



Special Needs
Assistants
Group Ltd.

Snagroup Seminar

Understanding the child with ASD/Asperger Syndrome

Menlo Park Galway
Saturday 12th of June

Speakers:

Maria Dollard: Parent and Tutor

Kirsan Conroy: Behavioural Specialist

Marie Butler: Senior Speech and Language Therapist

Karen Lowther: Special Needs Teacher

Registered SNA's -€95

Teachers, Parents, SNA's not registered with snag- €110
9.45-4.20 Price includes lunch and tea/coffee in the afternoon.
Certificates of Attendance provided on the day.

Booking form:

Name:

Address:

.....

Registration no:

Phone:

Mobile:

Please send cheque or postal order to:

The Old School House,
Bynesgrove,
Ballyragget,
Co. Kilkenny

Email: snagroup@eircom.net or snagroup1@gmail.com 0857716733/4



Special Needs Assistants Group Ltd.

NEWSLETTER

Tenth Edition January 2010

www.snagroup.ie

Happy Birthday

This month SNAG is 4 years old!

Since we began in April 2006 SNAs (teachers and parents) have had the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops dedicated to their training and further professional development. Topics we have covered include:

- Introduction to psychology
- Introduction to communication disorders
- Assisting the child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Assisting the child with Physical Disability in Mainstream
- Assisting the child with Asperger's Syndrome

In 2010 we also introduced an evening workshop, and our first was successfully held in Cork last month, with very positive feedback. Look out for more in the coming year, visiting a venue near you!

During our four years (now into our fifth!) we have hosted and enjoyed three Annual Conferences held around the country. Presentations on a number of very current topics have included Asperger's Syndrome and ASD, Behavioural Management, Multi-Sensory Integration, Dyspraxia, First Aid, Dyslexia, ICT and many others! This year we aim to host an equally dazzling line-up of key speakers with presentations on Autism, DIR Floortime, E-learning and special needs, and Behavioural Management. We will also hear what it is like to live and flourish with Dyspraxia, knowing no limits. The venue for 2010 will be The Tower Hotel in Waterford on the 22nd May- a definite date for your diaries!

In addition to our newsletter we have a new and revamped website at www.snagroup.ie which is dedicated to the needs of SNAs in particular, but is also proving very popular with teachers and parents of children with Special Needs in Ireland. We aim to continue to build and improve the site, so feedback and comments from you all are very important. We greatly appreciate all of your feedback and comments to date, and would like to say a big thank you. Contact us through the website or email Karen at www.snagroup1@gmail.com

Technology is ever moving forwards, and to make it easier for you to see what we are planning and be able to contact us we now have a new Facebook page. We invite you all to visit us there at

SNA Group is very much in the here and now, and continues in its primary aim of helping to support SNAs, Teachers and Parents in their working with Special Children in Ireland. We really look forwards to meeting up with all of our old friends and making some new friends in the year ahead.

Karen and Catherine



REMINDER- SPECIAL DEALS FOR THOSE REGISTERED WITH SNAG

Since October 2006 SNAs have been able to avail of the group scheme discount in **VHI** (just quote 41-11646).

SNAs registered with SNAG are also entitled to a better deal with **AXA** Motor Insurance - a 10% discount off your car insurance premium. Just phone AXA Insurance on 1890 28 28 20 and have your SNA Group registration number ready to get a quote.

The Special Needs Assistant Supporting the Deaf/Hard of Hearing child in the Mainstream Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Deafness is a low incident disability affecting approximately one child in two thousand. While many children experience temporary or conductive deafness associated with glue ear, it is those with permanent damage to the inner ear (sensori-neural deafness) that may need support from a special needs assistant when starting school. Children with mild or moderate hearing loss can benefit from hearing aids and are expected to develop speech and language without needing much intervention. For those deafer children with severe to profound hearing loss the journey to acquire language which underpins and is interlinked with literacy and learning, may be more vulnerable, and support may be needed. There are also children who have some degree of deafness plus additional disabilities that require support. Like all children, severe to profoundly deaf children come in all shapes and sizes and their support needs vary from none to substantial. The special needs assistant may be part of a school team which includes the class teacher, the visiting teacher of the deaf and the resource teacher. There may also be input from a Speech and Language Therapist and/or other professionals.

