

# MAKING CONNECTIONS



Lauren H. Kerstein LCSW, P.C. 303.284.3603 [www.LaurenKerstein.com](http://www.LaurenKerstein.com) Happy Holidays 2011



## On The Lookout!

### Being **PREPARED** with Sensory Strategies

By Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW

Sensory issues have a way of sneaking up on us. It can seem as though things are going well and then suddenly tantrums increase, withdrawal becomes the norm or meltdowns rear their ugly head. In retrospect, these “flare ups” seem a bit more predictable but in the moment we duck our heads and hope the storm will quickly pass. If there were a way to predict these times of challenge it would be wonderful. Although, it is not possible to always know when the next rough period will occur, there are times throughout the year during which challenges increase. If we know when things might worsen, we can add to our toolbox, batten down the hatches and be prepared. There are many times sensory challenges may increase. We will examine eight of these times and strategies that can help us be **PREPARED**.

#### 1. Birthdays

For many children and adolescents, birthdays are a time of extreme excitement. Birthdays can also be a time of great anxiety, “what if I don’t get what I want”. This extreme excitement and anxiety can increase sensory challenges.

#### 2. The Holiday Season

The holidays are upon us. This is a season of joy (positive stress) and a season of franticness (negative stress). An increase in the level of stress can exacerbate sensory issues. In addition, the holidays bring a change in all of the input in our environment. There is often more, or at the very



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least, different noises; more lights and moving objects; new smells such as candles, foods, evergreens, latkes and Aunt Janice’s perfume; and more time either in the car or on airplanes. This increase in sensory input can be very challenging for people with sensory sensitivities.

#### 3. Transitions

Transitions can be a time of great challenge for all of us. Whether the transitions are big life transitions or small transitions from moment to moment, we have to shift and adjust to the new environmental demands. This shift can be very difficult and may increase our sense of unease and discomfort.

**On The Lookout!****Being PREPARED with Sensory Strategies***By Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW**Continued from page 1***4. Changes in the Season/ Daylight Savings**

The most exciting part of a change in season is that there is a change. The hardest part of a change in season is that there is a change. With Fall and Winter comes less time outside and more darkness; and with Spring and Summer comes a shift to more light. These shifts disrupt people's circadian rhythm and sensory systems.

**5. Growth Spurts**

How many times do we as parents say, "I hope she/he is just having a growth spurt" when our children have periods of challenging behavior? Growth spurts can greatly impact our body systems including our sensory systems.

**6. Sickness**

In my years of practice, I have spoken with some parents who say their children become angels when they are sick. They note that many of the challenges with which they struggle disappear or at least subside when their child/adolescent is sick. Many parents, however, say that the sickness aggravates their child/adolescent's sensory issues. This is certainly a time to be more on the lookout and make sure your **PREPARED** system is intact.

**7. Adolescence**

Sensory issues seem to rear their head as children make the daunting transition to adolescence. This is a time to watch for old habits to return and old issues to resume.

**8. Toilet Training**

Toilet training is one of those times that parents wonder if they will survive or end up residing at the "Funny Farm". Children often go from regular bowel movements to constipation; from urinating regularly to trying to hold it. This period of time is trying on a good day and can trigger sensory challenges in the most unaffected children.



Now that we have reviewed some of the most challenging sensory times, we are left with the million dollar question: What do we do with this knowledge? I try to help parents to be **PREPARED**.

**P**re-warn your child/adolescent of possible sensory pitfalls.

**R**emind your child/adolescent that there are things that can help when they are struggling.

**E**ducate your child/adolescent about the feelings sensory input may create and strategies that can help.

**P**actice reactions to situations and role play possible sensory obstacles.

**A**dd new strategies that might be helpful for your child/adolescent.

**R**eact with limits AND support.

**E**ncourage breaks and time with limited to no sensory input.

**D**ig out old strategies and/or contact clinicians who helped in the past.

With some knowledge about triggers, some proactive thinking and a toolbox of strategies at your side, you and your child/adolescent can survive these challenging times.

