



CONNECTIONS

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FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

Information & Support for Families of Children with Special Needs in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, & Yancey counties

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A Crash Course in Communication

Need a quick refresher on effective interpersonal interaction? Two communication experts offer steps to smoother conversations.

Recently I heard someone say, "Communication is easy." I disagree. Talking is easy; communication, which means an exchange or communion with another, requires greater skill. An exchange that is a communion demands that we listen and speak skillfully, not just talk mindlessly. And interacting

with fearful, angry, or frustrated people can be even more difficult, because we're less skillful when caught up in such emotions. Yet don't despair or resign yourself to a lifetime of miscommunication at work or home! Good communicators can be honed as well as born. Here are a few tips to get you started.

- Don't take another person's reaction or anger personally, even if they lash out at you in what seems a personal manner.

Another person's mood or response is more likely about fear or frustration than it is about you as an individual. Take a deep breath and count to 10, and see it as a way of letting the other person vent before he is able to communicate what's really on his mind.

- You don't have to have all the answers. It's OK to say, "I don't know." If you want to find out, say so, then follow up to share your findings. Or you may decide to work on the

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Tips For Traveling With Kids With Special Needs

Summer is an ideal time for family vacations and get-a-ways. Most parents will tell you that successful family traveling takes planning. Traveling with a special needs child takes even more preparation, but is sure to create wonderful families memories for everyone. Here are some tips to help make your trip a true success!

1. Be brave!

Many families with special needs kids are just plain scared of trips away from

home. The thought of trying to do sensitive medical procedures "on the road" or deal with behavioral outbursts in front of a crowd is simply too overwhelming to contemplate. Unless your doctor or specialist has specifically ruled out travel, don't let your fears take over!

2. Planning is everything!

Map out your trip & select destinations that can accommodate you & your child's needs. If any of

your destinations seems totally unable to meet your needs don't be shy about asking for other recommendations in the area. Maybe the knowledge that they lost a potential customer will inspire them to improve their accessibility.

3. Consult with your child's physician.

Ask for recommendations, tips, and a special "travel pack" with items you may need in case of an emergency. Your travel pack might include

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problem together to find the answer.

- Respond (facts and feelings); don't react (feelings) -- e.g., "Tell me more about your concern" or "I understand your frustration" instead of "Hey, I'm just doing my job" or "It's not my job" (which is sure to cause more irritation). Share responsibility for any communication in which you're a participant, and realize that sometimes, maybe often, your own personal reactions may be causing your frustrations about communicating with others.

- Understand that people want to feel heard more than they care about whether you agree with them. It's strange how many people complain about others not hearing them, yet they don't listen to others either! You can show that you're listening by giving someone your complete attention and saying things like:

1. "Tell me more about your concern."

2. "What is it about XXX that concerns you?"

3. "I'm interested in what you've just said. Can you share a little bit about what lead you to that belief?"

4. "What would have to happen for you to be more comfortable with XXX?"

- Remember that what someone says and what we hear can be amazingly different! Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and

beliefs can distort what we hear. Repeat back or summarize to ensure that you understand. Restate what you think you heard and ask, "Have I understood you correctly?" If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"



- Acknowledge inconvenience or frustration and offer a timeline, particularly if you need someone else's cooperation or your activities will affect them. For example, if you'll be updating someone's desktop computer system and need access to her office, you might say, "I know it's frustrating to have someone in your space at a time that might not be convenient for you, and I appreciate your cooperation. It'll help us to keep your system working well. We expect to be in your office at about 3 p.m., and out by 5 p.m." Don't offer advice unless asked. This can be tough, particularly if we have experience that we think might benefit another person. Use respectful expressions

such as "One potential option is..." or "One thing that helped me in a similar situation was X. I'd be happy to share more about my experience if you think it'd be helpful to you" instead of "You should do X."

- Look for common ground instead of focusing solely on differences. What might you both be interested in (e.g., making the experience as nondisruptive as possible)? One way to begin discovering commonality is to share your underlying intention -- for example, "My intention in sharing this is to help you succeed on this project."

