



Special Needs
Assistants
Group Ltd.

Here is a great opportunity to partake in our series of three seminars aimed at covering the basic elements in the Eclectic Approach to teaching children with Autism and Developmental Delay. The three different seminars will take place over the next year in a range of locations, beginning with this one, which looks at the need for routine, structure and timetabling in the life of children with Autism. The second seminar will examine Behavioural models and Behaviour management, whilst the third seminar will examine Sensory issues, Sensory Integration and aspects of the Developmental model.

“The Eclectic Approach in Education for children with PDD and Autism”

Seminar 1- Structured Teaching and Autism

<i>The Green Isle Hotel Dublin</i>	<i>The Maldron Hotel Cork</i>	Menlo Park Hotel Galway
<i>Saturday 23rd October 2010</i>	<i>Saturday 6th November 2010</i>	Saturday 20 th November 2010

Time : 9.15 am to 5.00 pm each day

Speakers:

Kirsten Conroy – Behavioural Specialist

Marie Butler – Speech and Language Therapist

Maria Dollard – Mother and Tutor

Karen Lowther – Special Needs Teacher

Registered SNA'S – €95

Teachers, Parents, SNAs not registered with SNA Group –€110

Price includes lunch and tea/coffee on arrival and in the afternoon.

Certificates of Attendance provided on the day.

Early booking essential.

Booking form:

Name.....Seminar Location.....

Address.....

Registration No. Phone. Email:.....

Please send Bank Draft, Cheque or Postal Order to:

Special Needs Assistants Group,
The Old School House,
Byrnesgrove,
Ballyragget,
Co. Kilkenny

Receipts will be sent when we have enough SNAs to proceed with the seminar.

Email:snagroup1@gmail.com or Tel: 0857716733 See us online - www.snagroup.ie/ SNA Group on Facebook



Special Needs Assistants Group Ltd.

NEWSLETTER

Twelfth Edition October 2010

www.snagroup.ie

CELEBRATING A FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 22nd May dawned bright and sunny, the heat and warmth of the day apparent from early. It was with an eager air of anticipation that SNAs, parents and teacher travelled from all over Ireland to the Tower Hotel in Waterford to attend the fourth annual conference of the Special Needs Assistants Group. The line-up as ever was impressive, and was the culmination of months of preparation and planning. Some delegates and speakers had arrived the night before, most arrived early on the morning of the Conference. Armed with chocolates from sponsors, bottled water and their notes, all delegates were in place for the first presentation of the day by Ann Jackson, National Technology & Special Needs Advisor based in the Central Remedial Clinic, Clontarf. Her entertaining and informative talk on The Successful use of Technology as an Educational Resource for Pupils with Special Needs was full of practical advice and visual references. This was quickly followed by a talk on The use of D.I.R. Floortime as a Model for Learning for Children with Special Needs by Karen Lowther, a teacher in Special Education. Again

the presentation was full of practical advice on working this model in the classroom, and how it differs from, and compares with the more commonly advocated behavioural models. This was supplemented by a contribution during questions and answers by Mary Mullally, eminent in Ireland for her on-going work in this area.

Then it was time for a well-earned break, and in the heat of this exceptional day the sponsored ice-cream went down a treat! This break was followed by a very powerful and emotional presentation by Maria Dollard, the mother of Lucy, a young woman with Autism. Maria's perspective as a parent interacting with the education system was enlightening and very well received by all present. Her relaying of the grieving process which envelops parents and families when a child is first diagnosed with special needs was very moving for all.

The Tower Hotel provided a fantastic lunch for our delegates, and many then stepped out to enjoy a brief time in the very





hot sunshine before returning once again to the conference room. The afternoon presentations were again extremely interesting and varied, one a personal perspective, the other focusing on Behavioural Management in the classroom environment. First to speak was Hannah McDonnell, a former Rose of Tralee, who lives with and overcomes Dyspraxia daily. It is not until the reality of this disability is spelt out that it is possible to realize the challenges our children and young people meet on a daily basis, and for us to begin to understand how we can properly assist them in the school and home setting.

Kirsten Conroy, our fifth presenter of the day provided a very entertaining and thought-provoking talk on Dealing with Classroom Disruption. We were all encouraged to look behind the behaviours as they presented in our classrooms and schools and work on building self-esteem in our children. She examined strategies for dealing with disruption as it may present in general, for children with ADHD and Autism. She also talked about the impact of bullying and bullies, and strategies for teaching children how to deal with bullies.



