

Report on SELPA III CAC Workshop:

“I Need Help!!

Managing Challenging Behaviors

And

The Social and Emotional Impact of Raising a Special Needs Child”

Compiled by Tom Cobourn, Co-chair, SELPA III CAC

Event Info

Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2008

Time: 7pm – 9pm

Location: Foothill Elementary School, Saratoga, CA

Speakers:

- Ronald Grant, PhD, MFT
- Kathy McNamara, LMFT, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
- Michael Slone, MS, NCSP, Program Specialist / Psychologist, Cambrian School District
- Pamela Wingerden, M.Sp.Ed., Creative Behavior Solutions

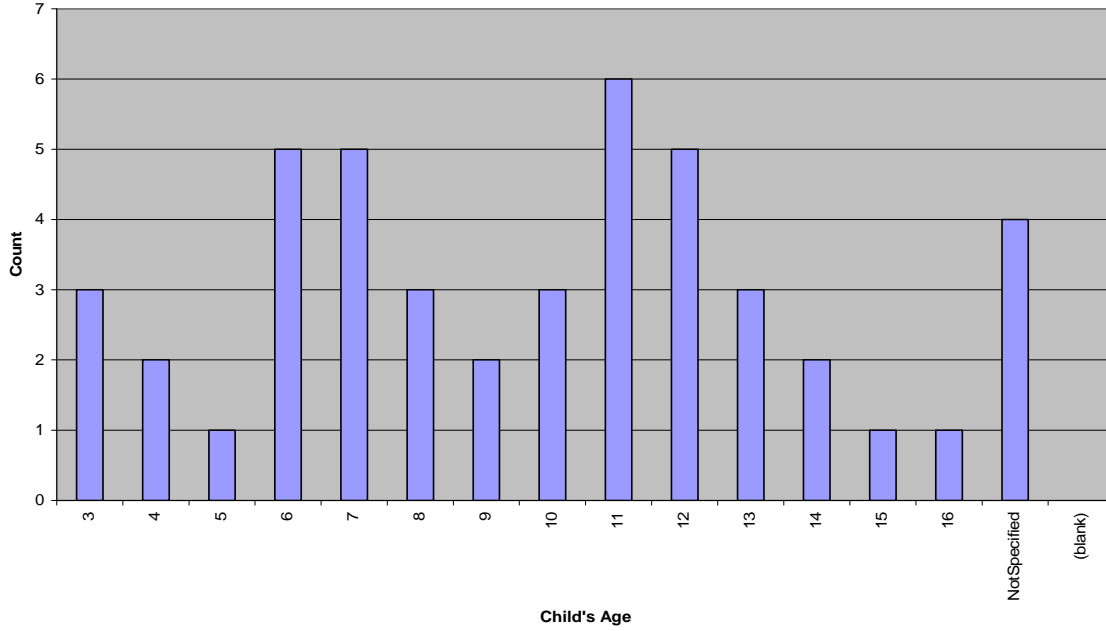
Moderator: Jaime Farr-Stacy, Program Specialist, Union School District

Format: The event was a moderated panel discussion. During the first half hour the panelists introduced themselves, described the handouts (if any) that they provided, and stated brief positions on the topic of managing behaviors. During this time the audience wrote their questions on index cards and submitted them to the moderator. The moderator read the questions one at a time to the panel. All panelists were given time to comment (if they chose) on each question before the next question was read.

