

# BIRTH through 5

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CONNECTICUT  
BIRTH TO THREE SYSTEM

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

A Newsletter for Families and Professionals • Volume 1, Number 1

## Let's Play! Toys and Technology for All Children

Carol L. Magliocco, MSPT  
University of Connecticut  
and  
A.J. Pappanikou  
Center for Disability Studies

**W**e've all heard that play is the work of childhood. Play is the work that prepares children to explore and interact with the world around them. Play is a means to developing the "curiosity and confidence in themselves as learners" that children need in order to become competent adults (<http://www.NAEYC.org>).

Today, for children with a disability, the world of play has become increasingly accessible. A growing number of toys and environments are being designed for universal access. Using the categories established by the Zero to Three Organization, we will look at how play can contribute to every child's development.

### BIRTH TO EIGHT MONTHS: YOUNG INFANTS

The first toys that a baby is likely to experience are those that provide sensory stimulation: toys that make sound, feel soft and cuddly, provide visual contrast and so on. The rhythm of the lullaby played by a stuffed animal or a crib mobile is often soothing to any child, but may be even more significant for a child with a disability, as the rhythm helps the child to control his emotional state or level of arousal. Every mother and grandmother knows that rocking calms a fussing baby. The baby is utilizing the sensory input of the world around him to establish self-regulation. The sensory input is helping the baby to develop self-control to learn, "I can calm myself."

Toys that have a "universal design" allow all



children, including those who have difficulty with movement and control, to experience success when interacting with the toy. Examples include rattles made like stuffed animals with easily held shapes, rattles with openings that tiny hands and arms can fit into, and rattles with Velcro straps so they can be secured to small wrists or ankles or other body parts that the child can control. This enables the child to experience the success of cuddling the toy or making that toy rattle. This success allows the child to develop a sense of cause and effect as he exerts control over his world. For a baby with significant motor difficulties, toys can be found which provide this experience when the baby makes a sound or moves any part of his body. In this way, any child can experience cause and effect, the power of "I can make this happen."



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## EIGHT TO 18 MONTHS: YOUNG EXPLORERS

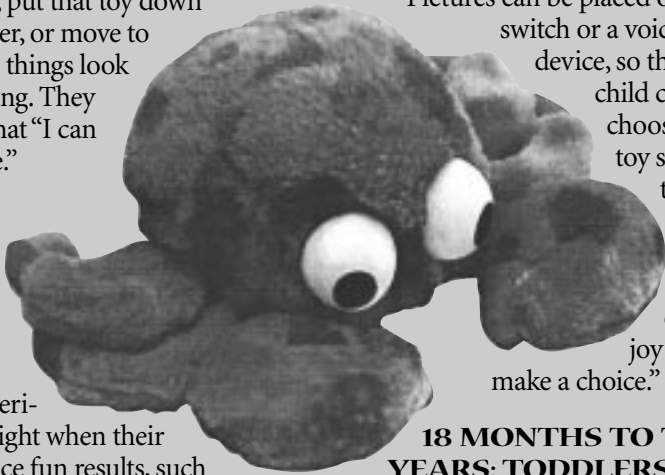
"Young explorers" describes children at this age. No longer are they dependent on a parent or a caregiver to place a toy in their hands. They can reach out for a toy they want, put that toy down and get another, or move to an area where things look more interesting. They are learning that "I can make a choice."

This period is also a time when children are very interested in how things work and experience great delight when their actions produce fun results, such as when a top spins or the car goes racing across the room. The young explorer is learning new things he can do with his body and how he can make things happen in his interactions with things in his environment. For the child at this age, it is important to select toys that the child can activate herself, even if she does it in unconventional ways. Fortunately, toy stores today offer many easy-to-activate toys. Although the typical way to activate a toy may be to push a button with the palm of the hand, the creative parent or caregiver realizes that a fist, foot or elbow will produce the same result.

For a child who experiences significant difficulty with movement and control of her body, it may be necessary to provide toys that are specially adapted. Many childhood

favorites can be purchased in a switch-activated form. Switch mechanisms can vary from requiring a gentle squeeze to tolerating a banging fist. Another use of a switch can be to provide a child with opportunities to experience choice.