*What I am looking for is not out there; it is in me.*

Helen Keller

**Lauren's Reflections**

We really had a beautiful Fall this year. I felt so lucky that we had the opportunity to watch as the leaves slowly made their way from green to some red, orange, purple and yellow. I decided to try to capture this beautiful transition. The above pictures are of a tree that is directly across from my house. My girls and I watched as the green turned to orange and then to a brilliant red. Watching this change reminded me of the work I do. Unless we try to take snapshots of moments, it is difficult to see the incredible growth made by our children and adolescents. The small but steady steps are lost to us as we muddle through the challenges of daily life. This holiday season, let's take a moment to celebrate the steps (however small) that our children, adolescents, and families have made. The small steps ultimately add up to astonishing growth. This is also a good time to note the growth that you, as a parent or professional have made. The steps may be small, but the outcome is to be cherished!

Happy Holidays! I wish you a year of small celebrations, time to take in the tiny details and a chance to appreciate the beauty in your life.

*Lauren*

### **“Speaking” of the Holidays: How to Use the Holiday Season as a Teachable Moment**

Melyssa Mayer, LSW

“That is the ugliest shirt I have ever seen! Where can I return it?” This is a parents’ worst nightmare when their child opens a gift from a friend or relative. A child may say words clearly, use long complex sentences with correct grammar, but still have difficulty with social communication (American Speech-Language Hearing Association). This social use of language is known as **pragmatics**.

Pragmatics includes using language for different purposes and following rules for conversation and storytelling. The holidays are a perfect time to plan ahead for moments in which social language will need to be used, in order help your child feel successful in the social world in which they may usually feel they are an outcast.

We use pragmatics for greetings (ie: hello, goodbye). Another nightmare for a parent is their child saying “Wow, Uncle Matt, you got fat!” as their holiday greeting. You can pre-talk through people that will be at the holiday get together with your child and role play their greeting to specific people. For example, “Hi Aunt Shelly, it is so nice to see you” or “Hi Uncle Matt, Happy \_\_\_\_\_ (insert holiday of choice here). This will help your child feel comfortable greeting family members and will decrease the chance of your child being inappropriate.

Pragmatics also relate to requesting and receiving items from others. A reminder to use “please” and “thank you” at holiday get-togethers can be very helpful for children that are struggling to master the use of pragmatic language skills. It is also important to pre-teach saying “thank you”, even if you get a gift you do not like or already have. If your child does not like a present, he/she can share that information with you during the car ride home. It is important to remind your child that by saying things such as, “I do not like that gift”, that they may make the gift giver feel sad. Using feeling words will help your child to understand what another person may be thinking or feeling based on their reaction. You can have a secret code word or sign that reminds your child, without embarrassing him/her, to use polite words when requesting or receiving an item from another person.

Following social rules for conversation and storytelling includes, but is not limited to, taking turns (reciprocal conversation), eye contact, staying on topic, and knowing where to stand when talking with someone. Reciprocal conversation describes the fact that conversations go back and forth; that people take turns. The holidays are a perfect time to work on reciprocal conversation because time is usually spent with family and close friends who are often willing to work with a child that has difficulty with pragmatic language skills.

Remind your child that conversations are like playing catch. If someone asks you a question (while throwing him/her a ball,) it is now his/her turn to answer the question and come back with another questions (while throwing the ball back). If he/she does not throw the ball back, the game of catch will end, just like the conversation will end.

Staying on topic is another difficult piece of pragmatics to teach a child. The conversation tree is a great way to explore and teach how to stay on topic. As a parent working with your child about pragmatics around the holidays, you can draw a tree and show how conversation must all relate to the trunk of the tree (main topic). And, as the story continues, pieces will add to the trunk like branches. The branches all must relate to the main topic. The visual nature of this activity is very helpful for many children.



Children who have difficulty with pragmatics may have lower social acceptance, be avoided by peers and may be considered rude and impolite. When it comes to this very important part of language skills, the holidays are a great time to give your child more self confidence and self esteem. Being in a loving, caring and supportive environment to work on these skills will help your child to feel successful!