Before considering the duties of the special needs assistant in relation to deaf children, it is useful to remind ourselves of our overall purpose: to support the deaf child in class to ensure that their deafness does not prevent them achieving their full cognitive, social and personal potential. This requires us to support the deaf child so that they can access the curriculum, and to monitor their holistic development. The special needs assistant contributes to this goal. Deafness potentially affects not just hearing but attention, listening, communication, language, social development, learning, emotional development and behaviour. With appropriate support many potential difficulties can be avoided. For most children, this means that if we do our job well they will become increasingly independent and we may become redundant in respect to that child. This article relates to supporting deaf children whose families have chosen to use spoken rather than sign language. These form the majority of deaf children in mainstream settings. There are some children who are developing sign and spoken language in mainstream but a separate article would be needed to do justice to their needs, although some principles apply to all.

AIDED HEARING

Almost all deaf children use hearing aids of some description. The aim of this is to enable them to hear

MIND MAPPING A SECRET KEY TO SUCCESS

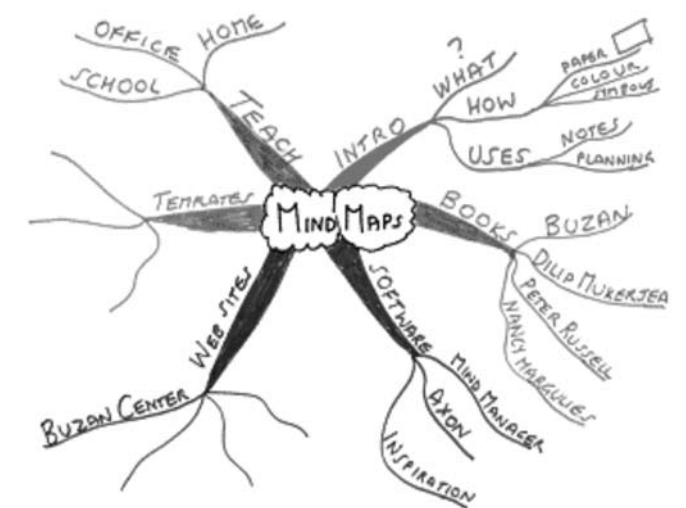
In the busy times we live in, often both children and adults find themselves caught up in a whirl of activities and many times the organisation of ourselves and our minds is a task we often neglect.

Mind mapping is a useful method whereby an individual can study, revise, organise, problem solve and make decisions. Mind maps help to generate, visualise, structure and classify ideas. For the child with poor organisation skills or inability to concentrate mind mapping is a useful device to help them.

So what is a mind map? In simple terms it is a diagram which is used to represent the ideas in our mind. They provide a brainstorming approach to planning and organising. Very often when we have something to do or we have something to organise we write lists. In school we take notes, and in college studying for exams means ploughing through pages and pages of lecture notes. But what if we could simplify this process? We can, by making a mind map. Our brains don't operate along a linear pattern, we don't think of ideas going down a page in black and white. Usually we think of an idea and then many more ideas radiate outwards from this one central theme. In a Mind Map, information is structured in a way that mirrors exactly how the brain functions - in a radiant rather than linear manner. A Mind Map literally 'maps' out your thoughts, using associations, connections and triggers to stimulate further ideas. They extract your ideas from your head into something visible and structured.

So how do you draw a Mind Map? It's simple! All you need is paper and colouring pencils. A visual representation is made centrally i.e. "Things to Do this Weekend". From the central picture a different coloured "stem" emerges each representing a focus category i.e. shopping, tidying, kids sport, leisure. The 'Laws of Mind Mapping' were originally devised by Tony Buzan when he codified the use of imagery, colour and association and coined the phrase 'Mind Mapping'. In the intervening 30 plus years, there have been many variations on the original 'Mind Map' and the widespread usage of mapping software of various sorts, has dramatically changed what is possible. (www.mindmapping.co.uk).

When starting a colourful representation should be placed in the centre of a landscape page. Use words and pictures throughout your map, and if possible key words should be used printed along a single line. The lines make the associations between ideas as clear as possible. The lines should be curved and flowing. A mind map might look like this:



Tony Buzan emphasised the use of colour in a Mind Map to enhance memory and delight the mind. The more eye-catching it is, the easier it will be to recall. Recent research, performed by Roger Sperry, Robert Ornstein and Eran Zaidel, would lead you to conclude that a note-taking and thought-organisation technique designed to satisfy the needs of the whole brain would have to include not only words, numbers, order, sequence, and lines, but also colour, images, dimension, symbols, visual rhythms, etc.: in other words: Mind Maps (www.opusnet.com). The best feature of a Mind Map is that it combines both the left brain and the right brain in both its creation and use. It naturally uses the left brain because it is structured and has words. It naturally uses the right brain, as it is a picture and multidimensional.