Pictures can be placed on a switch or a voice output device, so that the child can choose which toy she wants to play with, and experience that joy of "I can make a choice."



## 18 MONTHS TO THREE YEARS: TODDLERS AND TWO-YEAR-OLDS

This exciting time in a child's play involves emerging literacy skills. Toddlers and two-year-olds are very interested in books, songs and finger-plays. They will repeat (or ask you to repeat) favorite stories or songs. This repetition is critical to the child's developing literacy skills. Children can "read" their books to their dolls.

It is especially important to make sure that children with significant disabilities have ways to communicate and choose books they want repeated.

Research suggests that children with disabilities often fail to develop their literacy skills, partly because they often have less opportunity to hear favorite books and stories repeated – over and over again! (Musselwhite)

Simple communication devices can allow the child to request favorite stories.

Similarly, a child with limited language can retell a story by showing the book to her doll while an audiotape reads the story text aloud. Or the child can take his turn reading with you by using a

speech output device for repetitive lines in familiar books and nursery rhymes.

During this time children are developing an increasing ability to manipulate small items and make marks, though they do not yet have the ability to remain on the paper! Crayons, markers and paintbrushes all come in a variety of shapes and sizes for easy grasping.

Your child can use his writing and drawing to tell his story. The child with special needs can tell his story by find-

# BIRTH through 5

**A Newsletter for Families and Professionals** is published quarterly by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System in collaboration with the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Newsletter Advisory Board. We welcome readers' comments and contributions related to the special needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Please mail correspondence to the editor at 67 Stony Hill Road, Bethel, CT 06801.

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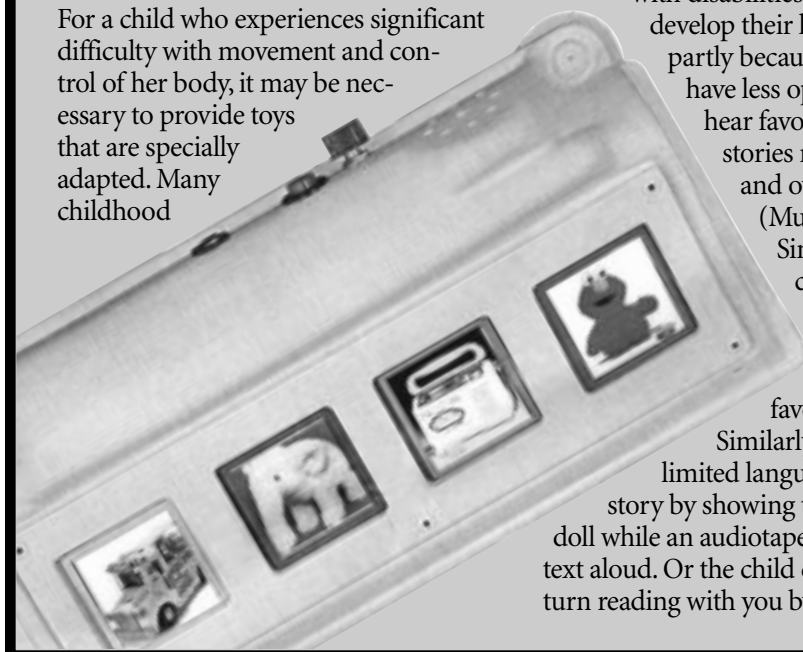
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The *Birth Through Five Newsletter* is distributed free of charge to those interested in issues related to children, ages birth through five, with special needs. The mailing list includes families and providers active in the Birth to Three System, directors and providers of preschool special education services, special education directors, families in various preschool special education programs, local ICC's and others upon request.

Produced in the Office of Communication and Information Technology, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Connecticut; Karen J. Havens, Graphic Designer.



ing a drawing or writing implement he can hold or by using a special Velcro holder. As the child gets older, a computer with specially designed access and software programs may become this child's pencil and paper.