- Remember that change is stressful for most people, particularly if your activities affect them in a way that they aren't scheduling or controlling. Our routines can be comforting in the midst of what appears to be a chaotic world. So if you're in someone's space or need him to do something on your timeline, provide as much information as you can about what you'll need from the person and when. If you can, tell him how what you're doing will benefit him.

- Work to keep a positive mental focus. One of the choices we always have is how we see or experience any given circumstance. Many people who are considered skillful and successful, including professional athletes and cultural leaders, work to maintain a positive mind-set. Ask yourself, "What's great about this?" or "What can I learn from this?" to help

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maintain a positive state. Don't forget to adopt a variety of stress reduction practices that work best for you.

- Understand that most people, including you, have a unique, often self-serving, agenda. This isn't necessarily bad, because it helps us achieve and protect ourselves. Just don't assume that someone will know or share your agenda, so talking about what's most important

to you and asking what's most important to others, can help build a solid foundation for conversation.

- Improve your listening skill. Most people think they listen well, but the truth is that most of people don't listen at all -- they just speak and then think about what they're going to say next. Good listening often means asking good questions and clearing your mind of distractions, including what

you're going to say next, whom you're meeting with next, or what's going on outside. When someone makes prickly comments or complaints, there's often a concern or fear lurking. Like a detective, ask questions that get to the bottom of someone's real concern or agenda. Only then can you have a truly rich, beneficial conversation.

*From: Ivy Sea Inc. | August 2000
By: Sarah Fenson*

Welcome to Holland

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this.....

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going

to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from



Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things ... about Holland.

By Emily Perl Kingsley

Q & A

Where can I go if I'm concerned about my child's development?

The Children's Developmental Services Agency of the Blue Ridge (CDSA), formally known as The Developmental Evaluation Center (DEC), provides services for the same counties we serve (Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey). The CDSA can assist you in understanding



your child's needs and help you find resources to assist your child's development. The CDSA serves children birth to age five who are at risk for or suspected of having developmental delays. They specialize in the evaluation of the health, growth, development and learning of

young children. Parents and CDSA staff work together in determining recommendations for services and the CDSA staff helps families access resources in the community. The CDSA is committed to do "whatever it takes" to address each individual family's concerns about their child.

For more information, call the CDSA at (828) 265-5391.

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items like:

- a list of any prescription drugs your child is taking and a copy of the prescription (just in case)
- a physician's description letter of your child's condition and needs in case of an emergency
- phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and/or pager numbers of your home physicians/specialists.
- recommendations for physicians & specialists in the area you're visiting.
- health insurance cards and phone numbers (be sure you've reviewed your insurance policy before you leave – many require prior approval before out of town emergency room or doctor's visits)
- phone numbers of any necessary medical supply company

4. Make a small checklist of items that cannot be left behind.

If your special needs child has

favorite toys, security items or essential medical items, you don't want to discover them "missing" half way home. Make a list as you pack of all essential items & double check it before you leave each stop of your journey.

5. Don't Be Shy During your travels you're bound to run into individuals who don't know what to do or how to react to an individual with special needs. As diplomatically as you can, let people know what you need & expect them to make accommodations for your child's special needs. Most people will be more than happy to help. If they offer you a room or seating accommodation that just won't work, politely decline & explain again what you need & why. Look at it as an opportunity to do your part for disability awareness!

Traveling, like everything else, is an acquired skill. If you're first trip doesn't

turn out perfectly, don't give up! Sit down (after you've rested) and analyze what went wrong.



- How could you have prepared differently or more effectively?

- Which of your destinations & stopovers worked well?
- Which ones just need to be crossed off your list?

Chances are if your trip was to visit family or friends you'll be traveling that road again. Time spent establishing relationships along the road can be time well invested! And remember, every trip is a learning experience for you and a precious family memory for your children! Here's to many safe travels!

by Lisa Simmons, the webmaster of IdealLives.com, a Special Needs Practical Advice Network

Upcoming Events

Challenging Behaviors & Medically Fragile Share Groups meet the second Friday of each month at the Boone Unitarian Universalist Church (381 E. King St, beside the Playhouse). Dinner provided & Child Care provided if a space is reserved in advance. For July's meetings, there will be a picnic instead on the 15th at the Valle Crucis Park.