Happy Holidays!  
Melyssa Mayer,

*Being positive or negative are habits of thoughts that have a very strong influence on life.*

Remez Sasson

## Reduce Conflict and Enjoy the Holidays with your Teenager This Season

By Aaron Ragon, MA, LPC, NCC

As everyone is aware, the holidays can be a hectic time for many. Holiday stress can “fan the flames” of conflict with teens. Here is a list of suggestions that can help reduce conflict, increase communication and create more harmony in your home this holiday season.

### Holiday Tips

- **Be clear about expectations regarding family time.** Teens are extraordinarily busy. Many have jobs, club activities, sports and active social lives. Teens do better when expectations are clear. Let them know when they will be expected to be present for family dinners, religious events and holiday gatherings.
- **Ask for help.** Reduce your stress and recruit your teen to help with shopping, meal preparation and clean up. Express your appreciation to them and they will be motivated to lend a hand in the future.
- **Consider putting away distracting electronics.** Teens and parents are heavily dependent on smart phones, video games, iPods and a whole array of other high tech devices. Some families have implemented rules that these things must be put away during meal times or celebrations.
- **Create a new holiday tradition.** Talk with your teen about how they would like to celebrate the holidays and then collaborate with them to implement the plan. Families I’ve known have volunteered at soup kitchens on Thanksgiving, played new board games together or tried new holiday recipes all at the suggestion of their teenager.

### Tips for Dealing with Conflict

- **Strike when the iron is cold.** This tidbit of advice comes from Irving Yalom, one of my favorite therapists. He suggests that difficult conversations are most productive when everyone is calm.
- **Take time outs.** Everyone has said something they didn’t intend to say in anger. This can be especially damaging to a vulnerable adolescent. For this reason, it can be extremely helpful to create a household rule that either party (adult or teen) may take a break

from a difficult conversation and return to the topic under discussion at a later time.

- **Write it down.** Sometimes reaching an agreement with an adolescent can be exhausting. More than one parent has confided in me that they have negotiated for hours (over homework, chores, time spent away from home) and then forgotten the terms of their agreement. Creating written understandings or household contracts that everyone signs can help reduce confusion and future arguments.
- **Seek first to understand and then be understood.** This advice comes from Steven Covey and I think it very nicely summarizes what active listening is all about. Taking time to listen without judgment to what is happening with your teenager will pay huge dividends as misunderstandings are almost always at the core of conflict between teens and parents. Creating time on a daily or weekly basis to talk has made incredible differences for many families I know.

Hopefully your holiday season will be filled with love, harmony and connectedness with loved ones. If you do encounter a bump in the road with your teen, hang in there and try to remember these tips!

Happy Holidays!  
Aaron Ragon, MA, LPC, NCC  
303.588.2143



## **Having Family Over for the Holidays?**

By Amy Topelson MA, LPC, NCC  
Couple and Family Therapist

Chances are you are either hosting family over the holiday season or going to a family member's home for a meal/extended stay. Hopefully this time together brings you and your family joy and is for the most part a pleasant experience. However, if you are like many families, holiday meals and get togethers can be both a joyful and a stress-inducing experience. Most of you are nodding your head in agreement, right? Here's a bit of helpful advice that can get you through the holiday season.

### **Go in with realistic expectations**

Movies and the media are great at creating idealistic images of what time with family during the holidays should look like. A perfect meal, children sitting quietly at the dining room table, in-laws getting along harmoniously create an image we all want to aspire to, but isn't real life. Remember to go into the holiday season knowing that not everyone will act or aspire in the fashion for which you hope, and that not everything will be "perfect." When you go into the holidays with realistic expectations, you won't be crushed when everything does not go as planned.

### **Remember What Matters Most**

We sometimes feel pressure to get the perfect gift for a family member and this can be stressful especially for those who are hard to shop for. Remember, the holidays are a season of giving, but giving doesn't have to mean a gift in the materialistic sense. Acts of kindness towards family members are always well received. Take time to teach your children that love is not expressed through how much money was spent, but how one shows love through their actions and words.

### **Don't Push Buttons and Ignore When Others Try to Push Yours**

You've spent all of ten minutes with your Mother In-Law (from out of state) and she's already commented on how you've put on some weight, your children are spoiled and your turkey last year was a little dry. It's all you can manage to stay calm and not fire back some of your own observations! First of all, take a deep breath and remain calm. You've prepared for this "attack" and you are ready to fire back with a positive comment or a way to change the subject. Bottom line, try not to engage family members in any battles by remaining positive. The more positive you are, the less battles there will be. Holidays are not the time to solve long-standing problems or "fix" family members.



