

November 2018



# Island County Parent to Parent Newsletter

## What is Parent to Parent?

### In a nutshell, Parent to Parent offers Support and Resources for Special Needs Families

Island County Parent to Parent offers a monthly newsletter, a robust Facebook Page, social/support gatherings such as Coffee and Conversations on South and North Whidbey, educational opportunities like Guardianship Presentations with disability attorney and IEP workshops, Family Fun Social Events such as Dance Parties and Picnic BBQ's.

We utilize trained veteran parents called "Helping Parents" who provide one-on-one support to newly diagnosed parents who have a child with similar needs.

## No Cost Services:

- Support
- Resources
- Newsletters
- Support Meetings
- Educational Workshops
- Social/Recreational Events
- Presentations in our Community

<https://www.islandcountywa.gov/Humanservices/Pages/Parent-to-Parent.aspx>

## How Can Parent to Parent Help?

Learning that your child has a disability can be hard for some. We offer support and information about disabilities and community resources to families who are just learning about or seeking new information on their child's disability, illness or special health care needs. Parent to Parent is a nationwide organization that offer local support and resources to families in need. Families may have many questions and concern in coping with their child's needs and their own feelings. Personal support from another parent, who has a child with similar needs, can be helpful in coping with these challenging experiences and feelings. Helping Parents (volunteer peer mentors) are available to provide support and information.

## Support/Social/Self Advocacy Groups

### Coffee and Conversations

*North Whidbey* meets at Whidbey Coffee, 1st Wednesday of the Month at Whidbey Coffee next to Wendy's. 11am-Noon.  
*South Whidbey* Group meets the 2nd Thursday of the Month 11am-Noon. Call/text Tiffany for location information. (360)632-7539

### PAMI: Padres Apoyando Motivando Informnado

Spanish support group meets at Aptitude Habilitation Services the first Tuesday of the month. Contact Laiza for more details or questions. Childcare provided with RSVP. (787)529-6788

### People First of Island County

Self Advocacy group of adults with disabilities meet in Oak Harbor on the second Thursday of the month in Oak Harbor. Contact Mike Etzell for more information (360)678-7883

## 10 Tips for Stress-Free Holidays With Your Special Needs Family

I have two children with sensory processing disorder (SPD) and other special needs. All of these images of the holidays that often bring feelings of joy, love and excitement used to bring feelings of anxiety and confusion for my family. Thankfully, with the help of many years of therapy, both of my sons are now able to participate in many of the year-end celebrations with less stress on them and us.

Holidays are typically about traditions. Here is the thing I have learned about traditions: They are wonderful if they are working. I remember as a newly-married Jewish woman to a man who had been raised Catholic, I had conversations with my husband about our shared vision of family traditions. Little did we know that in two years we would welcome our first son and learn that he had different needs, which would necessitate new traditions. Before I heard the words “sensory processing disorder” (a condition that exists when sensory signals do not always get organized into appropriate responses), I knew something about the world was not working for my son. Events and celebrations that were supposed to be joyful for him and us were stressful at best and disastrous more often than not.

In an effort to make the holiday more enjoyable for our son and us, we decided to host Thanksgiving. We invited our extended family to join us in our home in hopes of taking away that stressor for our son. It proved to be one of the best holiday gifts we have given ourselves, and our extended family enjoys the holiday as well (full disclosure: my husband cooks a mean turkey).

I share this story with you, fellow parents of children who have special needs, and urge you not to worry. You do have options. I have listed a few below. Perhaps one of them can help your family this year.

### 1. Preparation is not just for turkeys. Explain to your child and family what you desire to happen.

“We will go to Grandma and Grandpa’s house at 3 p.m. and will stay until 9 p.m.; your cousins, aunts and uncles will be there, and Uncle Rich will more than likely be watching football. If you need a break, you may join Uncle Rich with your iPad (music, etc.). Remember, sometimes things don’t go as planned. I really appreciate it if you can try to be as flexible as possible. Let Dad or me

know if you need a break.”

My husband and I have found explaining to our boys what to expect ahead of time can help minimize their (and therefore our) anxiety.

