are currently two middle and three high school ISLE-2 programs; two of these high school programs are part of a cohort of regional programs at one school.

## Charles County

<http://beta.ccboe.com/departments/special/specialeducation.php>



Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders at the elementary level are served through the Multiple Intensity Teaching (MIT) program. This is a regionalized program designed to address the academic, social and behavioral needs of students with severe communication and behavior disorders. The program serves students beginning at age three and ending at Grade 4. The classrooms operate using the principles of an applied behavior analysis model. Students learn skills necessary to function independently across academic, social and behavior domains. Students in grades Kindergarten through Fourth are provided with inclusion opportunities as specified in their individual education plan (IEP). Placement in MIT is determined by the student's IEP team. Students at the secondary level are currently provided academic, social, and behavioral support through the use of Autism Resource Teachers. These teachers provide professional development for school-based staff in best practices regarding the instruction of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. For further information, please contact: Teresa Robinson, Coordinator of Autism and Early Intervention Services, 301-753-1745/trobinson@ccboe.com.

# St. Mary's County

<http://www.smcps.org/se/autism-support-services>



## **Autism Support Services** *(Please view the website page for active links.)*

St. Mary's County maintains a full continuum of services for children with a disability code of autism and those who are being considered for assessment to determine if autism is an appropriate disability code. The staff from the Department of Special Education work closely with staff members and families to support:

- Teachers in programming for students with an autism spectrum disorder;
- Administrators in designing appropriate learning environments and allocating resources;
- School psychologists in administering assessments and conducting observations;
- Guidance counselors in developing appropriate social interventions; and
- Families in developing home supports.

The framework of supports are provided to those students identified from Birth to age 21. To the maximum extent, all services to students are delivered in their least restrictive environment according to the needs in the student's IEP and IFSP. Services to children under the age of 3 are provided through the coordinated supports of the Infants and Toddlers Program and the Autism Support Team.

### Autism Support Team Members:

- Debra Pearce: Supervisor Special Education
- Lisa Dean: Autism Instructional Resource Teacher
- Dr. Carlton Sutton: Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- George Schlereth: Board Certified Behavior Analyst

Specific requests regarding supports to students with Autism Spectrum Disorders may be directed to:

Debra Pearce  
Supervisor of Special Education  
301-475-5511 x226  
dspearce@smcps.org

**Maryland Autism Waiver Fact Sheet** -- This program that is run through the Maryland State Department of Education and DHMH is intended to support eligible students and families. While the waiver is currently full, families may continue to place their children on a waiting list by contacting the Autism Waiver Registry at 1-866-417-3480. Families may also contact Debra Pearce for more information.

**Autism Waiver Services and Tricare Military Benefits to Support Autism** -- St. Mary's County Public Schools is a participant in the Autism Waiver Program that is jointly administered by the Maryland State Department of Education, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Local School Systems. Active duty military families living in St. Mary's County may also refer to their Tricare policy for information on Autism support services available through the ECHO Program. For information on eligibility and services contact:  
Resources for Families and Staff

### **Resources for Families and Staff** *(Please view the website page for active links.)*

**Autism Speaks School Community Toolkit** -- Downloadable training packets for all members of the school community

**Autism Internet Modules** -- Interactive modules that address assessment and diagnosis, structured work systems, visual supports, peer mediated instruction, transition and general interventions. This is a free resource available to staff and families.

**The National Autism Center** -- The National Autism Center is the May Institutes center for the promotion of evidence-based practices. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) by providing reliable information, promoting best practices, and offering comprehensive resources for families, practitioners and communities.

**Autism Connect** -- Resources compiled and posted through The Maryland State Department of Education.

**Assistive Technology Internet Modules** -- This resource is produced by the same organization that has published the above Autism Internet Modules. Visitors should check back often as the site is under initial development.

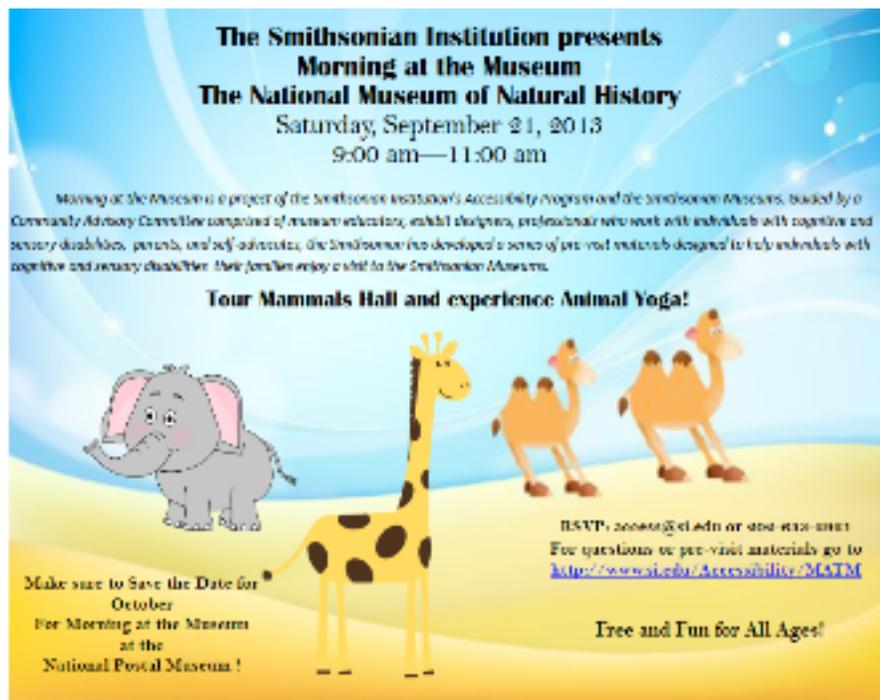
**The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders** -- This resource references best practices in Autism Supports as well as ongoing research on Evidence-Based Practices. Online instructional modules are available under the "Additional Resources" link on the main page.

**Autism Pro** (For SMCPS Registered Staff and Families)

**ICAN (Interactive Collaborative Autism Network) Training Modules** -- June, 2011 Update: This site appears to be under revision. The modules are no longer posted. There are still valuable resources for staff.

## Conference Scholarships Available

The Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland offers scholarships for family members/caregivers to attend autism-related conferences and workshops. We ask in return that you submit a write-up of a few paragraphs about the experience for inclusion in the next Newsletter or that you share your experience at the next Support Group Meeting (3rd Wednesday of every month in St. Mary's and Charles, 1st Thursday in Calvert). For further information about conference scholarships, contact us at [info@autismsupport-somd.org](mailto:info@autismsupport-somd.org).



## Monthly Autism Support Group Meetings now held in St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert Counties!

(See the Calendar on p.1 for details.)

***ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS OF  
PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS, PART 3***



If you are a family member or a caregiver of a person with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), please join us for the third part of the Roundtable Discussion. Our goal will be to continue working on courses of action to address positives and problems with educational services in southern Maryland, as identified in the July 29, 2013 and August 29, 2013 meetings and additional survey information.

If you were unable to attend the first 2 meetings in July and August, please consider attending this session.

Families and caregivers of people with ASDs, or who are suspected of having an ASD who do not have an IEP or a 504 Plan for whatever reason, are also welcome!

Where: Leonardtown Library, 23250 Hollywood Road, Leonardtown, MD

When: Monday, September 30, 2013, from 5:45 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Light refreshments will be provided.

Please RSVP (so we have enough materials for everyone!) to Missy at 301/884-4662 or to Terri at [terri@autismsupport-somd.org](mailto:terri@autismsupport-somd.org)