### **THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR-OLDS: PRESCHOOLERS**

The preschool years are a time of great activity. Children are experimenting with their increasing body control as they run, climb and balance, using a variety of games and play equipment. It is important for the child with motor difficulties to have the opportunity to experience a variety of positions and to practice her ability to move about freely, whether her movement be rolling, hitching across the grass on her bottom, crawling or walking.

All children can benefit from a slanted easel surface for better control when they are writing or drawing, but this may be especially important for a child who has motor difficulties.

To help the child grasp turning pages, you can separate the pages by placing textured items (e.g., one side of a Velcro dot or square) on the corner of each page. Again, speech output devices can allow the child with limited speech to participate in story reading and retelling at home or in preschool. Increasingly, quality software is available for all preschoolers to provide a fun way to explore their emerging literacy skills. Access to preschool software usually requires just a mouse click. For many young children, this can be made easier with a trackball or a special mouse made for small hands. The child

with more significant sensory or motor difficulties may need a special switch or adaptation to access the computer.

Play should be a vital and enjoyable aspect of childhood for all children and parents. For the child with special needs, parents and early childhood professionals need to be assured that toys and materials are selected and/or adapted so that they are appropriate to the child's physical, sensory and cognitive abilities. For these children, the special toys and adaptations are classified as "assistive technology."

The I.D.E.A. specifically recognizes assistive technology as an important service that should be discussed and included, if appropriate, in each child's IFSP or IEP. For further information about assistive technology, see the following references and web resources or contact the author.

### **References**

*Developmental Milestones: How I Grow in Your Care* (1999). [On-line] Available: [http://www.zerotothree.org/parent.html/Load=dev\\_miles.html](http://www.zerotothree.org/parent.html/Load=dev_miles.html)

Musselwhite, C. (1997) *Beyond Emergent Literacy*. Presented at ConnSENSE, 97 South Windsor, CT.

Schwartz, S. and J.E. Heller Miller, (1996). *The New Language of Toys: Teaching Communication Skills to Children with Special Needs*. MD: Woodbine House.

The Alliance for Technology Access. (1996). *Computer Resources for People with Disabilities: A Guide to Exploring Today's Assistive Technology* (2nd ed.). California: Hunter House.

### **Additional References and Web Resources**

Etoys and Exceptional Parent present: Toys for Children with Special Needs <http://www.etoys.com/html/et-ep-home.shtml/c=et100H2>

Provides suggestions of toys for children with hearing, visual and physical impairments. Includes tips for buying the right toy.

Enabling Devices: Toys for Special Children <http://www.enablingdevices.com/> Sells a wide variety of innovative and adapted toys.

AbleNet, Inc. <http://www.ablenetinc.com/> Sells a variety of switches and specialized devices.

Family Village: A Global Community of Disability-Related Resources <http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/index.htmlx>

Provides numerous resources for families, consumers and professional providers.

Early Childhood.com <http://www.earlychildhood.com/> Provides a wealth of arts and crafts ideas and products as well as articles covering a broad range of topics.

Judge, S.L., and H.P. Parette (1998). *Assistive Technology for Young Children with Disabilities: Guide to Family-centered Services*. MA: Brookline Books.

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## **¡A jugar! Juegos y Tecnología Para Todos los Niños**

**Carol L. Magiocco, MSPT**  
**Universidad de Connecticut y**  
**Centro A.J. Pappanikou para el**  
**Estudio de Incapacidades**

¡Cuántas veces oímos que jugar es el oficio del niño! Es la actividad que lo prepara para explorar el mundo que lo rodea y para relacionarse con él. Es un medio de desarrollar la "curiosidad y confianza en sí mismo" que necesita

para hacerse adulto competente (<http://www.NAEYC.org>) En la actualidad, el mundo del juego está cada vez más al alcance de los niños con incapacidades. Hay más juguetes y recursos ambientales infantiles que ofrecen acceso universal. Utilizando las categorías establecidas por la Organización Zero to Three ("Del Año Cero al Tercero"), veremos como el juego puede con-

tribuir al desarrollo de todos los niños.

