



## A Message From Our Director

I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy day to learn more about us and the focus of this issue - the value of play.

The Therapy Center for Children provides early intervention and pre-school home-based services. Our philosophy is that by providing these services, we will assist children to attain their maximum level of independence. This will improve the quality of life of children and their families, and help them to actively participate in the meaningful and significant things that make their lives more purposeful.

One of the ways that we assist children is through play. Therapeutic sessions should be playful and fun. Play is a natural environment for children. The art of play supports emerging developmental skills while allowing the child and caregiver to bond.

I hope you find this newsletter useful. As always, if you have any questions please contact me at 631-207-1053.

*Christina M. Bellini-Zaher*

Christina M. Bellini-Zaher MS, OTR/L



## Featured Article

### Toys for Toddlers

by Dr. Deena Abbe

Play is currently a hot topic. From the recent New York Times article "Taking Play Seriously" (Marantz Henig, New York Times Magazine, 2/17/08), to television commercials, we as parents and therapists are constantly being bombarded with ideas on how to play with our kids.

I personally prefer toys with no batteries or noise. I have enough sound in my house, I do not need to hear Old McDonald from an electronic singing machine for four hours, because it is sitting under a car wheel, do you? Your voice is the music to your child's ears (even if you think it's not). They recognize your voice, even in utero. So skip on most stuff with batteries and sound, if you can. To help, here are some suggestions:

You are the best toy your child can have. When you play with your child, support their activity and let them explore their world. Fifteen minutes a day of quality play time (no cell phone, no television, just child and adult) is irreplaceable. It gives you a chance to know your child, and a chance for your child to know and trust you. It strengthens the bond between parent and child. If you start with a strong bond now, when your child grows up they will feel more (Continued on page 3)



## Spotlight on Our Therapists



### **Deena Abbe, Ph.D**

Dr. Deena Kahn Abbe is a New York State licensed psychologist who received her Ph.D from Hofstra University. She has provided clinical work and evaluations with many children ranging from the ages of one through five and their families. She is an approved New York State Early Intervention Evaluator. In addition to her professional work, Dr. Abbe, spends her time raising her three children, and is involved with community fundraising.



### **Renee Clauselle, Psy.D.**

Dr. Renee Clauselle is a dynamic and innovative psychologist, who dedicates her work to helping children. She earned her B.A. degree in psychology and education at Rutgers University and her Psy.D. degree in school/child professional psychology at New York University. Dr. Clauselle is a New York State licensed psychologist, a certified school psychologist, and is trained as an early childhood educator. The bulk of her work focuses on evaluating and intervening in situations that might interfere with a student's learning process. Such things include, but are not limited to, developmental delays, learning disabilities, trauma, social aggression, social anxiety, school phobias, familial concerns and systematic concerns within a school.

In addition to her work as the Director of School Mental Health at St. John's University, Dr. Clauselle has taught as an adjunct assistant professor at both St. John's University and Teacher's College at Columbia University. She is also a faculty member for Lorman Educational Services, where she presents on various topics related to school mental health, such as the proper diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as school psychology and the law. While Dr. Clauselle loves working with children of all ages, she most recently developed a passion for working with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.

While most of her work is done through the public sector, Dr. Clauselle maintains a small private practice. Her private work focuses on special education advocacy, diagnosis and treatment of developmental delays, psychological assessment, and psychotherapy related to school-based issues. Her most recent professional interests include: diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorder, and resiliency in schools.

## Service Coordinator Corner

We are proud to announce that we will be available to start providing service coordination for our clients.

### **Contact Us**

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# Toys for Toddlers

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comfortable and safe with you and have an easier time talking to you about what's important to them..

That being said, there is a wealth of toys out there to help you play with your child, no matter how old. The age, developmental and skill level, and interest of your child will help narrow down your plethora of toy options.