Following a well-earned coffee break the day drew to a close with a presentation from Speech and Language Therapist Catherine Sheahan which focused on The Interaction of Speech and Language and Literacy Difficulties. This detailed and informative talk dealt with the interconnections between language and literacy, and possible interventions through work on phonological awareness and language skills.

The day had been long, but very enjoyable and packed full of great and relevant information. As the proceedings drew to a close we had our now customary draw. A number of generous sponsors had donated prizes, among them vouchers and wine. With the draw complete and our winners happy, certificates were distributed and the delegates and organizers began to disperse into the warm and balmy early evening sunshine to make their way safely home to all corners of Ireland- until next year....

Karen Lowther



A big thank you to all those who put so much effort into making the day so successful and to all of our generous sponsors. A special thanks to Stanley Jackson and Bounce Back Ltd. (Walloper) for the delicious Lily O'Brien chocolates, to Tipperary Water for the refreshing bottles of water, and to HB Ice Cream for the very welcome ices at the mid-morning break. Other sponsors who deserve special thanks for raffle prizes include The Stationary Store, Naas; Supervalu, Sallins; Smyths Toy Store in Naas, and The Italian Connection in Kilkenny.

INTRODUCING NEW FOR 2010/2011:

The Eclectic Approach to Education For children with PDD and Autism

A series of three seminars

1. Structured Teaching and Autism - back to basics
2. Understanding Behavioural Approaches and Behaviour Management
3. Sensory and Developmental Issues for children with Developmental Delay and Autism

These seminars will be run as stand-alone events, or as a package of 2 or 3 seminars. There will be a reduction of 15% on second and subsequent seminars in the series booked by the same person.

Over the three seminars presentations will be made by various speakers, including: a psychologist; a speech and language therapist; a behavioural specialist; a parent; a special needs teacher, and a sensory integration therapist.

REMINDER- SPECIAL DEALS FOR THOSE REGISTERED WITH SNAG

Since October 2006 SNAs who are registered 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. Just phone AXA Insurance on 1890 28 28 20 and have your SNA Group registration number ready.

Your SNA Group registration number also gets you access to the section of our website www.snagroup.ie which contains past editions of our Newsletter.

NEW for 2010 – you can avail of a 10% discount with EduThink toys – just quote your Registration Number

when you register and order on-line at www.eduthink.ie, or contact Kelvin or Celine on 056 7712569 or email kelvin@eduthink.ie

Also NEW for Winter 2010 – A special PRIZE DRAW for €80 worth of specialist books- see Outside the Box on page . And you can avail of a 10% discount from Outside the Box Learning resources from now until the beginning of November when you order online- just quote the code printed on the bottom of our great prize draw info.

A MOTHER’S EXPERIENCE

Special Needs Assistants and Teachers devote their working lives to the education and development of the children who pass through their care. This work, while challenging, is frequently described by these professionals, as extremely rewarding and deeply satisfying. As a professional, it is a joyous thing to witness, appreciate and indeed, contribute to the sometimes small but significant little steps a student with special educational needs makes on their journey of lifelong learning.

Parents can often be a great support to the school community and are frequently very involved and supportive of the school. However there are times when we as parents may appear difficult or challenging to staff in a school setting. It is important to remember that parents come in as wide a shape and size as it is possible to have in society, and disability is not confined to any one social class, educational background or economic situation. Despite the differences that may colour our values and attitudes there is one thing all parents of a child with a special needs will experience and sometimes struggle to cope with, and that is our sense of loss for the child we thought we were going to have.

Just as it is important for parents to understand how the education system works for their child, I believe it is important for professionals to understand a little of what parents have to deal with as they come to grips with the reality of a situation they never dreamed they would find themselves in. This is especially true of parents of very young children but it is also true of parents of older children, teens and adults. This understanding can help to develop empathy with the parents and so enrich the communication experience for parents and professionals alike.

When we think of bereavement we think of the death of a loved one. However bereavement is experienced in many situations in life, for example the loss of a parent through separation or divorce, relationships that end or change in our lives, unemployment or the birth of a child with a disability.

For some parents this is something that is realised a few days after their baby is born and for others it is a slower dawning of realisation that something is not quite right. The experience of grief is a normal and necessary response to the change in circumstances and indeed expectations- but it is always painful for parents, grandparents and sometimes siblings. A small child may cry bitterly as they come to realise that their older sibling with special needs is not interested in playing with them as they would expect,

and there is sadness for families at the loss of that simple family expectation.

