

Oklahoma Parents Connection

www.oklahomaparentscenter July 2008
Issue

Summer is here!

School is out and it's summertime! No rushing around getting the kids off to school! Now, it's just finding something for them to do all day long besides sitting in front of the TV. And trying to make sure they don't lose all they learned. It can be very challenging. Some communities provide summer programs and your lucky if you live in one of those communities. This is also the time when lots of folks go on vacations, go camping, swimming or have cookouts with friends and family. It can be a very exciting fun filled time for our children. With everything going on it's still very important to make sure your child reads or is read to at least 15 minutes per day. Pick a book and read it together. Times are tough these days with our economy and gas prices so high. If vacationing isn't an option for your family you can find a book about a place you would like visit and read it together!



Enjoy your summer!

Calendar of Events

"Recurring Grief Process" OK Mama's Hispanic Support Group	07/01/08
504 Workshop 6:00pm-8:00pm First United Methodist Church Piedmont, OK	07/24/08
Tecumseh Health Fair Booth 8:30am-7:30pm	07/28/08
Shawnee Health Fair Booth 9:00am-4:00pm	07/31/08
Christian Ministers Alliance "Back to school Bash"	08/02/08
"Basic Rights" Training In Miami, OK	08/07/08
Basic Rights Workshop Durant, Oklahoma	08/21/08
Basic Rights Workshop 4:00-5:30 Alva, Oklahoma	09/29/08
Transition Training 6:30-8:00 Alva, Oklahoma	09/29/08
"On the Road Family Perspective" Conference with Oasis Northwest Technology Center in	09/30/08

Welcome Our New Associates

Velvet Brown-Watts
Information and Training Specialist
Tulsa, OK

Latisha Coats
Business Manager
Holdenville, OK

Cassandra Elledge
Information and Training Specialist
& Web Tech Specialist
Miami, OK

Sandie Foote
Information and Training Specialist
& Part C Coordinator
Edmond, OK

The "Count Me In" Puppets are here!

Let's Celebrate!

They have arrived!

Their names are Mitch, Jay, Sally, Carmen, and Corey and they are some unusual newcomers to Oklahoma who are available to come to your school or community group and present disability awareness and bullying prevention program called "Count Me In". They sound like they are ordinary, everyday children. However, they are different from the rest of the school population. They won't move or talk unless brought to life by a puppeteer.



The puppets, explained Nancy Garner, Director of Special Projects who coordinates the "Count Me In" program, are available to help students understand and be more comfortable with their classmates who are different. They may learn differently, portray cultural or ethnic differences, or have a visible or hidden disability. We expect that children may be surprised to learn of all the things that the puppets CAN do instead of just thinking of what they can't do because of their disabilities." Just like their human counterparts, the puppets have lively personalities and are not about to let their disabilities stand in the way of doing things that children without disabilities like to do. They play baseball, swim, and argue with their brothers and sisters just like all the other children.

The "Count Me In" puppets have been brought to Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Parents Center from the Pacer Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Count Me In" programs have been presented to more than 350,000 people annually in the greater metropolitan area. The OPC puppet project has been funded through a grant from the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.



The puppets are 3 foot tall hand and rod puppets representing a diverse group of children. They also represent various disabilities: Gina is blind, Jay is deaf, Sally has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair, Corey has Down syndrome, Mitch has a learning disability, and Carmen may talk about her epilepsy. The puppets are the same age as the students in the group they visit. The program is made up of three or four skits, depending on the age of the audience. Time is allowed for audience questions and reactions. The entire program for young children (preschool-pre-K) lasts about 45 minutes and up to one hour for older students. Puppeteers are volunteers who have been specially trained. The puppets will be ready to perform beginning August 18, 2008. Volunteers are needed. Interested schools, organizations, or individuals wanting more information are encouraged to call us,

OPC, toll free 1-877-553-4332 or locally 405-379-6015

From Our Executive Director



The Oklahoma Parents Center is very fortunate to have an exceptional relationship with the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Misty Kimbrough, Assistant State Superintendent has always been especially supportive and helpful to our project. Her devotion to children has been an inspiration to me as director and to our staff and board of directors as well.

We are delighted to announce that April 1, 2008, OPC received a grant from the Oklahoma State Department of Education which will allow us to staff underserved areas, provide our "Count ME IN" puppet presentations, add a Part C Coordinator to work with early intervention and early childhood issues and provide training in these areas. We are additionally expanding our Community IEP Partner Program, and will be hosting an additional state conference in Tulsa for the spring of 2009 among other things.

OPC staff and board of directors would like to express a heartfelt thank you to the Oklahoma State Department of Education for their support and assistance in serving the children and families of Oklahoma.