### **DEL NACIMIENTO A LOS 8 MESES**

Los primeros juguetes de un niño suelen ser los que proporcionan estímulo sensorial: los que suenan, son suaves al tacto, invitan a estrecharlos, fascinan por su contraste visual, etc. El arrullo de nana que brota de un animal de peluche o de un aditamento móvil en

la cuna puede calmar a cualquier niño pero más al que tiene alguna incapacidad, porque la cadencia lo ayuda a controlar su estado emocional. Cualquier madre o abuela sabe cuán eficaz es mecer al bebé agitado. El bebé utiliza el estímulo sensorial de su entorno para desarrollar su autorregulación. El estímulo lo ayuda a aprender que puede calmarse por sí mismo.

Los juguetes de diseño universal son los que permiten a todos los niños, inclusive a los que tienen dificultad de movimiento o de control de sus miembros, tener interacción con el juguete. Como ejemplos se pueden citar los sonajeros en forma de animales de peluche con partes fáciles de asir por el pequeño, con aberturas donde quepan sus manitas y bracitos, o con bandas de Velcro que se le puedan ceñir a la muñeca, al tobillo o a otra parte del cuerpo que él pueda controlar. Así el niño puede lograr que el juguete suene, adquirir la conciencia de causa y efecto, de que puede ejercer influencia sobre su mundo. Para un niño con dificultades motoras serias pueden encontrarse juguetes capaces de proporcionarle esta experiencia, de permitirle sentir “puedo hacer que esto pase.”

### **DE LOS 8 A LOS 18 MESES: NOVELES EXPLORADORES**

La frase jóvenes exploradores bien puede describir a los niños de esta edad. Ya no dependen de quien los cuida para que llegue un juguete a sus manos. Pueden ya acercarse al que quieren, tomarlo o sustituirlo, o trasladarse a otra área donde las cosas le parezcan más interesantes. Están aprendiendo a sentir “puedo escoger.” En esta etapa los niños se interesan por saber cómo funcionan las cosas, y les encanta que sus acciones produzcan resultados que le resultan divertidos, como que un carrito se desplace por el piso. El joven explorador aprende cosas nuevas que puede hacer con el cuerpo y cómo hacer que pasen cosas. Para el niño de esta edad es importante preferir juguetes que pueda activar él mismo aunque lo haga de forma poco convencional. Aunque el procedimiento típico sea que apriete un botón con la palma de la mano, puede lograr el mismo resultado con el puño, el pie o el



codo. Hay en el mercado muchos juguetes fáciles de activar.

Para el niño con dificultad seria de movimiento o control pueden necesitarse juguetes con adaptaciones especiales. Los hay activables por conmutador eléctrico. Estos mecanismos pueden variar desde los que apenas requieren una leve presión hasta los que toleran un puñetazo. Otro uso del conmutador puede ser el de proporcionar al niño la posibilidad de elegir. Se pueden colocar dibujos en distintos botones de conmutador o grabaciones de voz para que el niño pueda decidir con qué juguete quiere jugar, y así experimentar la satisfacción de poder tomar decisiones.

### **DE LOS 18 MESES A LOS 3 AÑOS**

Esta apasionante etapa de los juegos infantiles incluye el desarrollo de facultades vinculadas al lenguaje, a la comunicación. Se interesan en libros, en canciones, en el juego de expresarse con los dedos. Repiten – o piden que les repitan – cuentos o canciones. Esta repetición es crítica para el desarrollo de esas facultades. La niña puede leerles a sus muñecas. Es de importancia que los niños con incapacidades tengan forma de comunicarse y de escoger los cuentos que quieren que les repitan. Según estudios, la deficiencia en el desarrollo de las facultades lingüísticas de los niños con incapacidad puede deberse a la falta de oportunidades de que les repitan lecturas y cuentos una y otra vez (Musselwhite). Hay en el mercado simples dispositivos de comunicación para que los niños reclamen sus cuen-

tos preferidos. Una niña con limitaciones de lenguaje puede “repetir” una historia enseñándole el libro a su muñeca mientras una grabadora reproduce la voz.