Even when families are coping well and perhaps some years into their experience of trying to raise a child with special needs, they may find times like communions, family or school events, difficult as their loss and their child’s perceived deficits are thrown into sharp contrast. It is at times like this that many parents benefit from the support, encouragement and help that they receive from their child’s teacher and SNA.

The stages of grief are well documented and we can all identify with some aspects in our lives. They follow a sequence in many cases. These stages are: shock and disbelief, denial, growing awareness, yearning, anger, depression, guilt, anxiety and acceptance. Many school professionals find themselves on the receiving end of some of these more negative symptoms. For example, parents who are in an anger stage will often become angry at whoever is in the firing line. Professionals may find they are bewildered and hurt by comments from parents or outright hostility. What may start out as a discussion on the progress of the child may turn into a stream of blame, with everybody from the Minister for Health or Education to the Principal, Teacher and SNA being held responsible for a perceived lack of attainment on the part of the child. What may really be going on is that a parent who loves their child deeply is trying to come to terms with the difference between the child they ‘thought’ they would have and the child they really have. Unfortunately, we as parents are far from perfect and as we journey on our road to acceptance of our situation we may make mistakes along the way. It is important that we are listened to, despite the sometimes ham-fisted way we might try to advocate for our children and understood, not as troublesome but as human beings with all our faults trying to do our best for our children.

Teachers and SNA’s are very important in the lives of all our children, however they take on a special importance for us when our children have special educational needs. A teacher once said to me as she commented on my child’s computer skills at a parent/teacher meeting, “This skill could be very important when she comes to getting a job.” My heart soared as I thought about the possibilities of my special child being able to hold down a job of some sort. I’m sure that teacher has long forgotten that passing comment, but I haven’t.

Maria Dollard

LIVING WITH EPILEPSY

Figures from the Irish Epilepsy Association Brainwave, estimate the number of people with epilepsy in Ireland to be in the region of between 30,000 and 40,000. Epilepsy causes seizures in an individual as a result of nerve cells in one area of the brain signaling abnormally to other parts of the brain. This interruption of regular brain activity may result in a seizure, which can be described as an ‘internal electrical storm’. The seizures may take on different forms depending on which part of the brain is affected. Partial seizures start in one area of the brain and can affect a person’s awareness or consciousness, sensation, movement or cognitive functions. Generalised seizures affect the whole brain and include tonic-clonic (‘grand mal’) and absence (‘petit mal’) seizures. During a tonic-clonic seizure the person loses consciousness and may fall to the ground, arms and legs may jerk, bending and relaxing rhythmically. After a few minutes the jerking slows down and stops. Bowel or bladder function sometimes is lost as the body relaxes.

Witnessing a seizure can be frightening if you haven’t seen one before. The important thing is to stay calm. Remove any dangerous or sharp objects from the person’s vicinity that may cause injury. Do not attempt to insert objects or medication into the person’s mouth, as it may cause choking. Do not move the person unless there is an immediate danger such as deep water or flames. Allow the movements to occur and do not try and prevent them. If the person has fallen on the ground you can place him in the recovery position and cushion his head. Be aware of the duration of the seizure, which should normally pass in about 1 – 4 minutes. If a person however continues in seizure and it lasts longer than normal - 5 minutes upwards- then seek medical help and call an ambulance. Afterwards calm and reassure the person, as they sometimes may be embarrassed or confused. Often once a person has had a seizure they fall into a deep sleep. It is recommended to sit with the person for about 15 minutes and move their arms or legs to ensure respiration is occurring normally.

There is still a lack of knowledge of epilepsy in Ireland and many sufferers find themselves in the situations where they are surrounded by people with little- or no- knowledge of the condition. They feel quite vulnerable therefore, and dread the thought of an oncoming seizure. Depression or low self-esteem may result. Education on the part of society and a greater openness towards the condition can help alleviate some of this distress and allow the individual to lead an active and normal life.

To give a deeper insight into the condition, what follows is an interview with Simon, a 22 year old student who was diagnosed with epilepsy when he was 10:

Q: Simon – do you remember how you were first diagnosed with epilepsy?

A: I started engaging in unusual behaviour, which my parents noticed. It manifested itself in strange facial expressions and noises similar to laughing, but in inappropriate situations e.g. in Mass. My Mum brought me to the doctor and I was referred to a neurologist who diagnosed epilepsy after doing an EEG and an MRI scan.

