

The Director's Link

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As a director, teachers probably come to you from time to time with developmental concerns about the children in their classrooms. How you handle these situations is important and can even impact the future of the children. Here is an example of what Caroline, a preschool teacher, shared with her director about one of her students, two-and-a-half-year-old Branden.

There are several behaviors that Branden exhibits that I am concerned about. He seems to lack interest in any of the activities that are provided and wanders around the classroom instead. He does seem to enjoy playing with matchbox cars and will line them in a row, placing them right next to each other, but becomes easily upset when another child approaches and tries to interact. Branden doesn't speak yet and is often confused by simple directions. I also wonder if he is having difficulty hearing. When I try to engage him in reading books or playing at the water table, he just looks away and ignores me, as if I am not even present.

If you were Caroline's director, what steps would you take after hearing her concerns? Would you wonder if perhaps Branden might have autism? Jo-Anne Yearwood, the director of the Children's Center at the University of North Dakota, says "It is important that teachers record behaviors of children on a regular basis and use those observations to communicate any concerns they may have regarding a child's development." Having detailed observational notes that reflect a child's behavior over a period of time and in different contexts can help professionals make an early diagnosis of a typical development such autism.

What is Autism?

According to the diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association (APA),

autism occurs when a child has a severe qualitative impairment in reciprocal social interaction, communication skills, and a restricted range of activities and interests. Autism is also referred to as a spectrum and comprises a wide range of intensity, symptoms, and behaviors. Children on one end of the spectrum may be non-verbal and asocial and are referred to as having "classic" autism or Autistic Disorder. At the other end of the spectrum are children with a high-functioning form of autism characterized by idiosyncratic social skills and play, such as Asperger Syndrome.

There are several categories that fall under the "umbrella" of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). These include: Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS).

Every child with autism is different. There are some characteristics that are shared by many children on the spectrum. A child who has autism sees and interacts with the world differently. For some, their senses are over-stimulated and for others, their senses are under-stimulated. Children with autism may notice things that are not relevant and do not pay attention to many things that other children think are important. For example, a child on the spectrum may be fascinated by a pattern on the carpet or the shadow that light makes on a surface.

Who Does Autism Affect?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is estimated that one in every 110 children is diagnosed with autism. Government statistics suggest the prevalence rate of autism is increasing 10 to 17 percent annually. More boys than girls are diagnosed with autism and the disorder affects all races, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic levels.

Early Signs of Autism: What Directors Need to Know

By Kari Chiasson and Carol Johnson



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Although there is a concern that the actual number of children with autism spectrum disorders is increasing, several factors, such as improvements in diagnostic methods and the view of autism spectrum disorders as being on a continuum, may account for the increase. Autism spectrum disorders not only affect the person diagnosed with the disorder, but also make a significant impact on the entire family. This can include financial issues, social concerns, and how the family functions in day-to-day tasks.

"I knew something was not quite typical when he was only a few months old. He was harder to feed, harder to get to sleep, and more difficult to predict than any other child. I remember the day I figured out exactly what was going on—Easter. The meltdown was indescribable. Everything was too much for him to handle with all the excitement. I knew on that day we were dealing with autism. That was just before his second birthday. We quickly sprang into desperate action to do any and everything we could to pull him out of the grip of autism."

— Shannon Grave, mother of Carson

How is Autism Diagnosed?

In the past, the diagnosis of autism was not made until late preschool age because appropriate screening tools were not available. Early diagnosis is essential for securing services and implementing appropriate treatment. Physicians, child care providers, teachers, and parents may initially dismiss signs of ASD, often thinking the child is just a little behind and will "catch up." As a result, many young children go undiagnosed and miss learning opportunities through effective early intervention services.

There is not a single medical test for autism. A diagnosis is obtained through comprehensive behavioral and educational observations as well as psychological testing. Recently, standard guidelines have been developed to help identify autism in children before the age of 24 months. However, most children who have autism can be diagnosed around 18 months of age.

The standardized guidelines were developed with assistance from eleven different organizations. According to the guidelines, all children before the age of 24 months should routinely be screened for autism and other developmental delays at their well-child check-ups. The comprehensive screening guidelines can be found on the firstsigns.org website.

What Are the Signs of Autism?

If a child in your program exhibits any of the following signs, it is important to have a discussion with their parents or guardians and encourage them to make an appointment to see their pediatrician or family practitioner.

The child:

- does not exhibit big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by six months or thereafter
- does not reciprocate sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions by nine months or thereafter
- avoids eye contact and wants to be alone
- does not babble by 12 months
- does not exhibit back-and-forth gestures such as pointing, showing, reaching, or waving by 12 months
- does not respond to their name by 12 months
- speaks no words by 16 months
- does not play "pretend" games by 18 months
- does not speak any meaningful two-word phrases (without imitating or repeating) by 24 months
- exhibits any loss of speech, babbling, or social skills at any age

Taking Action

Because early identification can have a profound impact on the future of a child with autism spectrum disorder, don't hesitate to take action if you suspect a child is not developing as expected. As an early childhood educator, your experience working with a wide range of children gives you an important and valuable perspective to recommend intervention.