Between birth and six months old your child is learning that they are their own person (not just an extension of you, although sometimes it does feel that way...). They are learning that when they move their arm, something happens! Rattles and squeeze toys are great for this age. And everyone talks about "tummy time": it's important for so many reasons for our children to learn to hold their head up, push themselves up with their arms, roll over from front to back (and then back to front). A great play mat with interesting shapes and textures on the floor side will help encourage all these skills in your child. If you want your child to be on their belly, then the toys should not be above them, right? If they are, place them within reach (or a little beyond to encourage the child depending on the skill level) at eye level. Best of all, you get down there too!

By six months your child is learning to explore his or her surroundings, usually through their mouth. Teethers are great for this. Stacking toys and rings allow children to sit up and play, and since most of these are soft, they also provide an excellent way to explore textures and shapes.

Around one year old, your child is beginning to attempt to accomplish simple goals (see something they want and crawl to it) and look for objects that are out of sight. They love the "put in" and "take out" game, and some may be starting the pull themselves up and begin cruising, if they are not already walking. Blocks, shape sorters, riding toys (that they can push), and balls are all favorites at this age. By eighteen months children will begin to enjoy crayons and stuffed animals. Be aware, though, kids learn through their own discovery. Let them figure out how to color a circle and a square, and don't get too upset if it doesn't come out "perfect". There is joy in simply putting crayon to paper and creating lines and circles. Let them try and "tell" you what they made. Even if you don't understand what they are saying, this give and take babble sets the foundation for future language and back and forth conversation.

At two, these kids are taking apart things and dressing and undressing their dolls. They are learning to take turns in simple games (like rolling the ball back and forth between people). Their speech and their awareness of their surroundings are improving as well. These kids might like toys that lock and open, twist and turn. My two year old loves the fridge phonics magnetics letter set. He puts the letters in, hears a song, takes them out, and puts them in again. Big stacking blocks (like Mega Blocks) are great because little hands can pull them apart and put them together with ease. When they stack a tall tower, they are so proud of their accomplishment!

Although reading is essential at any age, sometimes it's hard to read to a two year old while they are interested in doing anything but sitting and listening. But if you persist, they will get the point that reading is fun for mommy and daddy, and fun for baby. At three, though, children have a longer attention span (than, say, two seconds...) and will sit for some short nursery rhymes. They might even repeat them back to you! Now is a great time to introduce your favorite short stories. If you've gotten them used to a book and reading all along, they may be more likely at this age to sit and listen to your story. If they are not the sitting type, they might like some more "pretend" play toys, such as bigger action figures or play sets. You can act out what it's like to go to the grocery store, or be a teacher. Simple puzzles and matching games (like memory) are appropriate at this age, as well. And best of all, with you as a patient and attentive teacher, anything is fun!



## Turn On Your Senses

*Attend "Play with Purpose," an Interactive Learning Opportunity*

**Turn On Your Senses, Inc.** is facilitated by a pediatric occupational therapist, Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) supervisor/teacher of the visually impaired, and a pediatric physical therapist. We surround ourselves in play whether with the children we work with, the children in our own families, or our friend's children. We fully appreciate the benefits of play and would like to pass that knowledge onto receptive ears in an effort to provide more knowledge and empowerment for parents during play with their children. In these hurried and structured times, the appreciation of free play has been forgotten, and our goal is to provide parents/caregivers with tools to teach their children how to play effectively. So when left to experience the world independently, children may be better able to explore and interact with their peers.

We offer a unique learning experience for parents or caregivers who would like to learn multi-sensory approaches to playing with their child and how to choose toys more appropriately that would better match their child's ever changing developing needs. Along with this learning opportunity, toys are presented to sample and view in an effort to offer a tactile experience so that parents may better understand why different toys are suited to address different learning needs at different stages of development.

**The Therapy Center for Children will be hosting "Play with Purpose".** For more information please call us at 631-207-1053. Learn how to interact with your child through the eyes of a pediatric specialist, where play can orchestrate confidence and overall growth.



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