### 2. The best laid plans... I learned to have a backup plan to my backup plan.

When my children were little, this would consist of a change of clothing (who am I kidding, more like three), favorite toys, extra food (especially if we were going out to eat), music, headphones, etc. I would also prepare them with the warning that things don’t always go as planned. My oldest son can get upset if we deviate from what he expects. An example of this would be not eating dinner at “dinner time.” He will state, “You said we would eat at 6 p.m., but it is 6:07. Where is my dinner?” I taught my son what “ish” means. When we say we will eat at 6ish, what we really mean is some time between 5:45 and 6:15.



### 3. Accommodating accommoda-

tions. Special needs parents are often excellent advocates for their children during IEP and 504 meetings. Why is it that we seem to lose these skills when we are dealing with our family and friends? Once my husband and I were ready and able to ask those closest to us for help (and spell out what we needed), holidays became less stressful. For us, it meant hosting Thanksgiving so our autistic son would have the ability to check in and out of the room as necessary to accommodate his sensory issues.

4. Sensory. All those wonderful smells that can conjure memories from your childhood also have the potential to make your child with sensory issues feel apprehensive and overwhelmed. Many people may not understand this; I didn’t until I had a son with SPD. If possible, tactfully explain that the smell of the Christmas tree and scented candles can be overwhelming for your child. Ask your host if it would be acceptable to move the candles during your visit, and explain why. I’ve found most people truly want to help and need guidance.

Have a quiet plan. Explain to your host how all the excitement during this time of year can sometimes overwhelm your child. Then ask if your son or daughter may take refuge in another room from time to time.

### Tips for the Holidays Continued.....

**5. Set realistic goals for your child and yourself.** We were able to enjoy Thanksgiving for the first time when we hosted. The reason? Our son was comfortable in our home, and therefore we could relax. We had learned by then that we had to set expectations, and not only for our son. “People are coming over to celebrate the holiday. They want to spend time with you. Do you think you might be able to visit for a few moments?” Extended family and friends, too: “It can be really exhausting for E to be social, therefore he might check out. Please do not feel offended if he goes off by himself; he is more than likely overwhelmed. Having the ability to retreat shows his maturity, and we encourage such behavior. Please support him and us.”

**6. Reminders. Advanced notice can prevent tears and tantrums.** “We are going to be leaving in a half hour.” Then, give 10-minute reminders, which can make an easier transition for the children. My oldest son had a habit of breaking snow globes when he was little. We thought he was misbehaving for attention, but years later he explained he was so fascinated by the lovely globe and he wanted to try to “climb inside.” While we do ask friends and family to be aware of his fascination and requested such objects be moved during our visit, we also remind E to be gentle should a globe be left out. “Hey, remember that cool snow globe Mama Cathy had? It was fragile and broke. If you see one, try to observe it with your eyes and ask if it is OK to touch before doing so.”

**7. Review.** Helping your child with perspective of the event can build confidence and may provide a positive anticipation for next time: “I had so much fun, how about you? I noticed how well you were reading to your cousin; he really appreciated that and I am proud of you for helping.”

**8. Just say, “No.”** It is OK. If you are overwhelmed, your child is anxious or it feels like it is all too much, it may be time to leave. Take a deep breath, grab your coziest cow slippers, a bottle of wine and your partner, and exhale. You should give yourself permission to enjoy the holidays in your own unique way, and at your speed. Deflect the pressure from what others think; rather, make the time meaningful for you, your child and your family unit.

**9. December holidays’ true meaning is not gifts.** Really, look it up. It might be hard for many people to believe, but I’ve observed that gift-receiving can be stressful for some children on the autism spectrum and some children with SPD. A nice “gift” for those inclined to give them can be one-on-one time with the child doing something they really enjoy. My son loves movies; he loves to go with his aunts and uncles or grandparents. Knowing he has a movie date is often all he needs to feel the joy of gift-receiving.

**10. Not everything went as you hoped or planned?** Don’t worry; I have it on good authority the holidays will come again next year!

## Event Planning for A Successful Outcome

Stressors	Specific Challenges	Accommodations
Sensory Challenges	Noise, Chaotic Activity	Ear plugs, sit in periphery, fidget tools
Degree of Interest	Excited but Anxious	Sitting in periphery, electronics, leave early
Novelty/Uncertainty	High Certainty, New	Preview ahead of time, watch YouTube videos
Degree of Control	Minimal Control	Check of list of events, timeline, schedule
Performance Demands	Sitting Still and Quiet	Have a Job, Be a Helper, Contribute
Social Demands	High, Unpredictable Interactions	Arrive late and leave early. Sit in periphery
Length of Time	Two Hours, too Long	Arrive late, and leave early. Escape as needed. Keep an eye out for signs that it is time to go.