### **Set Clear Boundaries**

Boundary setting starts from the planning stages. If you are hosting family at your home, then you are in charge of deciding whether or not you are up for a week long stay or just a weekend. If folks want to stay longer than you are comfortable, it's perfectly okay to help make reservations for them at a nearby hotel. Do you have a family member who is chronically late? Don't wait to start your holiday meal until they arrive. Maybe next year they'll get the hint.

These helpful hints are just a few of the basics for creating a more peaceful, enjoyable holiday season with your family. If you have any questions or would like to set up a free consultation please call me at 303-717-4929 or email me at [amytopelson@atfamilytherapy.com](mailto:amytopelson@atfamilytherapy.com). Happy Holidays!!

# SIBLING STORIES

## A VIEW FROM THEIR EYES

### FEELINGS

- *Ambivalence*  
“I love my sibling but I want him to be different.”
- *Love*  
“I do love my sibling.”
- *Embarrassment*  
“My sibling had to be dragged into school screaming the other day and all of my friends heard him. They knew he was my brother.”
- *Isolation*  
“My friends don’t understand what my life is like.”
- *Guilt*  
“I feel bad that I don’t always want to spend time with my sibling.”
- *Worry*  
“I worry that my sibling isn’t going to do well in his new school.”  
“I worry that I can catch autism.”
- *Jealousy*  
“My sibling gets more attention than me.”
- *Happy*  
“I had fun watching a movie with my sibling today.”

(Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW, P.C., 2010)

### “SIBLING SUPPER CLUBS”

This group will meet 5:15 pm -7:15 pm on **The Third Thursday of Every Month** for dinner and dessert. The group members will have the opportunity to begin to create a group project recording, illustrating and discussing the ups and downs of having a sibling with unique needs. The group will also include games and an opportunity to have FUN!



### MAKING CONNECTIONS - RELATIONSHIP SKILLS GROUPS

"Making Connections" began in 1999 to create an opportunity for individuals struggling with relationship skills to come together to find friends. The groups are designed to work on the numerous skills involved in interacting with others, creating friendships and sustaining fulfilling satisfying relationships. Most importantly, "Making Connections" was designed to make interactions meaningful and fun!

The groups incorporate the following skills into fun activities:

- Interaction and friendship skills
- Reading nonverbal cues
- Recognizing one's areas of challenge
- Understanding one's strengths and the ways in which to build upon those strengths
- Sensory awareness and strategies
- Cooperation
- Executive Function
- Big picture thinking vs focusing on the small details (Central Theory of Cohesion)
- Bullying
- Effective problem solving

For more information, to fill out intake forms, or to confirm your child will be continuing groups, please visit our website at: [www.LaurenKerstein.com](http://www.LaurenKerstein.com) or call 303.284.3603.

#### The "Making Connections" Relationship Skills Group Schedule—January 2012 through May 2012

| Week of                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1/23 | 1/30 | 2/13 | 2/27 | 3/12 | 3/19 | 4/2 | 4/16 | 5/7 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|
| Elementary<br>Monday<br>1 hour long<br>5:30-6:30                                                                                                                                                                                        | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •   | •    | •   |
| Middle/High School<br>Wednesday<br>1 hour long<br>5:30-6:30                                                                                                                                                                             | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •   | •    | •   |
| Girl's Group<br>Thursday<br><i>This group is beginning in January. The group is currently scheduled for the third Thursday of the month but it is hoped that it will expand to the schedule shown here.</i><br>1 hour long<br>4:00-5:00 | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •    | •   | •    | •   |

**SPACE IS LIMITED. PLEASE CALL IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ENROLLING, (303) 284.3603. YOU CAN ALSO VISIT MY WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION. WWW.LAURENKERSTEIN.COM**

