

ACT-NOW

FACT SHEET 31

*Community – Home Links
in the Preschool Years:
Book About Me*



A Monash University, Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology Project
Funded by the State Government of Victoria, Department of Human Services

Dr Avril Brereton & Ms Katie Broadbent

© Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology
Monash University

Community-Home Links in the Preschool Years: Book about Me










The preschool years are a busy time for families, and even more so for families who have a child with autism. Strong communication links between the main carers and the child's community links (Child care, kinder, FDC, respite etc) are an important aspect of successful inclusion and understanding of the child with autism. There are a number of different strategies that can facilitate successful links between the home and the community:

- Regular Program Support Group meetings
- Inclusion Communication sheet
- Generic Communication Book
- Book about Me

Regular Program Support Group (PSG) Meetings

A PSG meeting involves the child's teacher, the child's main carer/s and usually involves a representative of the child's early intervention program or therapy service, and may also involve a parent advocate. These meetings are designed to discuss the child's learning needs and opportunities, set clear and realistic learning goals and discuss any other issues related to the child within a caring team environment. PSG meetings should be set up at a minimum once a term.

Inclusion Communication Sheet

Name: _____				
This is what I did at kinder today:				
play dough 	painting 	blocks 	books 	cut & paste 
music 	ball games 	water play 	construction 	other...
Comments: _____ _____				

- designed to develop communication links between the community and home environments for children with autism who are verbal and children who are non-verbal.

For children who are non-verbal, carers can talk about the child's experiences at kinder with the child, once the child is home, which can help to increase the child's communication skills.

© Irabina Childhood Autism Services, 2007

For children who are verbal, this strategy can help to develop conversational skills.

Teachers working in the child care or kindergarten sector have a wealth of knowledge about child development. However, teachers usually need support in understanding autism and developing a range of strategies that might help the child entering their environment. Most importantly, teachers need specific and helpful information about the individual child they will be working with. The *Book about Me* is one effective way of sharing this type of information:

Book about Me

The book contains specific information about the child that the carer wants anyone working with their child to know and understand. The book travels with the child and is, therefore, available to relevant adults working or caring for the child in that environment.

The *Book about Me* is developed by the carer from the child's perspective. It is written in simple language and contains photos of the child, and examples of strategies being used to help the child. A *Book about Me* focuses on the following questions:

- How does the child communicate?
- What is the child communicating?
- What can we do in response?
- What are the child's strengths and favourite activities?
- What are the child's fears/anxieties/dislikes?

A *Book about Me* has been used successfully with many children with autism. There is no "correct" way to write a *Book about Me* but many are written following a basic format.

An example of a *Book about Me* text for a child with high-functioning autism:

P1: Hi! My name is Matthew. When you talk to me, say my name first and wait for me to look at you.

⇒ Telling the reader about Matthew's receptive language skills and difficulties with conversation

P2: My favourite thing is cars. I love to talk about cars, I love to play with cars, I love to draw cars and I can even read about cars! I am very good at some things but there are other things I find really hard.

⇒ Informing the reader about Matthew's interests and hinting that his interest in cars can become an obsession. The reader now knows Matthew has the above-average skill of being able to read. The reader also begins to get a picture that Matthew is a child who has some strong skills, but that his developmental profile is scattered, and not all his skills are above average or even age-appropriate.

P3: I don't like doing activities that I think are "childish", tasks that I can't see a point to doing, or activities that I think I might find hard. I tend to avoid painting, pretend play, home corner and art and craft activities.

⇒ The reader now has specific information about Matthew's dislikes. The activities Matthew avoids are all open-ended tasks where imagination and creativity are involved. Information from page 1 and this page provide the reader with a good basis for activities that will engage Matthew, and things to avoid when first getting to know him.

P4: Help me to join in these activities by providing me with a motivator. A schedule card works really well for this. Give me a "jobs list" of 3-4 activities you would like me to complete for the session, and the final activity is to be one of my favourites. This way, I don't mind trying new things because there's a reward at the end!

⇒ Having described the difficulties Matthew has, the reader now has some strategies to help him.

P5: I get frightened and anxious easily. There are some things I *really* don't like. These are:

- Children approaching me to play
- Balloons
- Cakes being cut in front of me (I like things to be "whole" and become upset when they are "broken")
- When planned things get changed
- When I try to do something and I can't

⇒ It's important for the reader to understand the specific situations that will make Matthew anxious. Without this information, the reader would find it very difficult to predict the situations that upset Matthew.

P6: When I am upset I might:

- Hit the person who upset me
- Try to "fix" what I perceive to be "wrong"
- Run around in circles screaming
- Cry
- Try to escape from the situation
- Call out "Thunderbirds are go!" very loudly

I am still learning what to do when I am upset. I will need your help.

⇒ This provides the reader with helpful information about what to expect when Matthew is upset. It will also help the reader to

interpret these behaviours as a sign of anxiety or distress rather than “attention-seeking” or “naughty” behaviours when they occur.

