



Special
Education
Alliance
200

SEA Scrolls

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Seeing the ability in every child

January 2010

Please join SEA200 for an informative presentation:

Identifying Mental Illness at Home and School

Featuring: John M. Glennon, Ph.D.,

from 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 12

at Monroe Middle School, 1855 Manchester Road, Wheaton

This presentation is free and open to the public.

Dr. Glennon will present signs of mental illness that occur at home and at school. He will discuss issues that interfere with the ability to see these problems.

Dr. Glennon is a licensed clinical psychologist and clinical director of the Glen Oaks Therapeutic Day Schools, which special in the treatment of emotionally disabled children and adolescents.

Dr. Glennon has provided consultation and psychological testing for school districts for the past 20 years.

Previously, he developed and directed the specialized inpatient unit for boys at Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, directed the Girls Program (a specialized inpatient program for adolescent girls) and was the clinical director for the Touchstone Psychiatric Group.

Visit www.sea200.org after 5 p.m. on the day of SEA200 presentations to check for any cancellations.

In our newsletter...

- Summary of the November presentation by Allyson Chrystal, MOT, OTR/L on Strategies for Success for Kids with Unique Sensory Needs.
- For a copy of our newsletter, visit www.sea200.org or e-mail board@sea200.org. All district schools also have copies available.

SEA200 is an independent, not-for-profit organization that assists families of children with special needs in the communities that make up CUSD200. For details, call SEA200 President Theresa Hinck at 630-653-3224 or e-mail tthinck@aol.com.



SEA200 is pleased to announce that we will offer:

Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy Training

with Pat Howey, paralegal and advocate

Saturday, March 20

8:30 a.m. -4:30 p.m.

Northern Illinois University, 1120 E. Diehl Road, Naperville

**Cost: \$40 per person, which includes snacks, lunch and a copy of
Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, 2nd Edition (\$19.95 retail value)**

Parent advocate Pat Howey will teach you how to take an active role in managing your child's special education, the gentle art of disagreeing and how to maintain healthy working relationships with the school.

- how to document information that may prevent or resolve disputes
- how to participate as an equal member of your child's IEP team.

You will learn:

- about IDEA 2004
- how to assess your child's strengths and needs
- how to prepare a Parent Report for the IEP team
- how to understand testing
- how to build healthy working relationships with school personnel

Wrightslaw programs are designed to meet the needs of parents, educators, health care providers, advocates and attorneys who represent children with disabilities regarding special education. The program is not disability specific.

Continuing education units will be available for an additional fee.

This training program is possible thanks to support from Central DuPage Hospital and the Village of Winfield.

Registration for From Emotions to Advocacy training will be limited to residents of CUSD200 until Jan. 30. After that, it will be open to the general public. To register, visit www.sea200.org. Space is limited, so sign up today.

OT offers strategies to tame 'homework beast'

by **Carla Kemp** • SEA200 Newsletter Editor

Imagine your day goes like this:

You wake up and head downstairs for breakfast. On the way to the kitchen, you're greeted by the noxious odor of burnt toast. You decide to skip breakfast and pour yourself a cup of coffee instead. You sit down to read the paper but are distracted by the kids talking, the microwave beeping and your husband calling to you from upstairs. You give up on the newspaper and head back upstairs to get dressed, but you can't find anything in your closet that is comfortable. Your sweater itches. Your skirt is too tight. And forget about pantyhose.

Somehow, you manage to make it to work, where you struggle all day to tune out the soft rock in your colleague's cubicle. The overhead lights give you a headache, and your boss' constant interruptions have you dazed and confused.

At the end of the day, you fantasize about curling up on the couch with a glass of wine and a good book. Instead, the minute you step foot in the door, your daughter demands that you help her with a book report that is due tomorrow. Oh, and she needs you to run to the store to pick up some poster board.

Can you shake off the day and help your child?

For children with sensory processing challenges, the sights, sounds, smells and tastes they encounter overwhelm them. While we may be able to tune out our co-worker's music or tolerate an uncomfortable pair of pants, such irritations are 10 times worse for children with sensory issues, explained Allyson Chrystal, an occupational therapist and instructor at Midwestern University in Downers Grove who spoke at SEA200's November meeting.

Sometimes, they are able to hold it together throughout the school day, but when they get home they turn into Mount St. Helens.

So what's a parent to do when it comes to trying to tackle nightly homework?

Chrystal gave an overview of sensory processing and offered some strategies to help kids with unique sensory needs tame the "homework beast."