En esta etapa los niños desarrollan una capacidad creciente para manipular objetos pequeños y hacer marcas, aunque no logren todavía plasmarlas en papel. Hay lápices de pastel, marcadores y pinceles de diversas formas y tamaños para facilitar su utilización. El niño puede valerse de ellos para contar su historia. El niño con necesidades especiales puede expresarse utilizando un instrumento de escribir o dibujar que pueda sostener en las manos, por ejemplo con un mango especial con Velcro. Al avanzar en edad puede resultar más práctico utilizar a modo de lápiz y papel una computadora con acceso y programas especiales.

### **PREESCOLARES DE 3 A 5 AÑOS DE EDAD**

Los años preescolares son de gran actividad. Los niños, conscientes de su creciente control corporal corren, trepan, hacen equilibrios, utilizan varios juegos y aparatos de jugar. Para el niño con dificultades motoras es importante que experimente con distintas posiciones, y que ejercite su capacidad de moverse y desplazarse libremente, ya sea rodando, saltando sentado, gateando o caminando. Si para todos los niños es útil un atril o plano inclinado para escribir o dibujar, mucho más lo es para quien tiene dificultades motoras.

Para que al niño le resulte más fácil pasar las páginas de los libros o cuadernos puede adherirse a una esquina de cada hoja un pequeño cuadrado o círculo de material como el Velcro. Los ya mencionados dispositivos especiales pueden permitir al niño con limitaciones en el habla participar en la lectura de cuentos y su repetición en el hogar o en la preescola. Hay buenos programas de computadora para preescolares que hacen entretenida la exploración de sus nacientes capacidades idiomáticas. El acceso a esos programas no requiere más que un clic con el ratón de la computadora, o de un trackball o un ratón especial diseñado para manos pequeñas. El niño con dificultades sensorias o motoras más serias

puede necesitar un conmutador especial u otra adaptación para acceder la computadora.

El juego debe ser un aspecto de la niñez vital y agradable para todos los niños y sus padres. Para el niño con necesidades especiales, los padres y los profes-

sionales de la tierna infancia deben asegurarse de que los juguetes y materiales estén fabricados o adaptados para las aptitudes físicas, sensorias y cognitivas del niño. Para estos niños, los juguetes especiales y adaptaciones se catalogan como tecnología asistencial (assistive technology). La I.D.E.A. reconoce la

assistive technology como un servicio importante que debe discutirse e incluirse, según proceda, en el IFSP o IEP de cada niño. Para información sobre la tecnología asistencial ver las referencias a continuación y los recursos de la Red Electrónica, o comunicarse con la autora.

## Program Updates

### "GUIDELINES FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY"

The State Department of Education and Connecticut Birth to Three System produced the document *Guidelines for Assistive Technology*, providing information and state resources on assistive technology for children, aged birth through twenty-one, with disabilities. Additional copies for Birth to Three families or Birth to Three providers are available from the Birth to Three offices in Hartford, 860-418-6146 or are posted on the website: [www.birth23.org](http://www.birth23.org). For further information on assistive technology or copies of the guidelines contact SERC, 860-632-1485 and/or Carolyn Isakson, Education Consultant at the State Department of Education at 860-807-2046.

### BIRTH TO THREE

By Linda Goodman

I hope you like the new format of our newsletter. We're excited to begin a partnership with the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System which also produces the newsletter *All Children Considered* for childcare providers. In the past, I have sometimes had questions from families about how the mailing of this publication is done. In order to send this quarterly newsletter, a large mailing list that combines the names and addresses of all families of children currently enrolled in Birth to Three, Birth to Three personnel, ICC and local ICC members, preschool special education personnel and interested others is given to the UCONN mailing center each time the newsletter is produced.



Here are some ways we have been publicizing the Birth to Three System:

- New brochures in nine languages are available.
- A 30-second commercial ran last Fall on the Fox network as part of the Start-Smart campaign for young children.
- We have completed a 13-minute close-captioned video, *Providing Hope, Realizing Dream*, explaining Birth to Three to families, in both English and Spanish. Copies of the video along with the new brochure were sent to all Connecticut pediatricians and child care centers that serve children under age three. Families should request viewing from their service coordinator.
- A revised edition of the *Birth to Three Central Directory*, which gives information about resources for families, is ready and available to families across the state. A copy was sent to each public library and family resource center as well as to all Birth to Three programs and parent centers. After this year, we will no longer be producing this hard copy version and will encourage

anyone looking for this type of information to call 211, a statewide information and referral line that is answered at Infoline.

### PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

By Maria Synodi

Recently a number of activities have taken place, many in collaboration with Connecticut's Birth to Three System. Some of the activities include:

- Development and use of a new Birth to Three and Preschool Special Education logo to identify those activities and/or events that are a joint collaboration of the two service delivery systems. Look for the new logo as a marker for birth through five collaborative events.
- Development and dissemination of a Transition Video for families and providers. The videos are available for loan through the Special Education Resource Center (SERC) at 860-632-1485, at the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) at 860-739-3089, from each school district or from any Birth to Three Service Coordinator.
- Continuation of the *Birth Through Five Newsletter* for parents and professionals. The newsletter has a new face and format; let us know your reaction to the first issue of the redesigned newsletter.
- Availability of conferences and workshops in the area of autism (See the list of training events on page 8). The sessions will be offered through SERC.

For more information contact:  
Linda Goodman at 860-418-6147 or  
Maria Synodi at 860-807-2054.

## "SNIPPETS"

# The Professional Perspective

• **Angela FitzGerald, M.A., CCC-SLP**

**A**s a one-year veteran of the Birth to Three System, my "professional perspective" on assistive technology is an evolving one. During the past year, I have had the pleasure of working with a special little girl who has severe motor impairments due to cerebral palsy, as well as the determination and drive of a professional athlete. Jordan has led me to a new appreciation for the entire gamut of assistive technology, from the simplest devices to the most advanced innovations.

Through our speech sessions, I have learned that low-tech options are often just as "valuable" as the most expensive systems. Jordan's ability to use a portable touch computer was discovered while playing with photos and a simple cardboard box. This homemade contraption opened up a world of new opportunities, when a standard touch monitor was not a viable option.

On the other hand, Jordan is also experimenting with an amazing high-tech computer system called EagleEyes. This new technology allows her to control a mouse by moving her eyes or head, while signals are read from electrodes on her face. Jordan can now actively participate in preschool software programs, and interact with storybook characters just by watching the screen. This technological breakthrough is exposing her to a wealth of knowledge and concepts, and may one day teach her to read and write. It has allowed Jordan to experience instant success, readily evidenced by the peals of her laughter and the sense of accomplishment reflected in her eyes. Our next step is to add a multimedia projector, to transform a wall into giant computer screen. Or perhaps we will incorporate a robotic arm to provide a more "hands

on" experience.

I have had the benefit of a strong interdisciplinary team approach, allowing for ongoing collaboration between Jordan's parents and all her therapists. My experience with Jordan has also taught me that steadfast parental support and dedication to carryover are critical factors in successful implementation of assistive technology. Regardless of the complexity of the systems we choose, our families must feel comfortable using the devices, so that they will continue to turn them on, to play and learn together, and most importantly, to have FUN!

(Angela FitzGerald is a speech pathologist working for McLaughlin & Associates, a Birth to Three program.)

### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR EVERYDAY LEARNING THROUGH MOVEMENT

• **Scott Van Epps PT, ATP and Ruth Lintz, OTR**  
**CT Children's Medical Center**  
**Department of Education and Rehab Services**

**Y**oung children use common pieces of equipment every day. High chairs, strollers and exersaucers are examples of equipment that provide the opportunity to enhance cognition,



communication, mobility, feeding and socialization skills. Assistive technology should be accessed when a child is unable to actively explore or manipulate their environment. A child's ability to support themselves while sitting or standing along with their ability to move are essential in growth and devel-

opment. Professionals can be called upon to identify specific technology to meet the child's unique needs.

Assistive technology devices can vary from a simple bath ring to a power wheelchair. Proper positioning may make the difference for a child to be able to perform a specific task. Assistive technology can allow a child to explore their environment, learn and, most of all, build their self-esteem. Socialization and self-esteem has been shown to increase dramatically with these types of devices.