Dr. Kari Chiasson teaches in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota. She coordinates the early childhood special education and visual impairment graduate programs. Dr. Carol Johnson coordinates the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) graduate certificate program at the University of North Dakota.

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Our Mission

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training and technical assistance, program evaluation, research, and public awareness.

<http://cecl.nl.edu>



The Director's Toolbox

Indicators of Possible Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

This chart describes behaviors that may indicate a child is at risk for atypical development and in need of further evaluation. It provides guidance in documentation efforts to support concerns and should not be used to diagnose a child as having ASD. These indicators apply to some children with ASD and will vary in severity and intensity.

Impairment in Social Interaction	Impairment in Communication	Repetitive Behaviors & Restricted Interests
<p><i>Lack of appropriate eye gaze</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appears to “look through” a person and not give direct eye contact <p><i>Lack of warm expressions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not readily smile or show enjoyment in the same way that their peers do <p><i>Lack of sharing interest or enjoyment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has difficulty learning to engage in shared human interactions • appear indifferent to others • often prefer to be alone • do not seek out human contact <p><i>Lack of response to name</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not readily turn toward a person who calls out their name • appears as if the child has a hearing impairment because of the lack of response 	<p><i>Lack of showing gestures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not use gestures (e.g., pointing) to get something that they desire <p><i>Lack of coordination of nonverbal communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unable to demonstrate appropriate facial expressions, movements, and gestures • exhibits a disconnect between their nonverbal communication and verbal communication <p><i>Unusual prosody (little variation in pitch, odd intonation, irregular rhythm, unusual voice quality)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exhibits a high-pitched, sing-song or flat, robot-like voice 	<p><i>Repetitive movements with objects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spends hours lining up cars or trains in a specific manner • becomes quite upset if a person moves the car or train out of alignment • is preoccupied with turning switches on and off or opening and closing doors <p><i>Repetitive movements or posturing of body, arms, hands, or fingers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exhibits obvious or subtle odd repetitive movements • repeatedly flaps their arms, clenches their jaws, shakes their hands, walks on their toes or freezes in position

Helpful Resources for Directors

These resources may be helpful for staff development and parent education programs at your center.

- Autism Speaks, Florida State University's FIRST WORDS Project, and First Signs have developed a web-based video glossary for parents of children suspected of or recently diagnosed with autism and for professionals who do not have experience in diagnosing young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. It contains video clips contrasting behaviors that are red flags for ASD with behaviors that are typical. <http://www.autismspeaks.org/whatisit/learnsigns.php>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with national partners, is hosting a public awareness campaign entitled Learn the Signs, Act Early. The campaign is designed to help parents and early childhood educators learn more about child development, including potential early warning signs of autism and other developmental disabilities. <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The First Signs website provides a wealth of vital resources, covering a range of issues such as monitoring development, early detection, the screening and referral process, and treatment options. <http://www.firstsigns.org>

Planning Ahead

Professional Development Opportunities

Technology Training for Early Childhood Administrators Playing It Safe in the Digital Age

Computers, smart phones, e-mail, and social media may make our lives easier, but they also make early childhood programs vulnerable to a host of new problems. This session addresses some of the issues associated with operating an early childhood program in the digital age. Learn how digital devices impact your staff and families and discuss strategies to bring your program's policies and procedures up to speed. Topics include:

- How to protect yourself and others online
- Options for keeping data safe
- How to avoid online scams, viruses, and malware
- How to set permissions in social networking sites to keep private information private

No past social networking or advanced computer skills required. This one-day workshop will be offered in three locations.

Fee: \$45 per session

Date: March 18, 2011, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Location: National Louis University, 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, IL

Date: March 24, 2011, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Location: Parkland College, 2400 West Bradley Avenue, Champaign, IL

Date: April 1, 2011, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Location: Kishwaukee College Conference Center, 21193 South Malta Road, Room A221, Malta, IL

Register online at: <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/workshops.htm>.



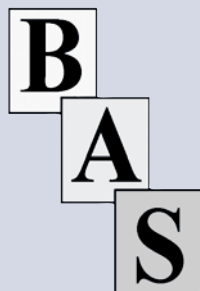
Business Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

March 28– 30, 2011 or August 15–17, 2011

The *Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care* (BAS) is a valid and reliable tool for measuring and improving the overall quality of business and professional practices in family child care settings. The BAS is applicable for multiple uses including program self-improvement, technical assistance and monitoring, training, research and evaluation, and public awareness.

