

"Connections"

Letter From The Director - 'Time To Reflect'

Reflecting on the recent passing of Apple founder and visionary Steve Jobs, it seems to me people were touched by him not only because his computerized tools allowed individuals to be more communicative, organized and expressive in their work and personal lives, but his work really did bring about some unprecedented changes in society. I appreciate how the field I'm dedicated to was affected by his forward thinking inventions. Who'd have thought that an iPad would have such communicative and organizational importance to children with difficulty with social relating, communication and learning?

Steven Jobs passing triggered a memory of another computer science 'geek' who was well thought of and whose last words, titled, "The Last Lecture" went viral. Randy Pausch set out to leave something of himself for his three young children, to help them with their growing up, and a final farewell to his students and colleagues. Pausch valued what most professors considered their ultimate goal for their students, "learning how to learn," but not as essential as **'character building'**—developing reliable self-evaluation skills.

Pausch set out to provide feedback opportunities within his students so that they could hear how their peers viewed them. His interest for a particular student had to do with whether their peers perceived them as: hard working or not; working in a focused or distracted manner; easy or difficult to work with; contributing to a team effort or functioning as an island unto themselves. The personal feedback from their peers was for some a 'kick-starting' experience, as it was often through their peers' eyes that they became motivated to want to become more self-aware and self-reflective. This capacity for reliable self-reflection is so key because if we can't accurately trust our own assessments, how can we tell if we're getting better or worse?

We strive at VHAP to develop this feedback process within our professional staff teams, putting a high value on self-reflection toward 'character building,' and on our staff developing their own reliable self-evaluation skills. Our other tools and intervention strategies come from this foundation in self awareness and ability to attune to the children and parents. We set out to create this feedback loop with the parent/teacher so that we can support them in the effective use of intervention strategies to help develop their guiding relationship with their child/student.

Our overall goal at VHAP is to create a community of professionals and parents communicating with one another while furthering our skills towards understanding to this very challenging work.

Deryl Goldenberg, Ph.D.

Questions or comments? Please e-mail us at Info@VHAP.org or call 818.386.1094.



Verdugo Hills Autism Project

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Director's Spotlight

Raising an ASD child is among the most demanding and stressful tasks a family faces.

Issues you may be experiencing:

- Excessive worry and/or depression.
- Disconnection from your spouse.
- Feeling ineffective as a parent.
- Lacking a support system.

We offer individual or family counseling to parents and/or siblings. Contact: dg@vhap.org.

Deryl Goldenberg, Ph.D.

VHAP Clinical Director



It's our goal to make positive changes in a child's and family's life.

"Connections"

Parenting A Child With Special Needs

By Allison Conrad, M.A., Parent of a Special Needs Child & VHAP Case Supervisor

As we all know that parenting a child with special needs is stressful. At times, we may feel resentful, guilty and angry knowing that we have no choice but to take care of everyone else's needs. We are chronically exhausted and forget that we, too, need time to recharge and take care of ourselves.

I'm sure that you have had similar fantasies as I have, wanting to continue to drive anywhere but home, avoiding the chaos that awaits you the moment you walk in the door. Knowing that, as soon as you open your front door, you will be "morphed" into the roles of caretaker, advocate, negotiator, disciplinarian, and teacher; meeting everyone else's demands except for your own.

You need a survival plan. For me, this process has taken almost three difficult years to develop with the help of my daughter's psychiatrist, educational therapist, and a very dear and wise friend. I still don't consider myself a "master implementer". I'm human, and when I'm overly exhausted, I still tend to revert to my old, ineffective methods. I've learned, though, to own up and acknowledge the mistakes I've made with my child. So what have I learned? Just that as I teach my students meta-cognitive coping techniques, I, too, have had to learn similar strategies to use myself. I have to continually review and practice these skills. Even with all of my training, it still isn't easy.

Plan to Care for Yourself: (Part 1)

- You know the basics, try to exercise at least three times per week, eat a healthy diet, and get enough sleep. Let the little things slide, remind yourself that eventually things will get done.
- Remind yourself that you'll have good days and not-so-good days; it's perfectly normal to experience lots of positive and negative emotions.
- Some parents have found it useful to create a box where they record on note cards the events that their children have engaged in that have made them smile or when their child demonstrates a new skill; and then reading these note cards on those difficult days.
- Practice strategies that will help you stay calm and regulated. For me, metered breathing exercises help. When things become incredibly difficult at home and I need some space, I take out the vacuum. Not only do I end up with clean floors, I also am able to buy some "time" as the noise from the vacuum always sends my daughter running to her room, giving both of us some needed time-out.
- Carve out some time for yourself, and take a break. For me, I've bartered babysitting time with a neighbor, in return for tutoring her child.
- Learn effective techniques to advocate for your child. Go online, order from Wrightslaw.com "From Emotions to Advocacy."
- Celebrate your successes!

➤ Look for Part 2 (Develop an Action Plan) and Part 3 (Plan to Help Your Child Understand Cause-and-Effect Relationships) at VHAP.org.



Verdugo Hills Autism Project

Early Intervention

VHAP offers specialized early intervention services for children birth to 3 years of age. Developmental constrictions and deficits specific to each individual child and the resulting impact on the child's family are identified through a comprehensive assessment and addressed through specified goals. Parent training and participation is a key component of this program. Our multi-disciplinary approach coordinates efforts to tailor-fit the program to the child's needs.

Friends Play Klub

VHAP's Friends Play Klub is a parent-participation social skills program which focuses on helping children improve their social relationship skills.

This program provides opportunities for children to master their social and communication deficits as a result of their diagnosis. Children will be provided the tools to utilize both functional and relative skills of social interaction which are fundamental to social relationships. This group is committed to meeting each child at their own developmental level.

➤ Visit us online @ VHAP.org