An evaluation needs to address the complete child. Combining the child's "medical" and "developmental" concerns is imperative. Regardless of the child's age or ability to communicate, it is essential for the child and family to be the center of the evaluation and for the selection of equipment. Specific ideas or suggestions by a clinician will not be carried out if the child and family are not in agreement with the plan.

Each child has very specific needs. Often equipment can not work appropriately for every child. To improve the success of the equipment, prioritize the child's needs and goals and allow the child to try the equipment before purchase. There are multiple equipment suppliers, who have experience and can assist in the equipment selection process. Funding for equipment can be difficult and frustrating. Two pieces of equipment that address similar needs are often not paid for due to them being viewed as "duplication of equipment." An example is a wheelchair and a position chair. Medical insurance, early intervention program and school systems are not the only source for funding. There are multiple agencies and charities that are willing and eager to purchase equipment for children, who have disabilities.

A family may purchase the equipment themselves if they have the resources.

Assistive technology has given children and their families the ability to explore their surroundings. This has shown dramatic changes in the child's learning, socialization, and communication

skills. Most importantly, families have grown closer together and can experience activities together.

### **SOME LOW-TECH DEVICES OUR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND SPEECH THERAPISTS LIKE**

#### **• Claudia Anderson Danbury Public Schools**

- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). Children use pictures to communicate their wants such as cookie, drink, play, etc. There is a video available at SERC about it.
- Hawk is a communication device that can be programmed for children to use.
- Adaptive keyboards from Intellikey that have overlays which are progressive in difficulty; great for preschoolers.

## **The Parent Perspective**

#### **• Lynn and Ray Rion**

**O**ur four-year-old son, Steven, was diagnosed with Multiple Symptoms Disorder (MSDD), a form of autism, at the age of 28 months. MSDD is a disability having significant delays in receptive and expressive language skills, social interaction and adaptive/regulatory development.

Immediately after receiving his diagnosis, Steven was enrolled in an intensive program using the **Birth to Three** services to work on his speech, sensory and developmental needs.

In the first six months of his program, progress was agonizingly slow. Once **Birth to Three** started working with Steven, it became so apparent to us just how bad off he really was. What the **Birth to Three** discovered was that Steven *did* respond to some visual “keys” and cues. By visualizing objects and words, we were told that Steven did in fact have a gateway to potential learning.

With the **Birth to Three** working “hand over hand” with Steven for the first few weeks, it quickly became apparent that

Steven was catching on. Within a few weeks he was doing the computer activity steps on his own.

Steven is now four years old and he has come a long way with expanding his sight vocabulary and his ability to comprehend language thanks to the use of the computer.

#### **• Cheryl and Mike Deary**

**J**ordan is our two-year-old daughter who has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. We were eager to have her participate in our family in a similar way that our older daughter had at the same age. We were introduced to assistive technology when Jordan was about a year and a half. Our first experience was a switch that had the ability to record speech as well as to turn on an external device. So we hooked the



switch to the Christmas tree and when Jordan pressed the big button the Christmas lights would come on and we could hear “Merry Christmas.” The look on Jordan’s face was priceless.

When most people think of assistive technology they immediately think of computers. Assistive technology can be as low tech as picture cards posted all over the house, (which makes for interesting conversation when new people come in the house) to a computer that is accessed with eye gaze. Since then, we have graduated to the eye gaze computer. At first she could play simple games and has now come to request an object or activity.

We feel that if it weren’t for assistive technology, we would not have assumed that Jordan could understand and participate in our family.

#### **• Peg Ventricelli**

**T**he assistive technology that has been paramount in our child Ben’s four years of life is the equipment that provides him with normal functioning and positioning. Most important for our severely physically challenged son has been the upright head positioning engendered by his Whitmeyer headrest. This headrest includes a pad at the back of the head, jaw-line support and a forehead elasticized pulley system. Ben has involuntary side-to-side head movements that rendered typical stationary headrests nonfunctional. An abductor and custom-build trunk and shoulder supports complete the system that allows Ben to eat, move about and play upright. This system has been wonderfully instrumental in allowing Ben to interact more naturally and comfortably in the world. It also serves to develop his muscles and bones correctly, as well as his feeding, breathing, verbal and fine motor skills.

