



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

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Provincial Update

This has been a busy summer for OAFCCD as we prepared submissions to the *Education Equality Task Force* and the *Ontario Human Rights Consultation on Education and Disability*. In addition, OAFCCD continues to be represented on the Ministry of Education *Co-ordinated Services Advisory Committee* and the *Volunteer Resource Group for Multiple Exceptionality*.

Education Equality Task Force

Politically, the Education Equality Task Force seems to be the most important consultation as the provincial government has appointed the Task Force and asked for the report in November. The recommendations from the report will be considered in the budget process, and impact school board funding for the next few years.

OAFCCD had the opportunity to make a presentation to the Task Force in London on September 25th. Key messages in the presentation included the fact that the ability to communicate is critical to education and that parents are tired of fighting year after year for services. OAFCCD asked that protected funding for speech and language services be included in the funding model. Copies of the OAFCCD presentation are available on the OAFCCD Website or by calling Alison Morse at (519)842-9506.

Ontario Human Rights Commission

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) consultation may also be very significant. OHRC recognized that the human rights cases related to school boards have raised important systemic issues. The OHRC issued a consultation document in June and invited responses by October 7th. They will also be listening to presentations as they tour the province over the next few weeks.

In the submission, OAFCCD again pointed out that the ability to communicate is critical to education and that students do not have equal access to speech and language services.

The Ministry of Education continues to accept advice from stakeholders through various committees. Unfortunately, the advice and consultation have not yet resulted in any significant changes in policy or the delivery of speech and language services at the school board level. The lack of improvement to services and, in fact, reductions in services in some school boards, is frustrating for parents.

Grade 10 Literacy Test Results

In late September the results for the February 2002 Grade 10 Literacy Test were released to the public. While the results seem better than the trial results of the year before (75% of students passed), the results raise concerns because students must pass the Literacy test in order to graduate. In particular, the failure rate of special education students is a disturbing, with only 34% of special needs (excluding gifted) students passing. Unfortunately, students who failed have had little time to prepare for the October 23/24 test dates, and another test is not planned until October 2003.

Advocates for students with language impairments and learning disabilities are concerned that failure to pass the Literacy test will dishearten students and lead to an increased drop out rate. The only hope is that the test results will lead to an increased investment in special education services at the secondary level, including speech and language services.

**OAFCCD Website has moved to
www.oafccd.com**

OAFCCD now has a domain name and a new Website. There are lots of resources for parents and professionals. Please check it out!

Helping Children Make Friends

Friends are very important and most of us can remember having a close friend at school. Friends are people with whom we can share our thoughts and ideas; people who like to be with us and who we can sit with at lunch, or visit after school.

Children with communication disorders often have difficulty making and keeping friends. Children with speech problems may be shunned because they talk differently or are hard to understand. Children with language problems often have difficulty following rules and miss social cues, or they may behave inappropriately and get into trouble.

Parents want to help their children, but often don't know how. Friends can't be bought and bringing children together in a room doesn't automatically lead to friendship. However, there are lots of things that parents can do to help their child to develop social skills and foster relationships with other children.

Preparing Your Child

It is important to make sure your child has the skills to be a friend. Many children with communication disorders need help to develop the social skills they will need to make and keep a friend. As parents we all want our children to have good manners, to pay attention and listen to others, to maintain a conversation. These skills are difficult for children with language disorders and parents will need to spend lots of time teaching the skills. However, without these basic skills your child will not be able to maintain a friendship.

It can be helpful to children if you help them learn a script, or list of questions and answers that they can use to start and maintain a conversation. Give your child a chance to practice meeting people, and having a conversation. Practicing will give them the confidence to try holding a conversation, the next time they get a chance.

Children with speech disorders may need more help in finding ways to communicate with other children. If your child uses picture symbols or sign language, you may have to set up training sessions for other children. Children are open to new ideas and may be very interested in learning sign language or a new method of communicating. By increasing the number of children who can communicate with your child, you are creating

more opportunities for friendship.