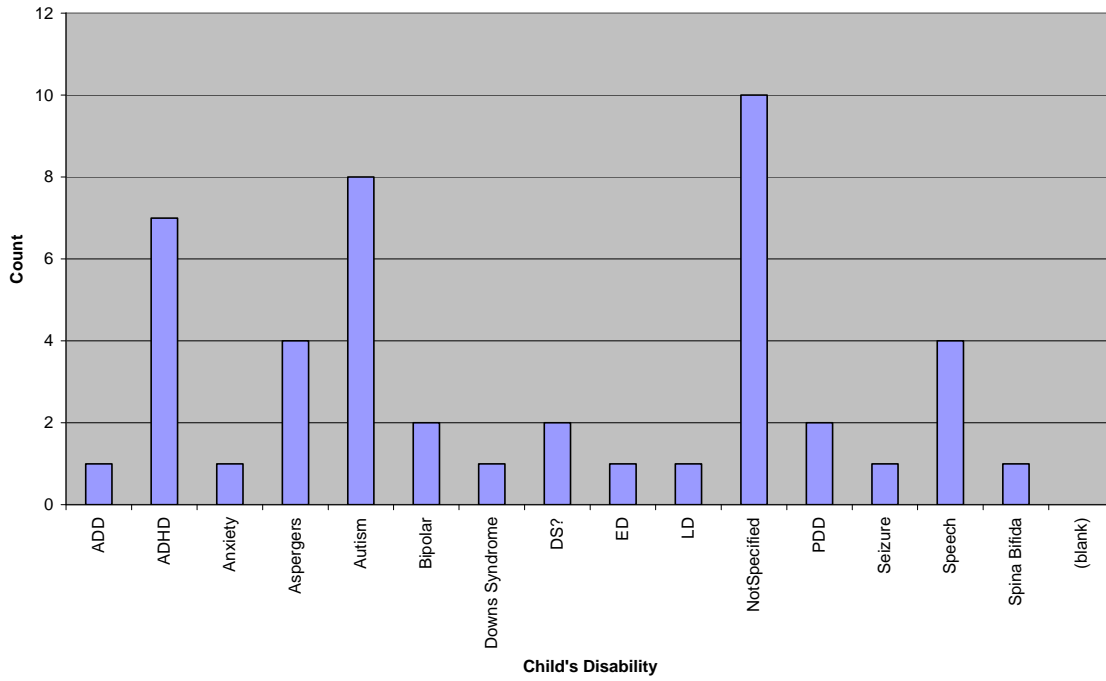
Attendance

Approximately 38 attended. 29 names were on the sign-up sheet, including 7 CAC members. Attendance breakdown by category (age, disability, district):

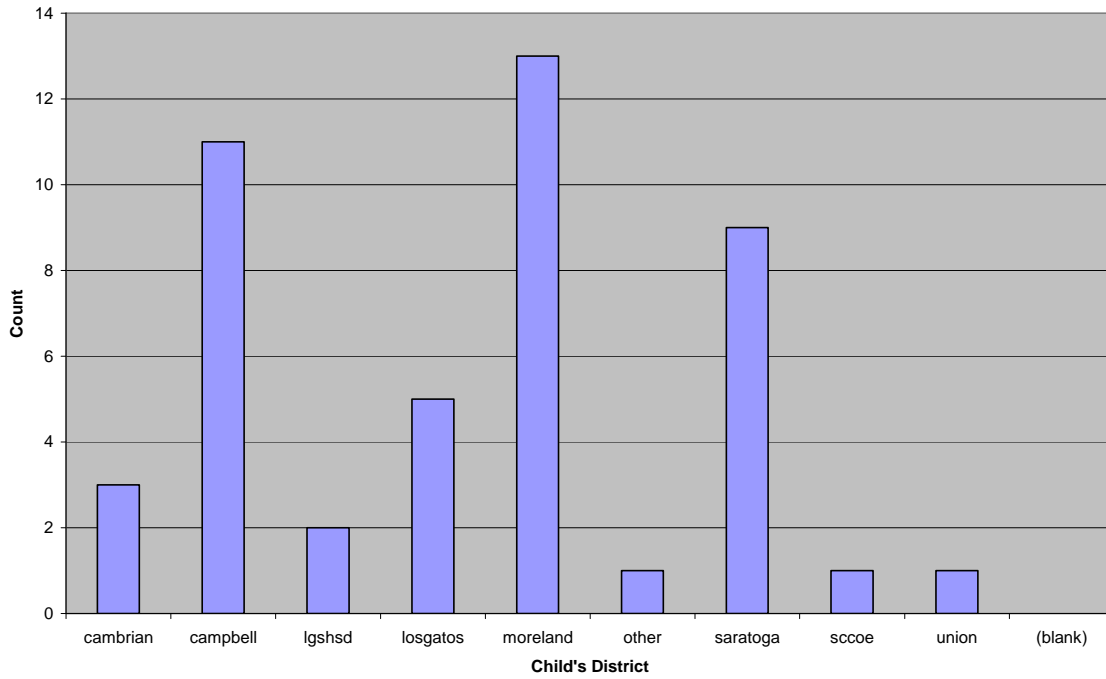
Attendance by Child Age



Attendance by Child Disability



Attendance by School District



Attendance by District compared with SELPA III percentages by district:

SELPA III			March 25th Workshop	
District	Count	Percent	Percent	Count
Cambrian Elemen	254	6.0%	6.7%	3
Campbell Elem	610	14.4%	24.4%	11
Campbell High	804	18.9%	0.0%	0
COE	838	19.7%	2.2%	1
Lakeside	8	0.2%	0.0%	0
Loma Prieta	55	1.3%	0.0%	0
Los Gatos Union	268	6.3%	11.1%	5
Los Gatos/Sarat	305	7.2%	4.4%	2
Luther Burbank	25	0.6%	0.0%	0
Moreland	414	9.7%	28.9%	13
Saratoga Union	200	4.7%	20.0%	9
Union	468	11.0%	2.2%	1
TOTAL	4249			45