In gratitude,

Sharon House
Executive Director
Oklahoma Parents Center

Steps to help your child prepare for a successful school year

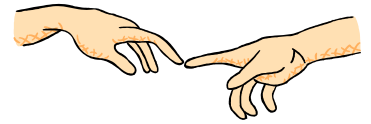
1. Make an appointment to meet your child's teacher. (Provide a copy of the IEP and other necessary information about child).
2. Learn school policies and follow them.
3. Model respect for teachers and encourage your child to do the same.
4. Create an environment that is conducive to learning at home
5. Celebrate effort, rather than grades, learning and test scores.
6. Encourage your child to pursue his or her interests. Try not to pressure your child into pursuing your interests or interests that you wish you had pursued.
7. Reinforce learning out of the classroom through extracurricular activities, family activities and one-on-one time.
8. Listen to what your child is saying and learn to be a good observer. Watch for signs that your child is developing new interests and then nurture them.
9. Model lifelong learning. Nurture your own interests and engage in learning activities that expand your interests and build skills.
10. Engage your child in conversation, but don't grill him or her. Children often are more likely to tell a parent about their day when they are engaged in another activity, such as setting the table or taking a walk after supper.
11. Try not to make homework an issue. Allow a child to take the responsibility for what he or she does - or doesn't - do.
12. Invoke *Grandma's rule*: Eat your veggies before dessert and finish your homework before moving on to the fun stuff.
13. Get involved in your child's school by volunteering in his/her classroom or other areas. By getting to know the school faculty and other parents provides valuable resources for helping your child.

Children may not always be excited about a new school year but with support and guidance this could be the best year ever.

Keep Therapy Going Over School Breaks

You've fought to get in-school therapy in your child's IEP, and that's a great thing. The services are free, frequent, and take place where your child's already going to be. They're also hard to monitor, hard to enforce, and at the mercy of therapist's calendar and competing school priorities. Not to mention the fact that they may stop dead during school vacations. Since breaks are unavoidable, you may have to step in from time to time to keep your child's progress going. These do-it-yourself techniques for four common school-based therapies may not be as good as the real thing, but at least, for a change, you're in control.

Five Ways to Keep Sensory Integration Therapy Going Over School Breaks



Occupational therapy with a sensory integration approach often has a strong element of parental involvement, with Mom and Dad asked to perform tasks like brushing and joint compression. There's more you can do, though, whether filling in for the therapist during school breaks or just augmenting the work being done throughout the year. Here are five easy ways to get started.

1. Use "The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun" as your textbook. The sequel to *The Out-of-Sync Child* by Carol Stock Kranowitz is full of easy exercises for parents to do with children to augment sensory integration therapy. These can be as easy as setting a child atop a rumbly washing machine, as makeshift as kicking a paper bag, or as orchestrated as putting together a "touch pantry." But it's all enjoyable, doable, and expert-approved.

2. Order some professional equipment. Catalogs like *Abilitations*, *Therapro* and *Sensory Comfort* allow you to order the same sensory integration tools and toys that occupational therapists use. This equipment isn't cheap, but may give you a springboard to starting fun sessions with your child and seeing what you can improvise along the same lines. Check the article "Make Your Own Therapy Tools and Toys" on About.com for some do-it-yourself variations.

3. Keep the pressure on. Deep pressure is helpful for many problems with sensory integration, especially those involving the tactile and proprioceptive senses. Administering it can be as simple as pressing down on your child's shoulders or giving a good hard hug. Try wrapping your child up like a burrito as a (sure to be oft-repeated) therapy game, or let your child self-administer pressure to his or her joints by doing heavy work like lugging boxes or vacuuming.

Try wrapping your child up like a burrito as a therapy game.

4. Read the IEP. If your child has an IEP, read it over again -- just as you'd expect any therapist working with your youngster to do. Review any occupational therapy goals that apply to sensory integration or processing. Review academic and behavioral goals, too, and think about how your child's sensory challenges impact these. Use what you've read to choose the things you want to work on with your child, whether they're specifically what the therapist targeted or not.

5. Teach your child self-regulation. The *How Does Your Engine Run* program helps kids learn about the way their sensory systems can get out of control, and how to keep their trains on track. If the train metaphor used in this program doesn't interest your child, try applying it to something that will captivate his or her imagination -- a car, maybe, or a computer that freezes when overloaded. The more kids understand about their own sensory systems, the closer they'll come to being at-home therapists for themselves.

Five Ways to Keep Speech Therapy Going Over School Breaks



Professional speech therapy, at school or in a private office, is invaluable to a child with speech and language problems. But inevitably, there are breaks in service. School's out. Therapist quits or goes on maternity leave and the school is slow with the replacement. Private therapist goes on vacation, or relocates and you have to find a new one. It happens. To keep your child moving forward, try these five ideas for at-home therapy. You'll be surprised how much you can help.

