

Angels Bridging Gaps



Love - Faith - Hope - Joy

(Palm Bay - Autism Support Group)

In Loving Memory of Michael A. Rentrope – Devoted Father, Husband, Papa & Friend

Founder/Contact: Jacqueline Yearby - Jbyearby@yahoo.com - (321)726-8814

About [Angels Bridging Gaps](#)

As a parent of a child with Autism I understand the struggles and unique challenges that become a part of everyday life. And it is only through a strong support system based on [Love, Faith, Hope and Joy](#) that my family has been able to weather the storms. When we relocated to Palm Bay Florida in 2006 I was fortunate to have met some wonderful *Angels* that assisted my family with settling in, during which time I found that there were a number of great resources for families living with Autism within the local and surrounding areas. The only thing that seemed to be missing was a local support group – where families and individuals could come together to share information and to socialize in a place where everyone understands. It was on this basis that [Angels Bridging Gaps](#) was founded – the official launch of the program is scheduled for February 24, 2009.

Mission Statement

- Our mission is to help families and individuals affected by Autism by providing emotional support, education, socialization, and to serve as a central resource to parents with children on the Autistic spectrum living within the Palm Bay, Florida area

Organizational Goals

- To provide parent to parent support/ mentoring/ socialization
- To serve as a resource point to inform parents of community services, activities, programs, and available treatment options – both local and national
 - o To pair-up and work with other organizations both local and national as a means to build a strong network of services and activities
- To provide workshops to enhance parent education
- To develop programs to enhance social interaction for children and their families living with autism

Meeting - Dates/Times/ Location

A few of our organizational goals are to provide parent to parent support through education, mentoring and socialization - we plan to accomplish this by hosting parent group meetings twice per month. The First Baptist Church of Malabar has been kind enough to allow us to utilize their facility to house such meetings in addition to adopting an Autism Ministry to provide spiritual support to those in need.

- Initial meetings are scheduled as per the dates noted below and will continue on every other Tuesday
 - o Initial Dates: [February 24th 2009](#), [March 17th 2009](#), [March 31st 2009](#)
 - o Time: 6pm – 7pm
 - o Location: **First Baptist Church of Malabar
1665 Malabar Road P.O. Box 500027
Malabar, Florida 32950-0027**

Organizational Website Development

Another means of putting our organizational goals into action will be through the development of our website. This will serve as a means for parents to keep in touch with each other along while keeping abreast of organizational updates, general information/education on various Autism topics, available community services and activities both local and national. We have been fortunate to have Keiser University Melbourne Campus volunteer to assist with development of an organizational website.

We anticipate the use of the following URL/Website Link: www.angelsbridginggaps.org

Website goals:

- Easily navigation/ clear content pages/ ability to easily make site updates and additions as needed)
- Autism education page
- Group bulletin board – where upcoming events can be listed
- Community bulletin board – where local and national events can be listed
- Parent chat room – where parents can have a forum to discuss various issues
- Links to other related organizations both local and national
- Data Collection/Parent Survey to assist with determining group needs

Website Content/Links

Local/National - Related links/websites:

- <http://www.nbbd.com/npr/autism/index.html>
- <http://autism.meetup.com/cities/us/fl/melbourne/>
- <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/adults.html>
- <http://www.asperger.net/links.htm>
- <http://www.incrediblehorizons.com/Autism%20info.htm>
- <http://www.unlockingautism.org/site/c.kiKTL8PMLrF/b.4343919/>
- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/community/fsdb/category.php?sid=12&cid=33>
- <http://www.autism-pdd.net/links/florida.html>
- http://www.incrediblehorizons.com/ABA_Special-needs_CLASSROOM.html
- <http://www.autisminfo.com/Whatis.htm>
- <http://www.abilityplustherapy.com/>
- <http://www.futurehorizons-autism.com/professionals.htm>

Local Treatment Options:

- <http://icdrc.org/>

Local Autism Ministry/Spiritual Support:

- First Baptist Church of Malabar <http://www.malabarbaptist.org/>

Resources/Information:

- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/whatisit/index.php>
- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/community/resources/index.php#library>

Educational Videos:

- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/video/index.php>

Organizational Programs

Another one of our organizational goals is develop programs to enhance social interaction for children and their families living with autism. On this basis we are looking forward to adopting the following programs:

- Group outings 4 - 6 times per year, where family participation and interaction is encouraged
 - o Universal Studios (Thanksgiving – Autism Day Event)
 - o Sea World
 - o Family Barbeque
- Special needs athletic programs
 - o Adopt our own parent involved programs
 - Bowling team
 - Currently working with *Brunswick Brevard Bowling Center* located at 4851 Dairy Rd • Melbourne, FL
 - Soccer program and/or Basketball (future goal)
 - o Gain affiliation with local athletic teams will to work with our kids (future goal)
 - Palm Bay Softball
 - Palm Bay Soccer
- Respite Program two hours on Saturday (future goal)
- Various fundraising events - TBD

Educational Materials to Be Used

- About autism? / Facts about autism
- How To Be a Friend to Someone With Autism
- *Books for Students with Autism, Siblings, Peers*
- Inclusion in Faith Communities: Some tips for Parents to Get Started
- Conversations with Parents

About autism?