Questions and Responses

Questions submitted to the panel are listed in the bullets below, with the panel member's responses added as sub-bullets:

- How do you know what to look for in a therapist?
 - Grant: Ask school and resource room staff who in the community is good. Don't let yourself get frustrated or feel defeated – keep trying until you get the right person for your child.
 - Wingerden: Use the PHP resource list.
 - McNamara: Question the therapist. Ask how many kids with autism they work with. Follow your intuition.
- How do you tell the child what behavior you want from him/her?
 - Wingerden: Depends on age. For pre-K, use visuals. For example – hitting. Teach what to do instead of hitting. Find out why they were hitting (frustrated? hungry?). Give them alternatives like hugging a stuffed animal, squeezing a ball, or jumping on a trampoline. Ask if there is a need they are not getting, e.g., were they trying to tell something to the recipient of the hitting? If they feel sad, teach them to cry or ask for help. If they are hungry, teach them to go to the counter and ask for food. Go through the house and pull out things to show them: “Did this make you hit?” Use picture icons: “Did you feel <picture icon for sad, angry, etc.>”. When my daughter had a breakdown, I let it happen. Then we talked about what to do instead, and practiced it. E.g., when you come home put a special stuffed animal on the sink to communicate that you have a problem. Always make sure you go right back and make [the breakdown] a teachable moment.
- Should consequences be carried out throughout the whole day? And what are some consequences?
 - Grant: It depends on what the behavior is. If behavior is hitting/beating, then YES because it is a health, safety, or welfare issue. If the behavior is taking an extra cookie, then NO. This is a complex question that depends on the issue you are dealing with. It may require a time out. Do this in a room with you there talking. Tell the child what you want them to do rather than what NOT to do. Do this right away – don't wait and punish later. Be calm.
 - Wingerden: Talk about it after the time out. If it happens a second time DON'T send them back to time out. Go right to practicing good behavior and reward for it. This creates more bond with the child and does not downward spiral.
 - Grant: The child will mirror your anger back to you, so stay calm. Don't constantly punish. Redirect them.
- How do I keep my child from playing one parent against the other? Example: Daddy said so... or Mommy said this...
 - McNamara: Parents need to present a unified front. If you don't agree, tell the child that you both think differently but if Dad said it you must listen. If Dad lets child eat junk food and you don't, explain to the child that they

cannot eat junk food while in your care because “I’m not Dad!” Note that letting a child get his way, even once, will reinforce bad behavior.

- Slone: It’s been proven that “intermittent reinforcement” (letting the child have their way every so often) is a powerful influence – this is why the slot machines in Las Vegas are so addictive, they work on the same principle.
- Video game time is out of control. We’ve tried to contract for time limits but he sneaks back on, persistently. Any ideas? Child is an honor roll student but needs more social skill development.
 - Slone: You control when they get the games.
 - Wingerden: Take the games away. He can earn them. Don’t start with limiting what’s there. Give him more as he demonstrates responsibility, e.g., he stops playing when game time is over.
 - Grant: Video games are designed to be addictive! Technology has generated difficulties, especially for people with low social skills because they can accomplish something in the game that they cannot otherwise.
 - Audience member: I have an ADHD child. We take away the computer and keep it under lock and key. We only bring it out on weekends.
 - Slone: Computers can be used positively as a reinforcer to obtain good behavior from the child.
 - Audience member: There is software available that you can download for your XBOX 360 that lets you limit the amount of time that games can be played on the box. We limit it to 3 hours per week. Our child is only 9 but he tracks his own usage and manages his time on the XBOX so he can play during the week. You can try taking away the controllers, but the kids find them!
- My autistic son, age 6, is beginning to steal forbidden foods and other things and hide them in his room. He’s on a special diet and he knows these things make him sick, but I can’t seem to find an appropriate intervention to stop this behavior – he has limited impulse control.
 - McNamara: My son has Seliac disease and is not able to eat protein in foods. My guess is that many of you have kids with food allergies and don’t know it. For example, I know a child who loved drinking milk and wouldn’t stop. The child was not speaking and had screaming tantrums, but these behaviors disappeared when the child stopped drinking milk. Don’t keep forbidden foods in the house. I know this is hard when you have other kids. It is a pain but you must deal with it. Your taste buds will get used to new foods. The child will know he feels better.
 - Wingerden: Take your child to Whole Foods or Bee Hive and let them pick numerous items they can eat. Put them in their “goodie box” and use the items to reward them. But schedule the rewards – don’t let them get the goodie box all the time.
- My child gets along with family but has no friends at school. It’s hard to set up intervention at recess and lunchtime.
 - Slone: Find a typically developing child or children and get them linked up. This should be in a structured setting with a trained person outside of

school. Use a “bossy girl”. But you must connect with the child’s parent, set up fun activities, and structure the interaction. This creates a friend that they can meet again on the school playground and feel comfortable with.

