

AUTISM TODAY
PRESENTS

TAP
MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2006
VOLUME 2 ISSUE 3
\$6.00 US

The **AUTISM** magazine
TAP INTO IT.
perspective



SURFERS HEALING



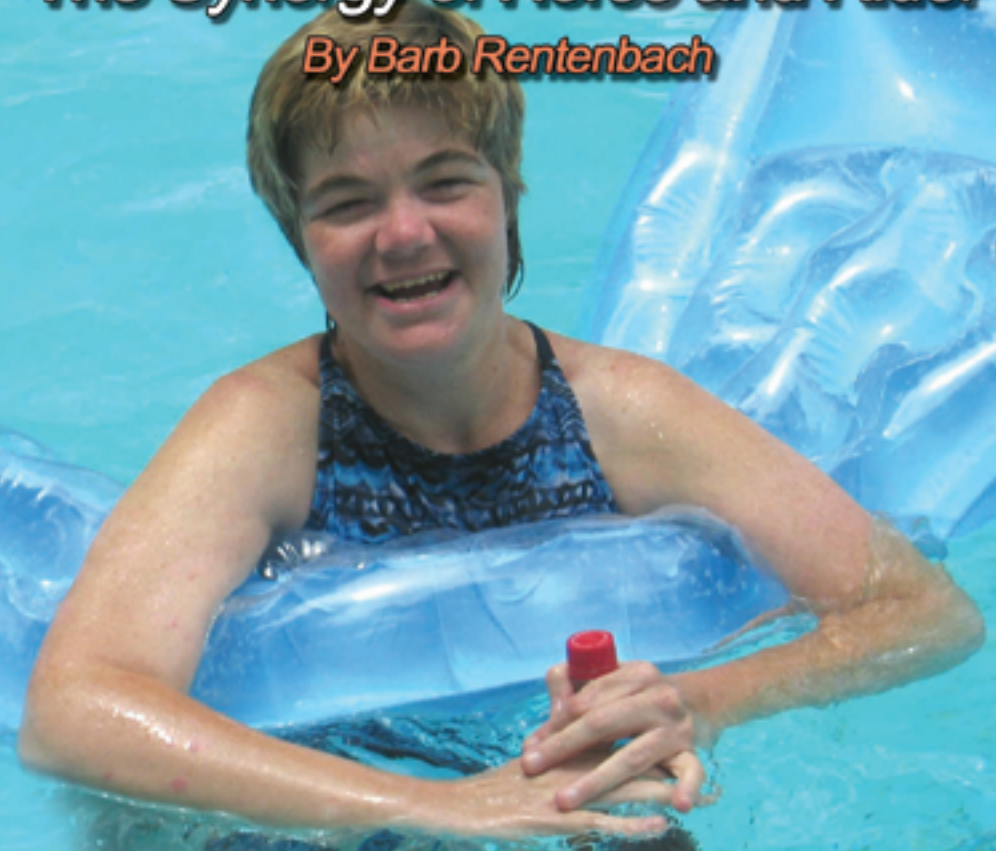
You Eat So Healthy



THE BUDDY BIKE

INSIDE AUTISM
The Synergy of Horse and Rider

By Barb Rentenbach



*Working with Older Children,
Adolescents, and Adults with ASD*

The Autism Perspective magazine
TAPS INTO a new direction



THE AUTISM PERSPECTIVE® - TAP MAGAZINE®

SUMMER • 2006 - PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

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A TAX EXEMPT 501 (c) (3) CALIFORNIA
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The Autism Perspective®
is a magazine about
options...

*The Autism Perspective's
mission is to support those
living with or touched by
Autism Spectrum Disorders
by providing unbiased
information regarding
available treatments,
services, resources,
and options, along with
providing a forum for
individuals to share their
points of view about their
autism experience.*

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AUTISM & EVOLUTION

With autism on the rise, increasing numbers of parents struggle to find ways of coping with the myriad of confusing and challenging problems facing their children. While science has yet to discover the cause of autism, we do know that one of the areas of neurological impairment an autistic child experiences is an inability to self-regulate sensory states, often resulting in “sensory overload” states of fright, flight and fight.

