



Autism Spectrum Disorders

Goodhue County Education District

Preparing for Holiday Success

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

Abe Lincoln

Holidays are a time for family, friends and food. A time to celebrate the spirit of thankfulness, giving and receiving. A time for decorating, traveling and shopping. For a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), preparing for the hustle and bustle of the holiday season is imperative.

The chaos, audio and visual stimuli and increase in human interaction that these occasions bring about can cause elevated amounts of anxiety and stress to a child with ASD. These heightened emotions can manifest into behavioral and physiological changes.

Twelve Holiday Tips

- ◆ Plan ahead whenever possible
- ◆ Prepare using calendars and social stories
- ◆ Decorate gradually-not all at once
- ◆ Create photo books for before and after decorations
- ◆ Create a holiday book for the child to share with family and friends to stimulate conversation
- ◆ Teach children how to leave a situation (have a safe/calm space set aside everywhere you go)
- ◆ Practicing opening gifts, taking turns, waiting for others, and giving gifts
- ◆ Practice unwrapping gifts and what to say
- ◆ Prepare school personnel/family members with strategies to use to minimize anxiety
- ◆ Have favorite foods/toys available
- ◆ Make a list of activities the child can do to help fill his/her time
- ◆ Engage the child with repetitive activities such as stringing popcorn for the tree

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Strategies for Teaching based on Autism Research (STAR)

The STAR Program (Strategies for Teaching based on Autism Research, Arick, Loos, Falco, Krug, 2004) is a comprehensive curriculum that includes detailed lesson plans, teaching materials, data systems and a curriculum-based assessment for teaching in the six curricular areas of receptive language, expressive language, spontaneous language, functional routines, academics, and play & social skills. The strategies used in the STAR Program have been shown to be effective with students at the preschool and elementary level, as well as students in middle/secondary DCD programs.

The STAR Program teaches children with autism the critical skills identified by the National Research Council. The ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) instructional methods of discrete trial training, pivotal response training and teaching functional routines form the instructional base of this comprehensive program for children with autism.

The STAR Program and the Links Curriculum are grounded in evidence-based practices

and have shown to be effective in many settings, including public school programs. These curricula transfer research into practice by



providing teachers with the tools to implement a comprehensive program using the teaching strategies identified

as most effective for students with significant learning challenges.

Links Curriculum (Linking Assessment and Instruction for Independence) is a comprehensive web-based curriculum to teach upper elementary, secondary and postsecondary students to be more independent across school, community and vocational routines. This curriculum includes detailed lesson plans, visual sequence strips, data systems and assessment. Links is designed to promote student independence in natural environments. The Links online system utilizes a curriculum-based assessment to individualize routines for every student.

Social Times Curriculum

Author: Kari Dunn Buron



Using a magazine format in full color and standard columns within each chapter, *The Social Times Curriculum* is written directly to students in an engaging “voice,” aimed at teaching social cognition and emotional regulation in an enjoyable way that increases students’ motivation and encourages peer interaction. *The Social Times Curriculum* set consists of three copies of *The Social Times Student Book*, one copy of *The Social Times Teacher Book*, *The Social Times Curriculum Guide*, and a USB drive with downloadable materials. [The Social Times Student Book is also available separately](#) to supplement larger classes.

Region 10 Autism Community of Practice and the state Community of Practice are both involved in initiatives to implement the STAR curriculum. Regionally, Cohort One began in the fall of 2015 including the educational communities of Owatonna, Rochester, LeRoy, Caledonia, and Plainview-Elgin-Millville. Cohort two began in the fall of 2016 in the educational communities of Winona, Goodhue County Education District, Albert Lea, Austin, Zumbrota Education District, Faribault, Cannon Valley and Northfield. STAR Training that is supported by the MN State Low Incidence Project is being implemented in the educational communities of Minneapolis, Bloomington, Buffalo, Inver Grove Heights, and Rockford.

Five Lessons You Taught Me - Michelle Garcia Winner

It's December again, a time of year I reflect upon the months that have so quickly passed and how life has unfolded (or unraveled, as the case may be!) for me, personally and professionally.

I thought I'd share five lessons that have made strong impressions on me. I've learned them from working with my clients (young and old) as well as the many parents and professionals who attend the talks I give around the world. See if they resonate with you too.

1. **We all share very similar desires.** Regardless of our age, race, religion, sexuality, social ability, nation of origin, or nation where we currently live, we all want to share space and interact with people who care not only about us, but also those in our community. We *want* to belong; to be part of, and contribute to, something bigger than ourselves.

2. **We have basically the same worries.** We all worry about others who may not respect our background, our race or religion, our struggles, our needs, and our triumphs. While we collectively understand people in our community want to help us, we also worry our governments and the many systems that spin off from our governments may not understand our needs. We worry our voice gets lost in the crowd of voices around us.

3. **We all seem to wish the global world, fueled by the Internet and ever-changing technology would slow down so we can spend more time enjoying the moment.** I admit – I'd be lost without my cell phone or my computer or the ease in which I can access information via the Internet. But there's a trade-off. We deeply want to connect with others face-to-face more, to be present and mindful without being in such a hurry to go do something else or check email or our virtual connections.

4. **We all want to be included in our physical communities.** Even when people look uncomfortable or anxious, they really do want to interact and connect with others. They may need some help... a kind word, someone taking a risk and being friendly to them first. Often these people are stuck in their tunnel of anxiety and struggle to look or act friendly to anyone. They do want to be friendly; they are just too anxious to show you that! Perhaps we can all be social risk takers this holiday season?

5. **As we each explore our own social thinking we're learning to better understand ourselves and how we each try to understand, or fail to understand, others.** Social Thinking's teachings are broader than helping people with social learning challenges develop new strategies. They help us all! Since the beginning of my work I have been amazed by the number of people around the world who have sought me out to tell me how much better they understand themselves and their personal relationships because of Social Thinking's frameworks and strategies. Learning how to help my clients and their families has also helped me learn to help myself.



Upcoming Events

January 31, 2017—ASD/DCD Cohort 8am or 12 pm RBEC

January 23-26, 2017 - Zones of Regulation and Practical Strategies to Teach Executive Functioning and Social Skills to students. Register at www.aepconnections.com \$220.00 for both days

April 23-25, 2017 - Charting the C's

April 26-29, 2017 - Autism Society of MN annual spring conference