- 1. Use "Teach Me How to Say It Right" as your textbook.** This slim, helpful volume offers numerous exercises for evaluating your child's speech needs and meeting them through everyday situations. If you want to get started in a hurry, jump to Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for a wealth of fun techniques to improve your child's speech and language.
- 2. Order some professional equipment.** Speech-therapy catalogs like *The Speech Bin*, *LinguiSystems* and *Academic Communication Associates*, as well as *The Library of Speech-Language Pathology* book club, allow you to order the same books and games that school speech therapists use. These tools are not cheap, but may give you a springboard to starting fun sessions with your child and seeing what you can improvise along the same lines.
- 3. Read the IEP.** If your child has an IEP, read it over again -- just as you'd expect any therapist working with your youngster to do. Review the speech goals, along with any techniques or yardsticks that are listed with them. Review academic and behavioral goals, too, and think about how your child's speech challenges impact these. Use what you've read to choose the things you want to work on with your child, whether it's just what the therapist has targeted or not.
- 4. Teach figures of speech.** One area that might be causing your child problems in using and understanding language is figures of speech and figurative language. Your child's speech therapist may not be putting much work into this area, but it's an easy thing for you as a parent to target, both during speech-therapy breaks and all through the year. Follow tips on teaching figures of speech using the book *What Did You Say? What Do You Mean?*
- 5. Expose your child to language.** Do it all the time. Talk to your child. Narrate everything you're doing. Identify the words for even the simplest objects and actions in your child's environment, and do it again. Read with your child. Read *to* your child. Play word games. Watch TV with your child and talk about what the characters are talking about. Ask your child questions that require more than a yes/no answer. Invite your child to ask you questions. Talk. Talk, talk, talk. Practice makes everything easier, eventually.

Just for Kids who Stutter

I believe that I am a penguin beneath my human skin. Penguins have wings but not the ability to fly. I have a mouth but I do not have the luxury to talk without a care. My wings were shortened throughout my youth. The de-evolution of my confidence forced me to stay grounded and not fly with my brothers, my sisters, my cousins. The tuxedo-wearing birds replace the flying with swimming, as I have replaced my stuttering with a new approach to talking. With this new mode of sustaining, I can now dive into language and speech and survive among the icy waters that I frequently belong to. This can sometimes be a cold place and only if I explore the depths of the ocean that surround it can I find my place in the world, and only when I accept this place can I be admired for my swimming and not my flying. Perhaps those who have the sky and look down can admire me gliding through the waters.

Ben

Edmond, Okla.

Taken from The Stuttering Foundation website <http://www.stutteringhelp.org>

Five Ways to Keep Physical Therapy Going Over School Breaks



School-based physical therapy often focuses on gross motor skills and mobility. Your child may have sessions once or twice a week, or participate in adaptive physical education classes led by a PT. When therapy stops for school breaks, you can keep the progress going by working with your child at home. Here are five ways to start.

- 1. Get in the swim.** A pool is a great place to work on strengthening muscles in a free and weightless environment. Whether your child enjoys swimming or water aerobics or just moving through the water, pool time can be therapy time while seeming like nothing but fun time.
- 2. Order some professional equipment.** Catalogs like *Abilitations*, *Sportime* and *WisdomKing* allow you to order the same equipment that physical therapists use. These tools aren't cheap, but may give you a springboard to starting fun sessions with your child and seeing what you can improvise along the same lines.
- 3. Read the IEP.** If your child has an IEP, read it over again -- just as you'd expect any therapist working with your youngster to do. Review any physical therapy goals, including any benchmarks or smaller goals under them. Review academic and behavioral goals, too, and think about how your child's gross motor challenges impact these. Use what you've read to choose the things you want to work on with your child, whether they're specifically what the therapist targeted or not.
- 4. Work out with your child.** Exercise packs a lot of physical therapy punch. You can make it as simple as a round of jumping jacks, toe touches and windmills every morning, or try some of the programs in your community. Just a walk around the neighborhood or taking stairs instead of the elevator can be of value -- for all family members.
- 5. Make a game of it.** From organized sports to a simple round of catch in the backyard, games are therapy for kids with gross motor challenges and problems with strength and movement. You'll want to be sure to adapt the activity to your child's particular needs and weaknesses -- the PE Central site has good suggestions for adapting activities for kids with special needs -- but if you can keep things within appropriate bounds and avoid frustration, you can turn therapy into a great time for you and your child.