Because mind maps are more visual and depict associations between key words, they are much easier to recall than linear notes. For this reason, children with auditory processing, attention deficit or behavioural issues find using mind maps helps them focus and learn. Many children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders are extremely visual learners, so they find the illustrations of Mind Maps particularly useful. I have worked with a young boy with dyspraxia who uses a mind map for such things as getting dressed in the morning and getting organised for school. He finds that the visual cues in a Mind Map assist him in motor planning. For people who want to use mind mapping regularly in their lives, the advance of mind mapping software has made this process easier.

There are many ways to learn, and difficulties sometimes arise if teaching methods or our own learning techniques do not meet our needs. Mind Mapping is a useful technique that improves the way we take notes, and supports and enhances our creative problem solving. They unlock the creative potential of the brain and provide us with a tool which helps us to achieve success in our lives.

For more info: (www.ThinkBuzan.com)



DIR Floortime employs a developmental approach (as opposed to, for example, a behavioural approach or a specific skills- based approach). It is child-centred and child-driven in that it aims to engage a child at their current level of functioning and development, works with the very individual features of their sensory and nervous system and is conducted through intensive interactive experiences that aim to help the child master new academic or intellectual, social and emotional capacities. The Model for DIR Floortime was comprehensively set out by Stanley Greenspan in The Child With Special Needs (1998).

Floor Time is based upon Greenspan’s theories of six functional milestones necessary for a child to succeed in further learning and development. Briefly these are:

- Level 1- The dual ability to take an interest in the sights, sounds and sensations of the world and to calm oneself down.
- Level 2-The ability to engage in relationships with other people.
- Level 3-The ability to engage in two-way communication with gestures.
- Level 4-The ability to create complex gestures, to string together a series of actions into an elaborate and deliberate problem-solving experience.
- Level 5-The ability to create ideas.
- Level 6-The ability to build bridges between ideas to make them reality-based and logical.

Greenspan says that children achieve these milestones at different ages - there is wide variation even among children without challenges. What is important is not so much the age at which a child masters each skill, but that each one is mastered, for each skill forms a foundation for the next (p.89). For a complete and comprehensive outlining of these milestones see The Child with Special Needs (1998) or visit www.icdl.com/dirFloortime/overview/index.shtml

In a school setting DIR Floortime focuses on developmental learning rather than skills based learning. Most importantly, DIR Floortime is based on a warm and positive connection with the significant people in a child’s life, and this includes the teacher and the SNA.

DIR Floortime is not a one-stop model for working with

children with ASD- it is a different and holistic approach and I have found it well worth investigating further. For more information see references and websites below. In Ireland the DIR Facilitator is Mari Caufield, based in Galway. A number of therapists have trained extensively in the DIR Floortime model. A list of these individuals and contact details can be found on the ICDL website below. Schools run on DIR Floortime principles are called ‘Celebrate the Children’, and information on these schools and their philosophy can be found on www.celebratethechildren.org/. The closest ‘Celebrate the Children’ school is in Wales, UK.

References:

Greenspan, Stanley I. and Wieder, Serena, The Child with Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth; 1998, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA

Greenspan, Stanley I. and Weider, Serena, Engaging Autism. The Floortime Approach to Helping Children Relate, Communicate and Think; 2004, Perseus Books

Kranowitz, Carol Stock, The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognising and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction; 1998, Perigee Trade; First Edition

Kranowitz, Carol Stock, The Out-of-Sync Child has Fun, Revised Edition: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder; 2003, Perigee Trade

www.icdl.com/

www.icdl.com/dirFloortime/overview/index.shtml

www.celebratethechildren.org/

www.youtube.com/dirfloortime/ (especially DIRFloortime short introduction)

www.autismsupport.ie

www.polyxo.com/floortime/buildingplaypartnerships.html

Karen Lowther, Teacher.

spoken language. It is through hearing spoken language and interacting with others that we develop our own language – both what we understand and what we say. Our rich knowledge of language then supports our learning and our reading and writing. With this in mind we can see how essential consistent use of hearing aids is to learning in the mainstream classroom. Hearing aids and cochlear implants help children to hear and to develop spoken language, but deaf children go through the same stages of language as hearing children. That is they begin by responding to others talking and by making sounds, gradually recognise and understand what others are saying and utter their first (imperfect) words. If a deaf child has been provided hearing aids or a cochlear implant at the age of two, their starting point is two years behind their hearing peers, and the chances are that if they start school aged five, their language level will be around the three year level, in line with their hearing experience. Some deaf children do “catch up” and achieve age appropriate language by the time they start school but many are still in the process. (There is currently a campaign in Ireland for universal newborn hearing screening so that deafness can be diagnosed within weeks or a few months of birth and aided hearing or intervention begun so that time is not lost).