Chrystal defined sensory integration as the "neurological process of receiving, processing and organizing sensory information from the body and environment."

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Sensory - from Page 3

Sensory systems include:

- tactile - what we feel
- proprioceptive - where our body is in space
- vestibular - how our body moves
- visual - what we see
- olfactory - what we hear
- gustatory - what we taste
- interoceptive - the feeling we have in our gut, especially when we are anxious
- auditory - what we hear

Some children are unable to integrate or process sensory information and either underrespond or overrespond to sensory input, Chrystal explained.

They may exhibit tactile defensiveness; be hyperactive; have gravitational insecurity, anxiety or fear; act out; or have difficulty with peer relationships, self-care or recreational activities.

These children also may struggle to do their homework.

Put on your detective hat

A child's success with any activity — including homework — depends on the interrelationship of the child, the task and the environment, Chrystal explained.



The child brings to the table sensory issues, motivation, hunger, alertness

and emotions. The environment includes sounds, sights, other people, temperature, etc. The task has its own demands, materials and difficulty.

Chrystal encouraged parents to be detectives to figure out what is



leading to the child's homework difficulties. Is it the child, the task, the

environment or a combination of two or three of these?

She then offered the following strategies:

The child

- Figure out what time of day the child does best.
- Give the child time to process the highs and lows of the school day before tackling homework.
- Have the child do activities that will prepare her body to sit down and do homework (calming proprioceptive work such as carrying a stack of books or vestibular work like swinging, or an alerting activity such as jumping on a trampoline).
- Provide opportunities for movement and breaks.

The task (homework)

- Use visual supports for any part of the homework that is challenging.

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Sensory - from Page 4

- Make a homework schedule for daily work and long-term projects.
- Instead of insisting that the child complete an assignment, set a timer and have the child work for a finite period of time.
- Use social stories to explain why homework needs to be done or how it will be completed.
- Get an extra set of textbooks for use at home.
- Break down long-range projects into smaller steps.
- Use supports such as pencil grippers, computers, slanted surfaces.
- Ask the teacher if the assignment can be modified, e.g., the child completes 25 of 50 problems.

The environment (home)

Create a sensory "smart" workspace.

- It should be distraction free but not isolated.
- Provide visual cues that it is homework time, e.g., transform the kitchen table into a workspace with a special place mat, cup of pencils, eraser and paper.
- Consider seating/positioning.

- Consider lighting: overhead light vs. desk lamp.
- Offer breaks that provide either calming or alerting input.
- Provide fidgets such as squeeze toys, gum or a therapy ball to sit on.
- Consider doing homework at the library.

Magic questions

Giving the child the answers to the following questions also is imperative for self-regulation:

1. WHAT do I have to do?
2. How MUCH do I have to do?
3. How do I know when I'm done?
4. What do I get/have to do NEXT?

The ultimate goal, Chrystal explained, is to help the child understand that he processes sensory stimuli differently than other people, help him learn strategies to self-regulate, help him choose an appropriate strategy and then gauge the success of that strategy.

That may seem like a tall order, Chrystal concluded, but parents should keep in mind that kids have an intrinsic developing need to do things for themselves.

And finally, don't forget to celebrate every small step.

Thanks to our donors

SEA200 is grateful to our contributors, whose generosity helps us educate and support children with special needs and their families. Below we have listed all those who have made contributions this past year. If you are interested in learning more about giving opportunities, contact Julie Yurko at 630-784-0206 or julieyurko@comcast.net.

Great Seahorse Society

(Gifts of \$250 or more)

Suzanne Bessette-Smith & David K. Smith
Ed and Shannon Downey: *In honor of the staff at Jefferson Preschool and Wiesbrook Elementary*
Freeborn & Peters LLC
Deb Hamilton: *In honor of Emerson Elementary Students*
The Hinck Family: *In honor of Whittier Staff*
Stephen and Christine Spanola
Beth Sullivan
Lisa and Michael Szudarski: *In memory of Thomas K. Ladd*

Crowned Seahorse Society

(Gifts of \$100-\$249)

Anonymous: *In honor of our grandsons*
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....and one additional contributor not listed herein.

Speckled Seahorse Society

(Gifts of \$75 to \$99)

Lisa and Barry Cruse
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Contributions made in memory of John Peluchowski, grandfather of Joey Spanola

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Contact us

If you have questions about SEA200 or would like to get involved, visit our Web site at www.sea200.org or contact President Theresa Hinck at 630-653-3224 or e-mail tthinck@aol.com.

Information contained in this newsletter is not necessarily the views of the SEA200 organization.