

Kansas Instructional Support Network

Scaling up Supports
for Autism



KISN NEWS!

CALENDAR

SEPT. 14-16, 8:30-5:00PM

SPECIAL INVITE ONLY -
Teaching Communication Skills to
Children with Autism & other
Developmental Disabilities -
Presented by Dr. Vincent J.
Carbone, BCBA-D - Overland
Park, KS

SEPT. 20, 3:30-4:15PM

Webinar Series - Autism
Overview Resources for
Supporting Staff - Presented by
Jane Goetz & Katie Thomas -
Online

SEPT. 27-28, 8-4, 8-2PM

SPECIAL INVITE ONLY - Autism
Interdisciplinary Team Training-
Presented by Lori Chambers, Jane
Goetz & Katie Thomas - Russell,
KS

FOR REGISTRATION, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

www.KansasASD.com and Click
on the Training Calendar, and
then Click on the training you are
interested in to get the
registration link!

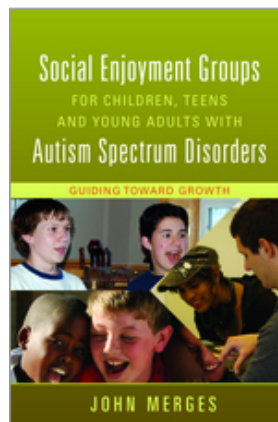
Please Note - Our Website is under
Construction & will be changing!

Thank you for your
patience!



Social Enjoyment Groups: Aha!

By Mary Schlyer-Woodworth,
Transition and Training
Coordinator, KISN



I attended a conference in Minneapolis, MN this summer hosted by Project SEARCH, and experienced a true 'aha' moment. Of all of the sessions listed on the program, *Social Enjoyment Skills – Essential to Employment Success*, peaked my interest the most. It was the word "Enjoyment" that hooked me. I started thinking about how I have been involved in conversations about the importance of teaching social skills, and in supporting generalization of those skills, for twenty years, however, I couldn't recall a time when the focus of the conversation was on teaching enjoyment in social situations.

The presentation by John Merges, LICSW (www.johnmerges.com) and Sheila Merzer, M.A., L.P. (smerzer@cpinternet.com) did not

disappoint! Both are experienced in working with students with ASD. John Merges has been a School Social Worker for 26 years, is currently in private practice, runs community social enjoyment groups, and acts as a consultant for many school districts in MN. He has written a book [Social Enjoyment Groups for Children, Teens and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guiding Toward Growth](#) (Merges, 2011) in which he outlines his program and provides many resources for replicating his work with individuals with ASD.

According to Merges, "Difficulty understanding and being comfortable in the social world is part of the diagnostic criteria for autism, therefore, we expect it to be present. We also expect it to remain as a part of individuals with ASD for their lifetimes, but that does not mean they can't gain skills in this area." He has learned that "social enjoyment is a skill. It can be learned."

As Merges began to study the concept of social enjoyment, a paradigm shift happened in his thinking "Children with ASD were not unable to learn the complex skill of social enjoyment, but delayed in their ability to reach the point where they could learn and incorporate the information, and probably never able to develop it to a high level of proficiency. They

Social Enjoyment Groups: Aha! Continued:

might never become social butterflies, or become comfortable at a cocktail party, but they could learn to enjoy navigating through the social world of work while they were being productive and independent." (Merges, 2011).

Guiding Toward Growth is based upon the development of the skills needed to be at ease in and to enjoy a social situation. The key is to wait until the individual with ASD is ready to learn more complex social enjoyment skills, and then when they are ready, offer unique, targeted, enjoyable experiential learning.

In Part II of his book, Merges identifies ten unique hurdles faced by students with ASD, that have to be addressed in order to enhance success in teaching social enjoyment: keeping things the same/routine; attention deficit disorder; emotional regulation issues; organizational deficits; language processing issues; associative thinking; sensory

sensitivities; 'unlearning' rituals; societal stereotypes, and motivational deficits.

Part III of the book teaches readers about *Funjoyment Groups*. Merges provides information on the interventions he developed, based on his understanding of the hurdles that challenge young people with ASD. His school-based groups are for students from Kindergarten through High School and community-based groups are for persons from age ten to 23.

Part IV of his book lists all of the activities and materials Merges uses in his *Funjoyment Groups* with information about how he modifies materials for shifting focus from winning/losing, to enjoyment in playing a game or engaging in an activity. All in all, a wonderful resource for starting the process of teaching social enjoyment skills!

If you are interested in learning more, a copy of his book will be available for checkout through our Resource Library. Contact Jennifer Houser jhouser@kumc.edu for more information on accessing this or other resource materials from KISN.



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN FOR THE FOLLOWING:

TRAINING SERIES:

OCT 7- Mental Health & the Autism Spectrum, presented by Dr. Valerie Gaus

APRIL 13 - More than Rock, Paper, Scissors!: Effective Occupational Therapy Approaches to Support the Teaching and Learning of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, presented by Louann Rinner, M.S.Ed., OTR/L

WEBINAR SERIES:

SEPT 20- Autism Overview, Resources for Supporting Staff

OCT 11 & 18- It's All About the Interaction: Strategies for Pragmatic Organization of Communication Systems Series

OCT 25 & NOV 1- Modifying Life Skills Curriculum & Modifying Academic Curriculum/Content
NOV 29, DEC 6 & DEC 13- Boardmaker Series

JAN 24, 31 & FEB 7- Reading Comprehension Strategies Series

FEB 28- Differentiating for Group Activities

APRIL 10- Using the Competing Behavior Model to Solve Challenging Behavior

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www.KansasASD.com

Requesting Technical Assistance from KISN:

Kansas Instructional Support Network is a Provider through TASN - Technical Assistance Support Network.



To Request TA - ask your administrator to submit a request:

1. Go to TASN website at <http://ksdetasn.org>.
2. Click on the Request Technical Assistance (TA) button.

Request Technical Assistance (TA)

3. Complete the Request TA form, making sure you indicate "Autism/Asperger" for the topic area.
4. Hit Submit.

The Kansas Instructional Support Network is partially funded through Part B funds administered by the Kansas State Department of Education's Special Education Services. KISN does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Deputy Director, Keystone Learning Services, 500 E. Sunflower, Ozawie, KS 66070, 785-876-2214.