- P7: Please don't touch me when I am upset- it makes me more upset. Talking to me isn't helpful either when I am upset; I find it really hard to listen at these times. These are the things you can do to help me:
- Let me hold one of my fluffy toys from my bag
 - Give me a matchbox car to roll on my hand
 - Let me read my “Wheels” car magazine for a while by myself
 - Let me go into a quiet space for a few minutes

⇒ This information is vital to assist the reader to understand how to help Matthew when he is upset. The suggestions are not what an adult would normally do to settle a distressed child but are important and helpful for Matthew.

- P8: I'm REALLY good at some things other kids my age can't do yet. I can read by myself, write stories, draw great pictures, talk about cars using the proper mechanical terms, use the computer all by myself and use tools to fix and construct things.

⇒ This page is designed to provide the reader with positive information about Matthew, his strengths and interests and how to engage him.

- P9: Help me to enjoy kinder and use my great skills by:
- Challenging me with tricky puzzles
 - Asking me to teach one other child about how to complete a trickier puzzle or use the computer or build a complex structure
 - Asking me to read a book to the class every now and then

⇒ Successful inclusion with peers can be hard to facilitate. This page provides the reader with information about how to help include Matthew with his peers. It also promotes a strengths-based approach to viewing his skills and difficulties at kinder.

Each page is accompanied by a supporting photograph of Matthew or the strategy being written about. Page 4 includes a photo of the schedule card Matthew is currently using. Page 7 includes photos of the toys that help Matthew to calm himself.

An example of a *Book about Me* text for a child with autism and developmental delay who is non-verbal:

P1: Hi! My name is Pattie. When you talk to me, please get down to my eye level so that I can see your face. I like sentences to be short and clear.

⇒ Informing the reader about Pattie's receptive language skills and difficulties with understanding instructions and language.

P2: My favourite thing is my orange wheelbarrow! I also like to play with water, sand, bead frames, spinning toys and balls. I am learning to ride my bike!

⇒ The reader has a number of ways to engage Pattie because they now know what he likes to do.

P3: I communicate by smiling, turning my head away, laughing, eye contact, babbling, biting and using words- Dad, hello, bye-bye, Pattie, Oh dear

⇒ The reader is beginning to develop a sense of Pattie's expressive communication skills and words that Pattie can say.

P4: I get frightened and anxious easily. There are some things I *really* don't like. These are:

- Big groups of children
- Parties
- Singing "Happy Birthday"
- People moving my lines when I have lined my toys up

⇒ The reader now has an idea of Pattie's fears and can attempt to avoid these whenever possible.

P5: When I am upset I might cry, bite, throw things, drop to the floor, scream or run. OBJECTS, not people usually help to calm me down. You can help me by:

- Giving me my Dad's old wallet to hold
- Giving me my red football to squeeze
- Wrapping me up in a blanket
- Singing "Twinkle Twinkle"
- Letting me play with warm water

⇒ Pattie has unusual ways of calming himself. It is very important for him and for the reader to understand these specific strategies to help Pattie in the most effective way.

P6: Sometimes I find it hard to share and I don't like it when other children get too close to me. I am learning to share by playing turn taking games like rolling a ball. Mum says "My turn...your turn" as we roll it to each other. It helps me to wait when I can see a picture of the wait circle (picture inserted here), and somebody says, "Pattie, wait" as they show me the circle and hold up their hand.

⇒ The reader now knows about one of the main social goals that Pattie is working on, and how best to help Pattie learn how to share/wait/take turns.

P7: I am learning how to make choices. If you show me two different things that I can choose from, I will reach for the one that I want. I need lots of practise, so give me choices throughout the day with food and toys.

⇒ Information about another goal that Pattie is working on, and a clear way to develop skills in this area so that everyone is being consistent.

P8: I am learning to play with different toys. My favourite things are dress-ups and balls. I can play with them when I have finished something hard like puzzles, pasting, blocks or play-dough. When I have finished, I put my toy in the "finished" box (pictured)

⇒ A play-based goal Pattie is working on, and an accompanying strategy to develop his skills

A *Book about Me* can be a wonderful tool for sharing important information about a child, so that all who work with and care for the child are supporting the child using consistent communication and behaviour strategies.

To view an example of another *Book About Me*, see below:

Hi!

My name is Michael.

When you talk to me, please get down to my eye level so that I can see your face.

I like sentences to be short and clear.





My favourite thing is cars.
I also like to play with:
Water
Sand
Bead frames
Balls
Spinning toys

I am learning to paint!

I communicate by



Smiling



Turning my head away



Laughing



Eye contact



Babbling



Biting



Using words - dad, hello, bye,
Michael, oh dear

I love to play Peek-a Boo with my brother,
Samuel.

I laugh and sign 'more'.

I don't sign when I play other games so you
could help me to learn. Sign 'more' to me
when we play peek-a-boo. Help me to sign
when I want more of other things like food
or my cars.



MORE
Cup right hand and place fingertips
on chest — move hand forward.



When I am upset I might:

Cry
Bite
Throw things
Drop to the floor
Scream
Run



You can help to calm me by:

- Giving me a matchbox car to hold
- Wrapping me up in a blanket and rocking me
- Stroking my back
- Singing to me (especially Twinkle, twinkle)
- Giving me my 'chewy tube'
- Letting me play with warm water