#### **• Meg Barlow**

**M**y daughter, Bess, is 3 1/2 years old. She is a beautiful, loving, exuberant little girl with some special needs. As yet, the cause of her needs is undiagnosed. Her special needs are low muscle tone, verbal apraxia and sensory integration dysfunction. Her body awareness is poor and she is large for her age.

Some of the assistive technology that has really been beneficial to Bess is as follows: a mirror – Bess frequently uses a mirror when she eats to check and see when her mouth is empty. Due to under registration of sensation in her mouth, she tends to overstuff her food; a cube chair (or any chair with a back and sides) – this helps her to sit upright since her trunk is weak and needs support, and it also helps her to focus and attend. Children who under register sensory input can be distracted by the need to touch in order to feel some boundaries. Probably of greatest help to Bess is regular use of a therapy swing. Any vestibular input is helpful but swinging has the greatest impact. Swinging, hanging upside down and spinning enable Bess to attend and control her touching impulses.



# Training Calendar



## Nutrition for Young Children

New Haven area March 13, 15, 2000; all day  
Norwich area May, 16, 18, 2000; all day

## Orientation to the Birth to Three System

Rensselaer Hartford Jan. 8, 2000; 8:45 a.m.-12p.m.  
Norwich area April 6, 2000; morning  
New Haven area July 10, 2000; morning

Infant Mental Health TBA

## Nutrition, Feeding and Developmental Issues

Location: to be determined January 18, 2000; evening

## Feeding Concerns for Young Children

Location: to be determined March 22, 2000; evening

Children/Deaf or Hard of Hearing April 3, 2000; evening

## Nutrition and Specific Medical Conditions, Including Tube Feeding

Location: to be determined April 18, 2000; evening

For more information on how to register for the above,  
contact Kathy Granata at Birth to Three: 860-418-6146.

CT Partners in Policy Making: Learn About Self-Advocacy  
Farmington Beginning February 2000

For more information on how to register for the above,  
contact Mary Ann Meade, Birth to Three: 860-545-9021.

## Meetings about the Transition Out of the Birth to Three System

Suffield LICC January 19, 2000; evening  
Contact Karen Boscarino, Birth to Three: 860-668-3039.

Waterbury LICC March 14, 2000; evening  
April 11, 2000; evening

Contact Joy Liebeskind, Birth to Three: 203-272-9058.

Hartford, LICC March 16, 2000; evening  
Contact Elaine Cannon, Birth to Three: 860-243-3517.

South Eastern LICC April, 2000; evening  
Contact Jan Lehrman, Birth to Three: 860-434-4800 Ext. 104.

Torrington, LICC April 12, 2000; evening  
Contact Diana LaRocco, Birth to Three: 860-412-0196.

Rethinking Autism and Challenging Behaviors  
Radisson Inn, Bristol March 9, 2000; 9:00 a.m.

Becoming Your Child's Best Advocate at PPT Meetings and Other  
Critical Educational Meetings - A Series of Six Workshops  
Special Ed. Resource Ctr, Middletown March - June

Discrete Trial Instruction for Young Children with Autism  
(Three Days); Rensselaer, Hartford Jan. 12, Feb. 23, April 7, 2000  
9:00 a.m.

Becoming an Effective Advocate for Your child with Autism  
Special Ed. Resource Ctr, Middletown April 15, 2000; 9:00 a.m.

## Floortime: An Introduction to the Greenspan Approach by Rebecca Klaw

Radisson Inn, Cromwell April 27, 2000

Two Workshops by Rebecca Klaw April 28, 2000  
Radisson Inn, Cromwell 9:00 a.m. - 12 noon  
and/or 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

For information on registering for any of the above, contact  
Cindy Salemi at SERC 860-632-1485, Ext. 225.

## Save the Dates

Early Childhood Administrators Conference, Birth to Three and  
Preschool Special Education January 20, 2000

Together We Will (Children Birth through Five)  
March 28, 2000

(For information about the Bush Center Social Policy Luncheon  
Series, call the Bush Center at 203-432-9935 or 432-4581.

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