Setting the Scene

Children with language disorders often have weak non-verbal language skills. This means they have trouble noticing and understanding non-verbal information such as body language and tone of voice. They will need to be taught how to look for clues in the behaviour and actions of other people. Television and video tapes can provide families with the opportunity to look at people and point out the non-verbal clues to what they are saying. Turn down the sound and ask your child to tell you what is happening. Discuss the expressions on the actors faces and what they mean.

Clothing and appearance are also important. We all judge new people by the first impression they make, and it is important that our children fit in with their peers. Clean face and hands are important for everyone, while hair styles and clothing style will change with age. Your child doesn't need expensive designer clothes, but should have clothes that reflect the general style of others - tight or baggy jeans, zippered sweatshirts or oversize t-shirts, depending on the age and fashion.

Children with language disorders often fail to notice that different social rules apply in different settings. For example, when playing in the house we often have to remind children to "use their inside voices". Children with language disorders will need to have the different rules explained and learn how to examine a new environment and decide which social rules apply.

Making the Connections

To help build friendships, children need opportunities to spend time with other children and share experiences. When a child has a communication disorder parents may need to spend more time creating opportunities and fostering connections with other children. A good place to start is by connecting with other parents.

Families are more socially isolated, because of their busy schedules and distance from extended families, and parents are more nervous of strangers. By starting the connections at the adult level, children have a chance to meet each other in a safe

environment under the watchful eye of adults. By connecting with more families, you can create a larger circle of acquaintances and increase the chances that your child will find someone that could be a friend.

There are opportunities every day in your child's routine to connect with other children. The walk to school or visit to the park can include siblings and neighbourhood children. Walking together, the parent can include all the children in conversations and games. At the park everyone can be included on the swings, or run around together in a game of tag. By sharing activities and talking about what they are doing, children can get to know each other.

Friendships are more likely to develop between children that have a common interest. If your child has a talent or interest, joining a club or team will provide the opportunity to meet other children. Talking about the day's practice, planning for the game, and having fun will strengthen the connections between the children and may lead to a new friendship.

Support Circles

All of us have a circle of friends and relatives that provides support. Your circle may be as small as your immediate family, or it may include neighbours, co-workers and extended family. One strategy used by families of children with disabilities is to build a circle of support for their child.

A circle is usually established by bringing people together for a meeting with a facilitator. Those invited to the meeting can include anyone who has an interest or connection with your child. At the meeting each person can share how they know the child. Together the group can brainstorm ideas about how the child can be more involved in community activities and connect with more people.

The facilitator can help the group develop a plan of how the child will connect with other people and who will be involved. By setting up detailed plans and getting commitments, new opportunities for friendship will be created for your child.

For more information, on helping your child to make friends, check out the expanded article and resources on the OAFCCD Website, or call (519)842-9506.

Membership Fees Now Due

A membership renewal form has been enclosed with the Newsletter. Membership fees provide important funding for the organization. Please complete the form and send the \$20 fee. Tax receipts can be provided for additional donations and fees will be waived on request.

Photo Contest

In the May Newsletter we announced a photo contest and to date we have had no entries or even calls with questions! The original deadline was November 1st, but because the fall Newsletter has been printed later than planned, we are extending the deadline to November 30th.

We are looking for photos which feature children or teens at school, at play or close up. The main purpose of the contest is to get pictures of children that we can use in public awareness campaigns - like the Chocolate Bar Campaign started in May.

The contest is open to everyone - parents, professionals and children. There will be two categories - (1) photos by an adult or (2) by a child under 16 years. The closing date for entries is November 30, 2002 and the official entry form is enclosed in the Newsletter. For more information, please call Alison Morse at (519)842-9506.