- McNamara: My child likes to play with younger children. That’s ok as long as it’s safe; after all, they are at that younger age socially.
- Slone: Turn taking and role playing can occur with a younger child.
- McNamara: Talk to your school about having a social skills class where the child learns how to be a friend. For example, rotate teachers to work with the kids.
- Audience member: I set up play dates with kids that my son sees at the wall ball court at school. Now he feels more comfortable hanging around them when they are playing at school because of the interaction he’s had with them outside of school.
- Slone: I taught kids how to play basketball. This skill provided an “in” for them to get closer to other kids.
- McNamara: Our pain at seeing our children not being with other kids is greater than their pain.
- My child refuses [special needs] services at school because he doesn’t want to look different from the other kids.
 - Slone: I dealt with a child like this and talked to him about another child in his class that wears eye glasses. Should we take his glasses away? No, of course not, he needs them to see. This story helped the special needs child understand that help is sometimes needed.
 - Grant: If one parent displays some ambivalence to services, the child will pick that up and may resist the help. Both parents need to be behind the services. Grandparents need to be supportive too. Splitting – i.e., different agendas from different family members – is harmful.
 - Audience member: As a school psychologist, many of the kids that I have dismissed back to general education had the common trait of having a strong drive to join their typical peers. This can be a motivating factor.
 - Wingerden: You should take a step back from this battle. Take a week or two break from services to stop fighting about it. Then start talking about it with your child. This is about confidence and self-esteem, not rebellion. Take your child to the computer and google “celebrities with ADHD” or “businessmen with ___”. Your child will see that if this famous person can have my disability, then I can too!
 - Audience member: Special education is a tool for success, not a punishment.
 - Slone: This is about a power struggle. You need to give choices. For example, you can do the even or odd problems, or do 2 hours extra work each day. Reschedule speech therapy?
 - Grant: Listen to your child’s fears about being labeled.
 - McNamara: Have empathy with their problem, then they will be willing to listen.

- How [do I] get [my] 13 year old ADHD son to get himself up [in the morning]. He has always been a night owl. It has had to do with meds and inability to “turn his motor off”. Someday, he’ll have to get himself up – like in college.
 - McNamara: It’s hard for them to shut down. Then they go into the REM state of deep sleep, so it’s hard to wake up. This is a physiological problem. Give them a reward like a favorite breakfast. Use visual cues, even for a 13 year old.
 - Slone: If they get 5 checks in one week for waking up, then they earn a reward.
 - Grant: If they are up late you must manage their bedtime. Have a wind-down time in the evening with a regular ritual. Also do not give them any sugar/coffee/tea based drinks.
 - McNamara: You may need to turn off the computer at 4pm and the TV at 7pm.
 - Wingerden: You need to teach them how to wind down. Try to avoid passing 11pm when they get their second wind. Talk to them about how to avoid doing the 2am thing. Teach what you do, for example, yoga (videos are available).
- My son’s behavior at school is generally good, but when we pick him up after school he becomes angry, rude, and sometimes violent. Any suggestions on how to calm him down or distract his behavior?
 - McNamara: True – parents see the worst behavior because the kids are letting off steam.
 - Slone: Look for a “replacement behavior”. See my handout.
 - Grant: Be available to talk to the child about what is triggering this, what is the sore point. Hear their answer and give some credence to it even if you don’t agree or see it as valid. Contact the school if you can’t solve it directly.
 - Slone: See www.thegraycenter.org, a social story website. Make a social story for the after school routine. This primes/prepares the child for what will happen. Note that it takes multiple readings for them to get it.
 - Wingerden: For my 1st grade daughter I made a book of physical games. She picked a game from the book after school and did it in the playground.
 - Audience member: Are social stories available for pre-teens?
 - Slone: You can do it without pictures, just as a story. Follow the website guidelines on how to write social stories so you can teach a replacement behavior and don’t inadvertently teach the wrong thing.
- Can you elaborate on: “Blame the Behavior Not the Person”? For example, I’ll say to my child, “Mommy loves you, but right now your behavior is not acceptable”.
 - Slone: Define and describe what the child is doing bad in a way that *they* can understand. Focus on the behavior. For example, focus on how they are expressing their feelings. This will require problem solving from the parents.
 - Audience member: I took Kathy McNamara’s class and it was amazing... fantastic. She provides lots of techniques, but still you must tackle it.