Q: How did it affect your life in primary school?

A: It didn’t affect me that much as I didn’t get any big seizures, mainly absence seizures. Medication controlled it well.

Q: And in secondary school?

A: It affected me more because the epilepsy was less controlled by my medication. It particularly affected me coming up to exams. The stress and tiredness caused me to have more seizures. During exams I was allowed to sit in a separate room and was given an opportunity to take breaks if I needed them.

Q: How did your peers react?

A: In secondary it wasn’t a big deal. Nobody ever slagged me. In college there were a few

issues that bothered me. On nights out, I would have to mention to people in my company that I had epilepsy. It really bothered me one night when I was back at a friend's house. I had a seizure and became very disorientated, which caused my friend to panic a little. This seizure caused me to engage in unpredictable behaviour. My neurologist told me afterwards that seizures like this are not uncommon.

Q: How do your seizures manifest themselves?

A: Mainly absences which involve a pre-seizure stage during which I feel an "aura", which is like an anticipation of the seizure coming on. Sometimes this happens, which allows me to know of the on-coming seizure, and other times I just go straight into the seizure. During the seizure stage I really don't experience it as I become totally unaware. I don't remember afterwards and people will tell me what I was doing i.e. absolutely switched off, or, for example, if I had been sending a text I could have dropped my phone but would still be moving my fingers to send the text. During the post-seizure stage I feel really, really tired and all I want to do is sleep.

Q: And what are the other kinds of seizures you experience?

A: The tonic-clonic seizures, which I only ever get at night when I'm asleep. They can sometimes be painful because you can be semi-conscious. Breathing can suddenly stop for a few minutes. It feels like a dull pain in the head spreading down to your face as if someone is hitting you in the face. It's more painful than frightening. I'm not really aware enough to think about it. After this I go into an incredibly deep sleep and when you wake up it's like you're hung over (or what I'd imagine a hangover to be like !) My joints usually ache and sometimes I have injuries from banging my arm or head off the bed. For someone with tonic-clonic seizures it's not a good idea to have any objects beside the bed.

Q: Are you on medication? Is it working? Are there any medical advances that can help?

A: I'm on lots of medication—around 5 different kinds (I wish they would work!). My neurologist is discussing a relatively new type of brain surgery that involves removing a small part of the brain that is responsible for the epilepsy. This can only be done when, after a series of intensive tests this section can be identified. It also must be an area that can be removed without causing damage to the individual. Not everyone is a candidate.

Q: What are the best measures you can take to best prevent yourself having a seizure?

A: Eat well, sleep well, take regular exercise, stay as healthy as possible and always remember to take my medication.

Q: And do you do that?

A: Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I find it difficult to follow the lifestyle.

Q: How does it affect your daily life?

A: Generally not too much, but sometimes I'm restricted in what I can do. Recently I had to give up kayaking because I was getting too many seizures. I can't attempt to drive or use machinery. But I lead a fairly active life and I'm involved in teaching filmmaking to kids in a youth club, and also involved in radio production and presenting. I still do a lot of hill walking.

Q: How do you feel people react to epilepsy?

A: People are usually good when you explain, and it's not the worst thing in the world to have. Epilepsy, if managed well, is easy to live with.

Simon's insight may help others to understand the condition better. For further information check out www.Brainwave.ie

Kirsten Conroy



79 John Street, Kilkenny
Open 10am - 6pm Mon to Sat

Hello, I'd like to introduce you to **EDUthink toys**.

Our ethos is to help children in their motor and kinesthetic development. We believe that toys should not only be fun but also educational.

Our toys are carefully selected so children learn through creative and imaginative play.

We want to encourage children to think and we carry this idea through our motto

play learn. think

We stock toys for all ages and stages
All toys are CE tested and are suitable
for children aged 0 years +

Have fun colouring your costume



play . learn . think



www.otb.ie

SNA Group Competition *in association with* **Outside The Box Learning Resources**



www.otb.ie

Outside The Box Learning Resources have kindly sponsored a selection of resources to the value of €80. To be in with a chance to win these four resources shown, send an email with **OTB.ie** in the subject line, along with a contact name to

snagroup@otb.ie

The winning entry will be drawn on November 1st 2010 and the winner will be notified by email.

10% Online Discount

Enter coupon code **SNAG10** in the shopping cart on www.otb.ie to avail of a **10% Discount** off online purchases up to Nov 15th 2010

www.otb.ie