University of Western Ontario Language Development Study

Early language development is a building block for a child's academic and social skills. Professor Elizabeth Skarakis-Doyle is conducting a research study to develop new ways of assessing young children's understanding of language, in order to identify children with language difficulties at an earlier age.

The project team is inviting English speaking children between 2 ½ and 5 years of age, who are receiving therapy for language difficulties, to participate in the study along with children who are developing language normally. If you are interested in taking part or finding out more, please call Joselyne Jaques at (519)694-1361.

Operation “Halogen” Police Investigation in Nova Scotia

Operation Halogen is an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police about allegations of abuse at the school commonly known as the Amherst School for the Deaf, but formally called the Atlantic Provinces Resource Centres for the Hearing Impaired; the Atlantic Provinces Resources Centres for the Hearing Handicapped; and/or the Interprovincial School for the Deaf. The school was located in Amherst, Nova Scotia from 1961 until 1995. Also included in the investigation is the Halifax School for the Deaf which was open from 1856 to 1961.

Anyone with information about this investigation can contact the RCMP offices in Dartmouth Nova Scotia at (902)426-4284 or TTY (902)426-5809.

SEAC Reps Needed -

Simcoe County and London Catholic DSB

Every school board in Ontario has a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) which meets monthly. The committee consists of volunteers representing different provincial associations. The SEAC reviews the annual Special Education Plan and provides the Trustees with advice on special education programs and services.

OAFCCD currently has parent representatives on 15 boards and we would like to recruit more volunteers. SEAC reps must be Canadian Citizens, who are over 18 and who support the local school board. The SEAC rep is your voice on the school board. If you are interested in becoming a SEAC rep and would like to find out more, please call Alison Morse at (519)842-9506.

Encounters with Canada

Encounters with Canada provides one week educational programs, for youth age 15 to 17 years, at The Terry Fox Canadian Youth Centre in Ottawa. All the weeks have themes and students can register for specific weeks. Two sessions annually are offered for deaf and hard of hearing students from across Canada. Cost is \$590 per student, which includes transportation. Check out this unique opportunity at www.encounters-rencontres.ca or call Isabelle Paillard at 1-800-361-0419 Ext. 240.

COMING EVENTS

Conferences

Mississauga - (November 3-5) *Meeting the Challenge: Inclusion and Diversity in Education.* Canadian Association for Community Living Conference. (Cost:\$275) **Contact: (416)661-9611.**

Toronto - (November 9) *Changing the Focus: A Strong Foundation for Every School.* A People for Education conference, at York University, on strategies for education advocacy. (Cost: \$25) **Contact: (416)534-0100.**

Group Programs

Durham Region - Parent Support Group, First Thursday of each month for parents of children with physical and developmental disabilities and third Wednesday for parents of children with learning disabilities. Various locations in North Durham, childcare available . **Contact: Precious Minds at ((905)982-0882**

Ajax - Children and Youth Programs, Saturday Sessions include *Language to Literacy, Primary Readers, Junior Readers, Social Skills* (Primary and Junior), *and Everyday Reading, Everyday Math, Everyday Social Skills* for Youth (Cost: 16hrs/\$250) **Contact: Exceptional Learning Centre (905)686-4800.**

London - Monthly Workshops - More Than Just Talking, Cracking the Code - Enhancing School Age Literacy Skills, Children Who Tune Out, Square Pegs in Round Holes. Workshops for parents and educators are held monthly by the London Speech and Language Centre. (Cost:\$30 or \$20 in advance) **Contact: Pat Cassidy, (519)642-7370.**

London - Monthly Workshops - How to be an Effective Advocate, Improving Organizational Skills, School Issues, Transitions. Workshops for parents of Learning Disabled and Attention Deficit Disorder Children. (Cost: \$10 or \$15 for non-members) **Contact: Learning Disabilities Association (519)438-6213.**

Toronto - Sign with Me - An American Sign Language program for young children while waiting for verbal language to develop. **Contact: Elyza Polsky at (905)771-5003.**