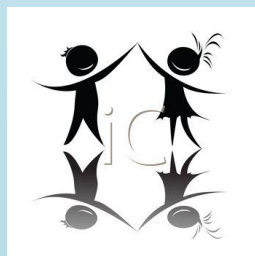
**THE PROFESSIONALS WITH:  
Lauren H. Kerstein LCSW, P.C.**

**Lauren H. Kerstein, LCSW:** *Lauren Kerstein, LCSW* is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in working with children, adolescents, adults and families. After receiving Bachelors of Arts in both Education and Psychology at Washington University in St. Louis, Lauren attended George Warren Brown School of Social Work and received a Masters in Social Work. Lauren completed a post-masters fellowship at JFK Partners, the University Affiliated Program at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center where she received multi-disciplinary training from psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, developmental pediatricians, neuropsychologists, and social workers at JFK Partners. Lauren specializes in working with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders and particularly Asperger's syndrome. She also works with children experiencing anxiety, depression, relationship skill difficulties, divorce and other adjustments, developmental or mental health needs. Lauren is the author of *My Sensory Book: Working Together to Explore Sensory Issues and the Big Feelings They Can Cause: A Workbook for Parents, Professionals, and Children (AAPC)*, and a textbook entitled *Asperger's Syndrome-- Diagnosis, Treatment Issues and Intervention Options* which is available as an on-line course through Western Schools Publishing.

**Mara Trager, LPC:** *Mara Trager, LPC, NCC* is a psychotherapist who specializes in the relationship skill development of children ages 2-18. She holds a B.A. in Art History and an M.A. in Counseling Psychology. Mara provides in-home therapy for families and children through Colorado's Early Intervention Program. In her private practice, she offers individual, family and group therapy. She is particularly passionate about the group process in which her clients can problem-solve, practice social interaction and develop friendships. Mara is also a child yoga instructor and loves to teach children cooking and art.

**Melyssa Mayer, LSW:** *Melyssa Mayer, LSW* is a Licensed Social Worker who holds a B.A. in Psychology and Sociology, and a Masters in Social Work. In her private practice, Melyssa specializes in working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, relationship skill development, mental health issues and school consultations. Melyssa also provides home-based therapy through Colorado's Early Intervention Program. Melyssa builds upon the strengths of the individuals with whom she works in order to create a successful intervention plan.

**Kelly Chavanu, BA:** *Kelly Chavanu* has a B.A. in Human Services. She has a teaching certificate and is nearing completion of a Master's program in Special Education. Kelly specializes in Autism Spectrum Disorders, behavioral issues and relationship skill development. Kelly provides in-home consultation through Colorado's Early Intervention Program as well as assistance around behavioral issues.





## *Save the Date for a Professional New Year's Gathering*

*Lauren Kerstein, Melyssa Mayer, Mara Trager, Amy Topelson, Aaron Ragon, Jenna Kerstein, Caroline Mancuso, and Lynda Balas would like to cordially invite you to "ring" in the New Year with us at a festive gathering in our office. We appreciate all of the work we did together as Professionals in 2011.*

**to:** *Our Colleagues*

**where:**

*5347 S. Valentia Way, Ste 120  
Greenwood Village CO 80111*

**when:**

*Thursday, January 26, 2011*

**time:**

*4:00 PM – 7:00 PM*

**r.s.v.p.**

*303.284.3603 or*

*[lauren@laurenkerstein.com](mailto:lauren@laurenkerstein.com)*

*We look  
forward to  
the work we  
will share in  
2012!*

## Continued Professional Development

Lauren H. Kerstein LCSW, P.C. will be offering Professional Development Workshops for LCSW's, LSW's and LPC's who are seeking Continuing Education in 2012. The workshops will also be helpful for Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and other professionals. Lauren is a National Speaker on Asperger's Syndrome and other Autism Spectrum Disorders. She also presents regarding many other topics including but not limited to, anxiety, depression, sibling issues, behavioral interventions and early intervention. Lauren is the author of *My Sensory Book: Working Together to Explore Sensory Issues and the Big Feelings They Can Cause: A Workbook for Parents, Professionals, and Children*. *My Sensory Book* is a comprehensive, practical tool for assisting individuals with developing a better understanding of their sensory systems and the impact sensory experiences can have on their emotions. Lauren is also the author of a textbook entitled *Asperger's Syndrome—Diagnosis, Treatment Issues and Intervention Options* which was published by Western Schools Publishing in 2010. Lauren is under contract for a new children's picture book about flexible thinking with Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