For those whose deafness is so profound that they do not hear speech well enough with hearing aids, parents may opt for cochlear implantation. This aids hearing in a different way. Whereas hearing aids make sound/speech louder, cochlear implants work by turning sound into an electrical signal which the brain interprets as sound. (Google the Cochlear Implant Programme at Beaumont Hospital and click on brochure for a fuller explanation of a cochlear implant.) Cochlear implants do for profoundly deaf children what hearing aids do for the moderate and severely deaf.

It is important to point out that neither hearing aids nor cochlear implants restore hearing nor do pupils with such aids “hear” the same as those born with normal hearing. Deaf pupils with aided hearing can hear within a radius of approximately one metre. In the school setting the teacher cannot always be within a metre of a pupil, so assistive technology is provided to address this. Using different means, soundfield systems and radio aids address the difficulties associated with distance from the teacher and background noise.

THE ROLE OF THE SNA WITHIN THE SUPPORT TEAM

The duties of an SNA in relation to a deaf child depends on the individual child and his/her needs. It is important to remember that the deaf pupil must have a direct teacher/ learner relationship with the class teacher, and that one of the challenges of the SNA is to know when to draw

back or how to provide discrete support without creating a distraction. The SNA mainly takes direction from the class teacher, but will also be given input from the visiting teacher of the deaf and from the resource teacher. The SNA has the opportunity to observe the child and can communicate any important observations to the class or resource teacher or the visiting teacher of the deaf. As with all children expectations are a major influence on deaf children’s achievement. Out expectations regarding deaf children’s behaviour and work need to be high, but appropriate to their individual needs.

To give a flavour of the types of support needed, below is an advice sheet directed at all school staff in relation to a deaf child supported in mainstream. Following that is a document that identifies the particular tasks carried out by the SNA:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR X. SEPTEMBER 2008

X is a friendly, active and inquisitive boy who was five in February. He has a permanent, profound, bi-lateral sensori-neural hearing loss, diagnosed in November 03, and received a cochlear implant in June 07 because hearing aids did not give him good enough access to spoken language. In addition, in school settings, a Sound Field system is used to address the difficulty of hearing over distance and in background noise.

X has made excellent progress in attention, listening, language and learning but is, as yet, delayed in these areas compared with his hearing peers, although he is expected to catch up. He communicates using spoken language and his speech intelligibility is developing well. X’s cognitive ability is perceived as above average, and in class resource support is recommended except for a few specific areas as listed below. The following recommendations are suggested to support X’s optimal listening, language and learning development:

Listening Environment and Communication

- A seat at the front of class, to one side will help X to attend and hear, and will enable him to monitor other pupils’ contributions/access lip patterns
- Ensure you have X’s attention before giving instructions or information
- Cochlear implant speech processor should be checked at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions, and at any time that X does not appear to be hearing well (A cochlear implant does not restore hearing but enables X to hear others well enough to develop spoken language,

provided the person speaking is 1m or nearer to X)

- As it is not practical for the teacher to be 1m or nearer to X at all times, the Sound Field should be used for whole class sessions.

- Please speak to x normally, but not too quickly

- Avoid speaking with your back to the window as this puts your face in shadow and makes lip reading to support hearing inaccessible

- Please use home/school liaison book to support X’s communication and language, and to record important school notices that X may not hear

Communication and Language

- One to one conversation around home and school topics will help X to continue to develop spoken language and to acquire new vocabulary

- If X does not understand an instruction or a piece of information, rephrase it

- Hands on experience and picture support will support understanding (and learning)

Literacy

- Phonics should be introduced one to one in a quiet room during resource time, and then X can join in with whole class phonic sessions

- It is recommended that the whole class story is introduced during resource time so that X can sustain his attention and engage with the story even if it has some unfamiliar language in it.

- Early readers need to be selected carefully so that they are in line with X’s spoken language level. Reading comprehension need to be carefully monitored

- Focus on reading for meaning, and read popular stories just beyond X’s ability to encourage reading for pleasure (Home and school)

Learning

- The use of pictures, titles and board notes consistently will support understanding, as will hands on experience and use of concrete materials

- Rehearse song/prayer words individually as learning by repetition in a group is difficult for a hearing impaired child

- Owing to his hearing impairment, X will not have the same capacity for overhearing/incidental learning as his peers. For this reason it is important to monitor his vocabulary and to reinforce new words with their meanings as they arise.