Research has shown that the sensory channels that are most often impaired in children with autism are the auditory and tactile sensory channels. This impairment can result in a child experiencing actual “pain” when exposed to specific types of auditory or touch stimuli,



Katie and Cris



Cris Rowan

necessitating treatments to either protect or desensitize the autistic child’s central nervous system. Those familiar with Temple Grandin may remember her use of deep pressure techniques by using a self-made “squeeze” machine that assisted her to self-regulate and remain calm.

To better understand the evolution of the autistic child, we need to look at what has happened in our technology-evolving world over the past 100 years. For hundreds of thousands of years, human beings have engaged in heavy work, and sensory stimulation was nature-based and fairly benign: chopping wood, hauling water, plowing fields...listening to, looking at, and smelling nature.

Recent advances in technology and transportation have resulted in a physically sedentary human body that is bombarded with chaotic and complex sensory stimulation. While schools are reducing recess and gym time, homes are increasing TV and video game time. Continued budget cutbacks have resulted in reduced organized sports at recess, as well as overcrowded classrooms with subsequent “caged animal” symptoms in children (anger, anxiety, chewing, depression). In the average Canadian home, studies show children spend an average of six hours per day “hooked up” to some form of technology.

Biologically, children’s nervous systems need excessive and intense touch and movement to develop properly; swinging, hanging, jumping, pushing and spinning are all necessary movements for developing vestibular, touch and fusiform sensory systems. If these systems don’t develop properly, the

SM OLUTION

By Cris Rowan,
Pediatric Occupational Therapist

higher level auditory and visual systems are also affected.

Remember merry-go-rounds, tall swings, climbing ropes? Remember our parents kicking us outside after school and all day on weekends and summer? We need to wonder what we are doing to children with autism by providing them with a physically sedentary yet sensory frenzied existence. What will be the consequences for autistic children if we continue? Are these negative results of an increasing use of technology one of the reasons why autism is on the rise?

Although the answers to these questions are largely speculative, Cris Rowan, a pediatric occupational therapist, believes that our world is not adapting as well as we would hope to the consequences of sedentary yet frenzied lifestyles. In the non-autistic population, Cris observes 30% of primary classroom children have attention problems, with energy levels ranging from sleepy and lethargic to charged and wired, and 20% have printing delays, primarily in the areas of motor planning.

As a society of parents, teachers and professionals, we need to work together to address how we can assist children with autism to balance sensory stimulation with heavy work, to increase attention and reduce sensory overload (fright, flight, fight). For example, at home, a parent might allow one hour of "box time" (TV, video game, computer) for one hour of heavy work (bike up hill, haul wood, dig in garden). Schools could work toward increasing classroom-based resistive type movement through desk isometrics (hand push/pull), or through re-

cess/gym activities (tug of war, climbing ropes). Schools could also provide sensory stimulation reduction for children with autism by decreasing classroom visual and auditory "clutter," creating sensory hideouts, or improve children's ability to attend by utilizing sensory tools for optimizing energy states (squishies, chewies, smellies).



Cris instructing a grade three classroom on Zone'in concepts



In order to help these children, Cris has developed two new revolutionary products called Zone'in and Move'in (www.zonein.ca).

Zone'in is an energy-based program, derived from sensory integration theory, and is designed to improve children's learning by maximizing their attention in class and home settings. Zone'in teaches children how to use sensory motor techniques and tools to change their body energy, which enables them to get "Zone'in and Learn"! Children learn how they need to increase heavy work (push, pull, lift and carry) by using isometric home and classroom techniques, and are challenged to balance sensory stimuli (TV, video games) with heavy work.

Move'in is a printing assessment and intervention program, derived from fine-motor skill development theory, and is designed to improve students' printing and reading. Children play a fun game called Ready, Set, Move'in and improve motor planning using a computer program called Play'in the Lines. Children learn how to use their bodies to print, along with a variety of techniques and tools, so they can get "Move'in" toward easier printing and reading!

While we may not be able to (or want to?) stop the pace of evolution of technology, we can accommodate society changes by teaching our children with autism to start listening to their bodies, and understanding more about their body energy. As families, we need to intersperse our daily lives with increased heavy work and need to moderate daily amounts of sensory stimulation, to get back on the natural evolutionary track. **TAP**