ASU's Dance Marathon Fundraiser will be

held this October. Come join us in the fun! Help us raise money for our program by boogying all night and/or sponsoring our dedicated dancers.

Participate in Tuesday Tunes, a weekly structured music, dance and play activity for young children & their caregivers at 10am every Tuesday at the Avery County Library in Newland; Presented by Avery County Partnership for Children.

A Smarter Summer: It's Never Too Early to Learn

For decades, doctors told parents their newborns were like blank slates. Today, in the book, "The Scientist in the Crib," a baby's mind is described as "the most powerful learning machine in the universe". Most education experts agree. But this head turning new model of early childhood often leaves parents confused about what's best for their very young child. Many parents I speak with wonder if they should buy the latest learning tools that promise to make their infants into super babies or to turn their toddlers and preschoolers into little Einsteins.

The good news is you don't need expensive toys, videos, flashcards or CD's to build your baby's brain. A caring parent or caregiver can find many "teachable moments" in the everyday play of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. And summer offers the perfect time to begin.

By learning through play, young children gain skills that help them get ready to school. This can be especially

important for 5-year-olds in the summer before kindergarten. Here are eight simple steps for a super smart summer.

1. **Talking:** Simply talking to young children gives them skills that help them get ready for school.



2. **Reading:** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents begin reading aloud to babies at 6 months of age. Summer is a great time to start a daily reading ritual. Frequent reading opens windows in the world, feeds children's imaginations and teaches them to associate books with your love. These experiences motivate young children to become independent readers.

3. **Libraries:** Books for babies and children are available free at your local

library. Librarians offer special summer story times and other activities for preschool children. Studies show that the best readers come from homes with lots of books. Get your child his or her own library card and make visiting the library a lifelong habit.

4. **TV:** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends waiting until your child is at least 2 years old before exposure to TV, and then limiting viewing to an hour or less per day. Choose only nonviolent, educational shows and avoid commercials. Watch with your child to ask and answer any questions that extend learning.

5. **Writing:** Provide a well-lit table or desk and a variety of papers and writing tools. Encourage the child, without pressure for making the writing "look like" something. Refrigerator magnets can help teach the shapes of the alphabet. Most preschoolers enjoy learning to write their own names.

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6. **Math:** Learning the names and symbols for numerals is a big early childhood accomplishment. Toddlers and preschoolers can play simple counting games and grasp concepts like more or less, heavy and light, long and short. Learning about squares, circles, and rectangles is a step towards geometry. Develop pre-math skills by sorting laundry, counting toys or baking brownies.

7. **Science:** Engage your child’s natural curiosity. Babies are fascinated by soap bubbles. Toddlers can watch an anthill and collect rocks. Preschoolers can learn about watering plants and washing hands. All young children enjoy learning about animals.

8. **Arts & Music:** Music, painting, dance, and dramatic play help build coordination, listening, spatial and other skills. Proudly display your child’s creations.

Loving parents can raise bright kids without high-priced gimmicks. By finding “smart moments” every day this summer and throughout the year, you will give your child the most valuable of gifts: the love of learning.

*By Carol Rasco, Director, America Reads
Article from the Star’s Web Watch, part of the US
Dept. of Education’s Summer 2000 Initiative*

HATS OFF!



Thank you to all of our tireless and dedicated volunteers! We couldn’t do this without you.

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Thank you to Ruple Memorial Presbyterian Church for their generous grant for our Medically Fragile Fund.

A special thank you for the wonderful donations to our Medically Fragile Fund in Sydney Powell’s memory. Their family is very grateful as are we.



Please support our projects so that we can continue to serve our parents and the community. Detach this form and send donations to the address below and help continue this much needed program. All donations are tax-deductible.

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Thank you for your valuable contribution.



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