- Deaf children cannot always discriminate speech from recorded material. E.g. the child may know there is someone speaking or singing on the cd or television/ computer, but may not be able to hear the words. This can be addressed by rehearsing the words individually and then counting the child in for the song on the tape, once they know the words

Social Development

- X interacts confidently with adults and peers in his family and in his local community, but will need a little time to settle into school. Some children find it difficult at times being the only child with hearing aids in school. Please monitor X’s self esteem and social confidence. If at any time you have any concern, please contact his parents and visiting teacher of the deaf for advice and guidance

- X may need initial support in getting to know the routine of the school day – the SNA may need to prompt him

Thank you for consideration of X’s individual needs.
Visiting Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

THE DUTIES OF THE SNA

- It is essential that X’s implant processor and sound field system are continuously monitored and are kept in optimal working order. At this age and stage, he is unable to do this himself. A special needs assistant would be there to check equipment regularly and to resolve simple issues such as spent batteries.

- There will be times when the SNA may need to clarify what X is saying and to request repetition when he is not clear. Recasting what the child says is more productive than “correcting” the child’s speech and language

- In addition the SNA will need to prompt X’s attention, check understanding and give clarification, as necessary.

- The SNA will also need to help X learn the mores and routines of the classroom including health and safety procedures.

- S/he will need to note down class and school notices given verbally, in a home school liaison book. In addition brief notes about the main events of X’s school day and home news will support communication at times when X’s speech or language is unclear

- The SNA is in a position to monitor X’s self esteem in class and in the playground. This is important as some hearing impaired children experiences times when they find it difficult being the only/one of very few children in a school with hearing disability

- Sometimes it is difficult to understand what X is saying as his speech is immature. An SNA has the opportunity to tune in to X’s speech as she support him, and can support communication as necessary while encouraging as much independence as possible. The SNA, alongside teachers, models mature language when talking with the deaf child.

Conclusion

Supporting deaf children in the mainstream setting is an interesting, varied, rewarding and at times challenging job. The SNA will gain experience, skills and knowledge related to hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive technology and in communication and language, as well as in other areas of development common to all children.

Claire Sheehan
Visiting Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Helpful Websites:

www.sess.ie

www.deafhear.ie

[www.des.gov.ie/visiting teacher service](http://www.des.gov.ie/visiting-teacher-service)

www.irishdeafkids.ie

[www.beaumonthospital.ie/cochlear implant programme](http://www.beaumonthospital.ie/cochlear-implant-programme)

www.earfoundation.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

www.deafeducation.org.uk

What is DIR Floortime?

In working with children with special needs we often focus on changing very specific behaviours and teaching very specific skills. Children are encouraged to memorise these skills and behaviours and learn them by rote. But if they can not think independently and apply these skills and behaviours their abilities to apply, use and generalise the rote learning can be severely limited. This model gives an alternative type of framework to work with special children where the emphasis is not on skills-based learning but focuses on developmental learning.

The DIR (Developmental, Individual-differences, Relationship-based) Floortime Model is a model based on understanding and supporting children’s development. It claims to be ideally suited to children with developmental delays, including speech delays, motor delays, sensory integrative dysfunction, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Down’s Syndrome, cerebral palsy as well as other rare syndromes. It was developed over the past 20 years to its current level by Dr Stanley Greenspan M.D. and Dr Serena Weider Ph D.. Within this model,

- **D is for Developmental.**

Understanding where the child is developmentally is critical to supporting their growth and developmental capacities as developed by Dr Greenspan and Dr Weider. There are six developmental milestones that identify what every child must master for healthy emotional, social and intellectual growth. These six functional developmental milestones are outlined very briefly below, and the expectation is that each level needs to be largely mastered before the child moves on to the next.

- **I is for Individual Differences.**

Each child has a unique way of taking in the world- sights, sounds, smells, touch, sight, movement- and responding to it. The challenges associated with the child’s sensory system and the various processing issues that make up a child’s individual differences may be interfering with his/her ability to develop and learn.

- **R is for Relationship-based.**

Building relationships with primary care-givers and significant adults in a child’s life are essential for helping a child on a healthy developmental path. A warm, positive and connected relationship is essential and fundamental to a child’s development.

See www.celebratethechildren.org/