

# Valley Region CoPA (Community of Practice for Autism) Meeting

November 7, 2007 - 1 PM to 3 PM

## Meeting Summary

**In Attendance:** 26 in attendance

After introductions, all in attendance completed the CoPA Pre-Questionnaire.

**Definition of a Community of Practice** – A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do...and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. The mission of our CoPA is to share information about evidence-based strategies with a focus on infants/toddlers and young children in natural settings. We will focus on guidelines for educating parents and professionals about effective strategies and using the strategies to meet IFSP/IEP goals. Our CoPA has been funded by the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Part C Integrated Training Collaborative, and the Virginia Department of Education. All in attendance received a power point handout on our CoPAs in Virginia. It was stressed that Communities of Practice are a new concept for Virginia in early intervention. We will do a lot of “learning as we go.” And, although Carol has taken on the role as the leader with Dianne assisting, this does not mean that either of them considers themselves to be experts. We are all learning.

**Goals for Our CoPA This Year** – These are our goals for our CoPA year (our year runs through the end of August 2008):

- 1) develop our knowledge, skills and abilities related to autism
- 2) develop a resource list (DVDs, books, articles, websites, etc.) for families and providers
- 3) develop handouts of strategies and information about autism to give to families and other caregivers
- 4) develop an overall strategy/list of things to consider when working with a family who has a young child with autism
- 5) have our members who attend our CoPA be a resource to others in our communities who are unable to attend
- 6) develop strategies to balance research recommendations with the current practices in Part C and Part B, recognizing that placing the responsibility for intervention on the family can increase their stress to sometimes an unmanageable level
- 7) develop a network of support and information sharing among CoPA members that will exist between and beyond our CoPA meetings.

We agreed that we may add more goals as we continue to meet.

## **Topic Ideas for the Year**

- 1) Methods to develop communication (verbal strategies, sign, pictures)
- 2) Development of play, turn-taking and social interaction
- 3) Sensory/Behavioral issues that include sleeping, eating, repetitive behaviors. Discuss how to do a functional behavioral analysis.
- 4) Use of visual strategies
- 5) Working with families – how to talk with them if they are not aware that their child may have an autism spectrum disorder, how to help families navigate the system and find out about resources in VA, learn what families want and need from providers
- 6) Biomedical approach, including special diets – what is the research? Is there support for this approach?
- 7) AAP’s recent recommendations

We agreed that we would like to know about the latest research for all of the topics we discuss. Dianne agreed to find out about the research for our CoPA. She will either give us entire articles or do a summary of current research findings.

We also agreed that strategies to address all topics must be those that families can implement during their daily routine rather than strategies that providers do with or to children directly.

Our topic for our December meeting will be number 5 (working with families).

**How to Structure Our Meetings** – The group agreed that we would like to have a topic for each meeting. Prior to the meeting, members are willing to do some reading in preparation. Dianne will provide information on evidence-based practices on each topic. We may have speakers. If speakers are desired, members are asked to share names of those who might be willing to talk. The final thirty minutes of each CoPA will be time for open discussion during which any member can ask questions of the group. We may, at times, break into smaller groups for these discussions. We agreed that we may want to change this plan once we have a meeting or two.

### **Planning for Our Community of Practice**

1) **Who Else Should We Invite** – Through the Local System Managers for Part C, Carol has extended an invitation to all Part C providers, all Part B preschool staff, and parents. Members present today were encouraged to invite others in their communities who might be interested in attending and who understand our focus is on children birth to four and on the development of strategies that families can implement during their daily routine. Carol asked that anyone who would like to attend contact her directly so that she can plan for handouts and meeting space.

2) **Meeting Day, Time, Location** – **We will meet on the second Wednesday of each month from 1:00 to 3:00 in the Augusta County area.** Our grant requires that we meet 9 times. Members were asked to schedule this meeting in their calendars through August which will give us one extra meeting in case one has to be cancelled.

3) **CoPA Roles** – We agreed to have, at each meeting, a facilitator and a note-taker. We may have a time-keeper depending on agenda items. We agreed to rotate these roles. Carol, as the CoPA leader, is responsible for the planning of each meeting while the facilitator will run the meeting. At our December meeting, JoBeth will facilitate, Shannon will take notes, and Sherry will bring refreshments.

4) **\$900 to Spend** – Everyone agreed that we will offer mileage reimbursement to parents who attend. We talked about other ideas, including notebooks for all members, CDs with handouts for all members, and hiring someone to keep all of the handouts and other information organized. No final decisions were made on how to spend the \$900 except that parents will be offered mileage reimbursement.

5) **Ground Rules** – We agreed on the following ground rules:

- listen, be respectful, don't interrupt
- stay on task/on topic
- meetings will start and finish on time
- if you agree to do something for our CoPA, do it
- email Carol about attendance (whether you are coming or not – she wants to know)
- what is said at our CoPA is confidential and is not to be repeated

6) **How To Communicate Between Meetings** – Carol will keep an updated group email list. The CoPA leaders have a Google blog and our Valley Region CoPA may want to consider that.

**Joint Attention** – Prior to the meeting, all members were emailed the following three articles:

1) Joint Attention in Children with Autism: Theory and Intervention by Emily A Jones and Edward G Carr

2) Joint Attention and Early Intervention with Autism: A Conceptual Framework and Promising Approaches by Hannah H Schertz and Samuel L Odom

3) Interventions for Toddlers with Autism: Building on the Parent-Child Relationship to Promote Joint Attention by Hannah H Schertz and Michele Robb

Members were also asked to go to the new autismspeaks website at <https://videos.whiteblox.com/autismspeaks/secure/player.aspx?sid=32765> and watch the video clips in the Social Interaction section.

Today we discussed what Joint Attention means. There was agreement that Joint Attention is a foundation for learning, is done with a partner, appears in children without autism before they begin speaking, and is a “dance back and forth.” The articles gave some good definitions of what this means. We learned that it is much harder for a child with autism to initiate Joint Attention (in other words, tell someone what he or she is interested in) than it is to respond to an interaction initiated by someone else. It is also much easier for a child with autism to request than it is to comment on something interesting. There was discussion about how to engage a child and agreement that finding what motivates him or her is the key. What motivates a child can change from day to day and even from hour to hour. Sensory profiling can help to learn more about what is motivating to a child. A suggestion was made to develop an engagement interaction around something that is not already part of the child’s routine so the child does not need to “unlearn” and then learn something new. A specific example was given around a child who frequently was given crackers and the interventionist did not want to change this routine. It is important the parents see that they can be successful in engaging their children. Videotaping can be a valuable tool. Shifting attention and giving eye contact is generally very difficult for children with autism. Several research articles related to Joint Attention were cited, including one from the September 2007 Science Daily and one from the Journal of Positive Behavioral Support (Kathleen will do a summary of this article for the group).

Carol passed out a draft handout she has developed for parents on Joint Attention and she welcomes input. Kathleen also has developed a handout of strategies and this was given out. These handouts will be the start of our handouts we will develop and refine throughout our CoPA year to meet one of our CoPA goals.

**Activity Evaluation** – This was completed and will be completed at the end of every CoPA meeting.

**Certificate of Attendance** - All members received a Certificate of Attendance.

Meeting summary written by Carol Burke