BULLYING PREVENTION WEEK - October 5-11, 2008

Oklahoma Parents Center is partnering with Pacer Center in Minnesota to present the first annual Oklahoma Bullying Prevention Awareness Week October 5-11, 2008. The week will include special presentations, activities, contests, online toolkits and bullying prevention training. Watch for more information to come. Also, please note the following important information from the Pacer Center such as resources for parents and professionals. Visit the PACER Bullying Prevention Website: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying>

PACER Kids
Center's **KIDS**
AGAINST
BULLYING

[Kids Against Bullying Web site](http://www.PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org)

PACER has created an animated website www.PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org for elementary school students. It is a creative and informative resource to educate students about bullying prevention and provide methods to respond to bullying situations. The site features an animated cast of characters, information, celebrity videos, Webisodes, games, animation, contest and other activities. Parents and professionals will find helpful tips, intervention strategies, and resources for use at home or school.

Five Ways to Keep Occupational Therapy Going Over School Breaks

School occupational therapists often work to help children with fine motor delays get caught up with skills like drawing and writing and cutting, and that's all well and good -- for whenever school's in session. But during school breaks, or breaks in the availability of therapists, those abilities may be left to lag. To keep your child moving forward, try these five ideas for at-home occupational therapy. Strengthening fine-motor skills is well within your ability.



1. Have arts-and-crafts time. Many of the skills that occupational therapists target are taught through art. Your child may learn to copy shapes, hold a writing utensil or use a scissors without even realizing it's therapy. Fun art projects are something that's easy for you to replicate at home.

2. Work on writing. Printing or cursive can be a huge chore for kids with fine motor delays, and improving control of those skills is a major OT goal. Work on your child's penmanship at home with a program like Handwriting Without Tears that offers books and tools for making writing more natural and comfortable, or just incorporate writing into fun activities by having your child form letters or words on a piece of butcher paper taped to the wall, or by running a finger through shaving cream or finger paints.

If your child has an IEP, read it over again

3. Read the IEP. If your child has an IEP, read it over again -- just as you'd expect any therapist working with your youngster to do. Review the occupational therapy goals, along with any techniques or yardsticks that are listed with them. Review academic and behavioral goals, too, and think about how your child's OT challenges impact these. Use what you've read to choose the things you want to work on with your child, whether they're specifically what the therapist targeted or not.

4. Order some professional equipment. Occupational-therapy catalogs like *Abilitations*, *Therapro* and *Southpaw Enterprises* allow you to order the same equipment that school occupational therapists use. These tools are not cheap, but may give you a springboard to starting fun sessions with your child and seeing what you can improvise along the same lines. See our listings of Special-Needs School Tools for a few goodies to start with.

5. Play with your child. Since the business of childhood is play, most games of early childhood have an occupational therapy component. Simply throwing a ball with your child can improve eye-hand coordination, patience, and balance. Jump rope, Ring Around the Rosie, London Bridge, bean-bag toss, hopscotch, calisthenics, swinging, play-ground activities -- all can provide an OT workout without your child even knowing it. Having fun together is always the best kind of therapy.

Bullying Prevention Web Site for Teens

Help PACER Create Its New Bullying Prevention Web Site for Teens

PACER is creating an exciting new bullying prevention Web site for teens—and you can help. Designed to reach, teach, and empower teens, the site will feature compelling stories from students, parents, educators, and community partners across the nation when it launches this summer.

Submit a video, story, poem, artwork, or audio clip expressing your ideas on bullying prevention. It can be about what happened to you or someone else, how you feel about bullying, how you think it affects students and schools, what you have done to prevent bullying, or what can be done to prevent bullying. We want to hear from everyone—teens, parents, teachers, and others with great ideas who want to improve the world. For information on how to submit your story just visit the PACER website at <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/mhs/index.asp> or email to bullying411@pacer.org



Anna, a 6th grade student from New York, uses artwork to tell her story.

Oklahoma Parents Connection

We hope you find the information provided in this newsletter useful and maybe a little entertaining. Our newsletter publication will be quarterly. You may view it online from our website at any time in pdf format. You may also receive a hard copy mailed directly to you. We are requesting a donation of ten dollars for a hard copy. Please mail a money order or check made payable to the Oklahoma Parents Center at our address below.

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Dear Advocate,

My child isn't doing well in school and I suspect a learning disability may be the cause. I have talked to his teacher and the counselor about the issue but nothing seems to be happening. It's not getting better. What is the next step to get some help for my child?

Clueless in Oklahoma

Dear Clueless,

This is a question we get very often. The first step in the process is that you, the parent, should request **IN WRITING** that the school do a comprehensive evaluation of your child. Some parents find it useful to use a form letter when communicating with the school. Please visit our website for further information.



Dear Advocate,

As a parent of a child on an IEP, do I have the right to have copies of assessments done by the school district prior to an IEP meeting?

Mary Lynn of Paris

Dear Mary Lynn,

Yes, the (LEA) Local Education Agency is required to provide copies of assessments prior to an IEP, (suggestion: a minimum of 5 days)!

Ellen Kimbrell is our *Ask the Advocate!* She has been an advocate with the Oklahoma Parents Center for eight years. Ellen also is a parent of a child with a disability. Thank you, Ellen!