This assessor reliability training is designed for organizational consultants, resource and referral specialists, family child care network supervisors, and college instructors who are interested in improving the quality of business and

professional practices in family child care settings. Participants will learn how the BAS can be used to set goals to incrementally improve business practices that result in better communication with parents, financial stability, reduced risk in operating a home business, and compliance with legal requirements.



Location: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
National Louis University, 6310 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, IL

Fee: \$750, includes texts, materials, and meals

Participants may receive graduate credit by paying an additional fee and completing course assignments.

For more information about these professional development opportunities and a list of local hotels, please contact Debra Trude-Suter at 800-443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu. You can also register online at <http://cecl.nl.edu/training>

Stay connected with McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership News!



Professional Development Opportunities

Taking Charge of Change™

Summer Institute: August 1–6, 2011

Follow-up Retreats: November 17–19, 2011 and May 9–12, 2012

Join the ranks of over 500 directors in Illinois who have taken part in this extraordinary professional development experience. Taking Charge of Change is guaranteed to transform how you think about your role as an early childhood leader. Topics focus on individual and organizational change and the director's role as change agent. Through interactive learning, group discussions, guided reflection, reading, and visits to exemplary programs, participants explore the components of quality programming and how to implement change to achieve program goals.

The training begins with an intensive six-day residential summer institute. Mentors provide consultation during the year to assist participants in implementing their program improvement plans. A fall retreat is held to report on progress. The training culminates with attendance at the Leadership Connections conference.

Location: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: This training is sponsored by the Illinois Department of Human Services. Participants' portion is only \$425 and includes all texts and materials, lodging, meals, and Leadership Connections registration.

Participants may receive undergraduate or graduate credit by paying an additional fee.

Contact Debra Trude-Suter at 800-443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu for information on how to apply.

TCC™ Train-the-Trainer

Summer Institute: August 1–6, 2011

Follow-up Retreats: November 17–19, 2011 and May 9–12, 2012

The goal of the McCormick Center's Taking Charge of Change Train-the-Trainer initiative is to develop a cadre of informed and experienced trainers who can implement the components of the Taking Charge of Change training model to support the leadership development of early childhood center directors in other states.

Eight trainers from across the country are selected each year to attend the training. TCC Train-the-Trainer participants learn how to implement the TCC model, strategies for supporting quality improvements in center-based programs, and how to plan and deliver dynamic workshops using the TCC curriculum modules. The fee for TCC-TTT participants is \$2,500.

Contact Dr. Sue Offutt, Executive Director of the McCormick Center, at 800-443-5522 , ext. 5233 or sue.offutt@nl.edu for information on how to apply.



TAKE TIME OUT FOR AN ONLINE DISCUSSION!

Promoting Quality in Family Child Care

*Monday, March 7 –
Saturday, March 12, 2011*

*Guest moderator:
Barbara Volpe*



The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership annually hosts a series of online discussions that are **free** and open to the public. Join our week-long open discussion to chat with other early childhood practitioners about this important topic.

About the moderator: Barbara Volpe is an assessor and training specialist for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. She assesses programs and family child care homes for the Quality Rating System (QRS) in Illinois and has developed and conducted training on the Environmental Rating Scales for the state QRS specialists. She has presented at local, state and national early childhood conferences and has published articles on program management.

Register for the free discussion at <http://cecl.nl.edu/discuss/active.htm>. For information on our Family Child Care Institute being held Saturday March 5, 2011 go to <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/institutes.htm>.

LEADERSHIP Connections

JOIN US FOR THREE ENERGIZING DAYS!

A conference for YOU,
the early childhood leader



May 12-14, 2011

Westin Chicago North Shore
Wheeling, IL

- Opening Luncheon with Keynote, Marie Wilson
- Public Policy Forum with Milton Chen
- Networking Reception
- Leadership Colloquium with Lilian Katz
- Skill-Building Clinics with dynamic, nationally known presenters such as Nefertiti Bruce, Diane Trister Dodge, and Michael Brandwein
- Marketplace
- Pamper Yourself evening
- Closing Luncheon with Keynote, Taylor Mali

A SPECIAL ADDITION TO YOUR LEADERSHIP CONNECTIONS EXPERIENCE!

From Administrator to Innovator Creating Organizational Systems that Support Reflective Teaching

Tuesday, May 10 – Saturday, May 14, 2011

A unique study tour guided by Margie Carter and
Deb Curtis, authors of *The Visionary Director*

From Administrator to Innovator will explore how
leaders of early childhood programs can transform
their organizations into learning communities
for children, families, and teachers.

For more information contact
Donna Jonas, Conference Coordinator
800-443-5522, ext. 5058
donna.jonas@nl.edu

Register at <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/lc.htm>

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