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

Facts about autism

- 1 in 150 children is diagnosed with autism
- 1 in 94 boys is on the autism spectrum
- 67 children are diagnosed per day
- There are 24,000 new cases diagnosed in the U.S. per year
- A new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes
- More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes & cancer combined
- Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the U.S.
- Autism costs the nation over \$35 billion per year, a figure expected to significantly increase in the next decade
- Autism receives less than 5% of the research funding of many less prevalent childhood diseases
- Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism
- There is no medical detection or cure for autism
- The effects of Autism are worldwide, effecting different races, region, etc.

How To Be a Friend to Someone With Autism

Take the Initiative to Include Him or Her - Your friend may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.

Find Common Interests - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).

Be Persistent and Patient - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn't necessarily mean he or she isn't interested.

Communicate Clearly - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate. Speak literally – do not use confusing figures of speech (He may truthfully tell you, “the sky” if you ask “What’s up?”)

Stand Up For Him or Her - If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it's not cool.

Remember Sensory Sensitivity - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he or she is OK. Sometimes your friend may need a break.

Give Feedback - If your friend with autism is doing something inappropriate, it's OK to tell him nicely. Just be sure to also tell him what the right thing to do is because he may not know.

Don't Be Afraid - Your friend is just a kid like you who needs a little help. Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.

Adapted, Peter Faustino
(Autism Speaks)

Books for Students with Autism, Siblings, Peers

A is for Autism, F is for Friend: A Kid's Book for Making Friends with a Child Who Has Autism

By Joanna Keating-Velasco (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2007)

www.aisforautism.net

The Autism Acceptance Book; Being a Friend to Someone with Autism

By Ellen Sabin (Watering Can Press, 2006)

www.wateringcanpress.com

Do You Understand Me? My Life, My Thoughts, My Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Sofie Koborg Brosen (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006)

Join In and Play (Learning to Get Along); Listen and Learn; etc.

By Cheri J. Meiners (Free Spirit Publishing, various)

www.freespirit.com

Trevor, Trevor

By Diane-Twachtman-Cullen

www.starfishpress.com

Wings of Epoh

By Gerda Weissman Klein (FableVision/SARRC, 2008)

www.fablevision.com

Inclusion in Faith Communities: Some tips for Parents to Get Started

By Bill Gaventa, M.Div., and Mary Beth Walsh, Ph.D.

1. Introduce yourself and your child to your religious leaders before you attend, if possible. Ask if there are other children or adults with autism in the congregation. Explain what autism is, and your child's limitations and potential. But first, let them know how important participation in a religious community is to your family, and that this is an area of concern for many families.
2. Offer to help provide information, educational opportunities, or people who can assist religious educators to include your child. Professionals may be quite willing to give guidance to religious educators and to help figure out how to adapt a curriculum. There may be other ways that you as a parent can volunteer in the religious education program to help overall teaching and staffing resources. There are also online resources and materials.
3. Find a family-oriented worship service where a little noise is not uncommon.
4. If your child is too young to pay attention to the service, bring books or other engaging toys to occupy him or her.
5. If the expectations are for children to sit in a religious service for 45-60 minutes or more, make sure the child is able to do this at home first, or has an opportunity to practice.
6. Figure out a way to come to the sanctuary with your child and go through the steps of the service so it is familiar space. Practice can happen outside the service and at home. Video modeling, a video of what happens in the service and what people do, can be a way of helping a child learn visually.
7. Use concrete language and visual aides when instructing your child.
8. Use a digital camera to make a picture book of your worship service and space, important parts of the service, key people, etc. You can use the pictures to help a child learn the names of the places, actions, and people. Practice at home, and reward the child when he/she labels them in public.
9. Find something in the worship service that your child enjoys and can participate in and succeed at to make attending services fun for your child.
10. Learn how to use a motivational system and then make it as discrete as possible.
11. Use this booklet as a resource and provide it to your congregation and other parents and families.
12. Use the resources in the next sections. There are some excellent ones for congregations.

Source: *Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community* manual by Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Department of Pediatrics and the New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community and The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation.

Conversations with Parents

1. Present an overall attitude of openness and a desire to be supportive

2. Ask the parent(s) what they are hoping for

Specifically, are they hoping for inclusion in a 'mainstream' religious education group with his/her peers? Potential possibilities re inclusion with the appropriate supports, within a group for children with special needs, one-on-one religious education or some combination.

3. What are his/her special interests?

4. What are his/her special gifts?

5. Let the parent(s) know that in order to provide as positive an experience as possible, certain information will be helpful.

- How would they describe his/her social relationships?
- What methods of communication are used?
- What have been effective learning strategies?
- Are there any aggressive or inappropriate behaviors?
- What are the possible triggers of inappropriate behaviors?
- What is helpful for holding his/her attention?
- Are they willing to share a copy of his/her IEP, or at least what the requirements of it are?
It is important to recognize and respect the confidential nature of such a document
Again, let them know that the reason for requesting it is to improve the quality of the experience for their child.
- Does she/he have any dietary or environmental issues?
- Does she/he have any medical issues you need to be aware of?

As you do with any new family, it is good to get a sense of the role that faith plays in their life.

Also remember that if they have not been able to attend worship regularly, it may be because they are very de-energized from dealing with disability in their family. A welcoming community can go a long way to helping them participate more.

Source: *Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community* manual