### Sensory Issues and Emotions

With this presentation, participants will be given the opportunity to engage in a deeper exploration of sensory issues and the impact they have on our emotions, mental health system and self regulation. The presentation will guide participants through developing a better understanding of sensory issues and strategies that might effectively assist a person with increasing his/her ability to understand and manage sensory issues. The workshop will then link sensory challenges to emotional challenges both by illustrating the ways in which these two systems are related, and by offering concrete tools to effectively address both the sensory and emotional difficulties individuals face. Finally, self regulation and emotional regulation will be discussed.

This presentation will incorporate the past and current research and concrete intervention strategies included in *My Sensory Book: Working Together to Explore Sensory Issues and the Big Feelings They Can Cause: A Workbook for Parents, Professionals, and Children*. The presentation will also include other intervention strategies and information based upon my 15 years of practice in the mental health field as a transdisciplinary provider.

**Tentative Dates:** January 19, 2012 and May 10, 2012

**Tentative Times:** 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

### Effective Interventions with Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders

With this presentation, participants will be taken through an in-depth description of the challenges and strengths associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders including but not limited to, executive function, theory of mind, central theory of coherence, learning styles, sensory issues, relationship skills, social problem solving, social perception, mental health, intense and narrow interests, and social maturity. Using this foundational knowledge, participants will explore ways in which to integrate the challenges and strengths into effective interventions. Vignettes will be provided in order to establish a more concrete understanding of these challenges. The presenter will also take participants through the process of isolating and designing goals that are most critical to support the needs of individuals with Asperger's syndrome. Specific, concrete intervention strategies will be discussed and demonstrated in order to provide participants with a toolbox of interventions that might assist the individuals with Asperger's syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders with whom they spend time. Additionally, "easy to incorporate" educational interventions will be discussed so as to enhance academic success in all areas.

**Tentative Dates:** February 23, 2012 and April 26, 2012

**Tentative Times:** 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

### Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents

Anxiety disorders are a huge challenge for many children and adolescents. Unfortunately, anxiety is often mistaken for willful behavior which can lead to ineffective interventions.

With this presentation, attendees will learn ways to recognize and conceptualize. Specific intervention strategies will be modeled and discussed as well as ways in which to more effectively support children and adolescents in home, school and community settings. Participants will leave this presentation with a new toolbox of strategies to immediately try with individuals with whom they interact.

**Tentative Dates:** June 14, 2012 and October 4, 2012

**Tentative Times:** 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Please call Lauren for more information at 303.284.3603.

**Lauren H. Kerstein LCSW, P.C.**  
**"Making Connections"**

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**Resources:**

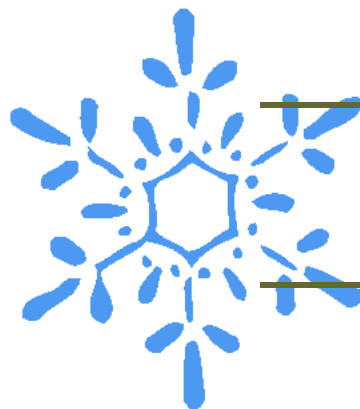
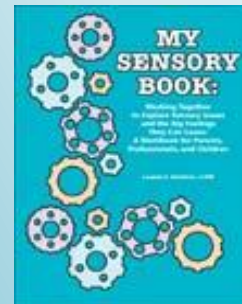
[www.AutismAspergerBooks.com](http://www.AutismAspergerBooks.com)

We help individuals develop strength-based, individualized approaches in order to more effectively manage life's challenges.



Please call today to receive more information regarding our specialized services including:

- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Dyads
- School Consultation
- Behavior Consultation
- Sibling Groups/Interventions
- Relationship Skills Groups
- Executive Function Support
- Home-Based Consultations
- Early Intervention
- Parent Support and Therapy
- Training/Presentations



*We are on the web!*

*Visit us at:*

[www.LaurenKerstein.com](http://www.LaurenKerstein.com)