- Audience member: I took the class 8 years ago and it was very helpful. But my husband didn't go!
- McNamara: It is best to bring both parents.
- Grant: Men will want to go if it is fun.
- How can I assist my child – age 16 – in truth-telling? When I ask her what happened at school and I have some knowledge, she will answer with something that obviously is not true. Then I have to recheck with the school.
 - Slone: Figure out what is the function or purpose of what they said.
 - Grant: Kids fill in the blanks of the likely story that they think the parent will like. It's not "not telling the truth", it's just trying to be loved and avoid the ritual of anger at home.
 - Slone: Make your questions more concrete... but don't grill the child.
 - Audience member: The child can't understand the problem.
 - Wingerden: Don't create a power struggle out of it. Don't battle your child just when they are home from school.
 - Grant: Find out what they like about their day. Don't just talk about what they get before dinner.
 - Audience member: We play 2 truths and a lie... Tell me one thing you loved about your day.
- How would you explain to your child that the issues that he has as a result of Aspergers and/or ADHD is not too bad and unmanageable?
 - Slone: The Tony Atwood book and video is good. But you should think about what you want to get out of it.
 - Grant: Avoid a power struggle – kids oppose you and wind up doing what you don't want. You need to be able to let go of control over the child to make the kid do things your way. Kids will find their own path but you must not show fear over that different path.
- *The following question has been edited to protect the identity of those involved:*
 How do you handle [this situation]: Relative who is caregiver does what [teachers and therapists] say and [is] consistent [but parent] is not. [Relative] cares for the child 5 days a week while [parent] is working. [Parent and child] live in a separate home and the child is [a teenager]. [Parent] is a kind, gentle person but not a good parent.
 - Grant: This relates to your perspective of what is a "good parent". If there are differences in opinion it will create conflicts in the child. [Those involved] must talk or the child will act out the differences. You need to have a family meeting or use a coach/therapist. The "not a good mother" message goes to the child. Aside from drugs, alcohol, or other abuse, be careful about how you judge a parent. You must come together without dissension about child rearing practices. You must have a concerted effort.

Questions That Time Did Not Allow Us to Ask

Unfortunately the 2-hour workshop ended before the following questions could be submitted to the panel:

- [Does a] special diet really work for [an] autistic kid?
- Do you know a private occupational therapist that takes Medi-Cal?
- We feel isolated as a family – we don't get many dinner or playdate invitations from our friends because of our son's behavior problems. How do we "normalize" our family life socially?
- How do you get rid of whining?
- How can I tell if it is a behavior problem or just part of my child's personality?
- We are looking for programs for our son after school hours and during summer time. Any suggestions, websites, etc.? He is Bipolar.
- How can I help my child stop stealing petty things, e.g., food, coins, other family member's belongings?
- What is your opinion of a psychiatrist who examines your granddaughter of age 14 and decides she has ADD and is Bipolar?
- My 12 year old has no concept of time. How can I help her to understand?
- My daughter hyper-fixates. It is very difficult for her to transition. Does not respond well to prompting.
- How do I help my daughter to improve poor perspective taking skills?
- Our nearly 7 year old daughter complains about everything – from not liking her socks (doesn't matter if she picks them out or me) to wanting more strawberries at lunch (strawberry basket empty) to not wanting to go potty before bed (routine). What can we do to stop her negative attitude?
- My 3 year old child gets anxious. When we raise our voices or talk loud, then he says Mommy (or Daddy) is "mad" or "upset" and gets a sad face and [is] anxious. How can we comfort him so he does not get upset? We explain some times we are upset, but will feel better soon.
- Can adverse behavior be addressed in the context of an IEP? If so, what are the minimal standards or goals that can be part of an IEP? How do you determine if the plan is fair and appropriate?
- 13 year old ADHD gifted boy finishing 8th grade. Long history of teasing at school and difficulty in social groups. Am considering doing less group and more 1-on-1 lessons for summer so he can develop competence. He's asked not to go to camps. Any suggestions to help him find opportunities for a good social fit?
- My son blames others for his behavior. "You did this so..."
- What is the best therapy treatment/regime for Social-Relational Anxiety Disorder (not phobias) for a 10 year old?
- Are there county resources available to school districts – specifically videos to show middle school kids what kids w/ tics, ADHD, Aspergers, etc., look like so that mainstream kids may think twice about mimicking or bullying?