# Free Preschool Child Development Screening



If you have a preschool age child (3- 5) with developmental concerns and would like to have them screened, contact your local school district. Your kiddo will be screened by a speech therapist, occupational therapist and school psychologist.

**WE CHECK... VISION HEARING LANGUAGE SOCIAL SKILLS EMOTIONAL MOTOR**

**SKILLS SELF HELP PROBLEM SOLVING SPEECH COGNITIVE SKILLS**

**South Whidbey School District:** November 14 Contact Marie Poolman at (360)221-6808 ext. 2206 Call to set up an appointment for the screening day or for more information.

**Coupeville School District:** Nov 16, Dec 14, Jan 18, Feb 15, March 8, April 19, and May 17. Contact Jamie Easton and/or Special Services at (360)678-2404.

**Oak Harbor School District:** January 4, February 22 and April 22 at Hand in Hand Preschool (360)279-5928

**Camano School District:** Special Services (360) 629-1236.

If you have development concerns for a kiddo ages **birth to three (3)**, services may include: in home Developmental Screening & Evaluation, Resource Coordination, Developmental Education, Parent Coaching & Training, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Feeding & Oral/Motor Therapy; Contact Toddler Learning Center for Central and North Whidbey (360)679-1039, for South Whidbey (360)221-6808 xt 4420 and Sherwood Community Services (425)334-4071 for Camano Island.

## Great Websites to Check Out

- ◆ **Informing Families** [informingfamilies.org](http://informingfamilies.org) Supporting real lives across the real life course. Ages birth to forever, in collaboration with DDA and DDC to produce information and resources to families in "parent speak"
- ◆ **Arc of Washington State** [arcofwa.org](http://arcofwa.org) The *Arc of Washington State* works for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The ARC of WA holds Parent to Parent. Resources and advocacy.
- ◆ **Island County Parent to Parent** [islandcountywa.gov/Humanservices/Pages/Parent-to-Parent.aspx](http://islandcountywa.gov/Humanservices/Pages/Parent-to-Parent.aspx) Special Needs Resource Guide, events and monthly newsletters are available on the website.
- ◆ **WA Autism Alliance and Advocacy** [washingtonautismadvocacy.org](http://washingtonautismadvocacy.org) A personal advocate and legislative champion for children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) & other developmental disabilities.
- ◆ **Washington PAVE** [wapave.org](http://wapave.org) **PAVE** is a parent directed organization that works with families, individuals with disabilities, professionals and community members in all walks of life and with all types of disabilities. As a Parent to Parent Coordinator, I use Jen Cole our regional WA PAVE coordinator, for special education information.
- ◆ **Understood** [understood.org](http://understood.org) Web Resource Helps Parents of Kids with Learning and Attention Issues
- ◆ **NAMI National Alliance Mental Illness in WA** [namiwa.org](http://namiwa.org)
- ◆ **University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities** [depts.washington.edu/chdd/ucedd](http://depts.washington.edu/chdd/ucedd)

**Many of these helpful websites also have Facebook pages. I share these resources on the Island County Parent to Parent Facebook page as they come available.**

# Join Us For Holiday Fun!



## Parent to Parent Holiday Party

Santa will be making an appearance about 12:30pm

Saturday, December 22nd

Coupeville Recreation Hall Noon-2pm

Potluck, music, arts & crafts

Questions? Call /text Tiffany (360)632-7539



**Special Olympics**

Don't forget, Special Olympics Basketball starts soon. Ages 8 and up. There is a North end team in Oak Harbor that starts practicing in December. Call Chris Becker for more info (360)320-2549. South end team has started practicing but is always open to new players. They practice at Trinity Lutheran in Freeland on Saturday 10-11am. No practice on November 3rd due to schedule conflicts. For more info call Mike Etzell (360)678-7883

## Upcoming Holiday Events

- \* Veteran's Day Parade- Downtown Oak Harbor: November 12th 1:00-2:00pm, **FREE** Rain or Shine
- \* WA State **FREE** Park Day for Arbor Day: November 23rd
- \* Holiday Lighting of Langley: November 24th 4:00pm. **FREE** 2nd and Anthes, Langley
- \* Lights of Christmas Festival: Available 21 nights starting November 29th through the end of the year. 20800 Marine Drive, Stanwood [Buy Tickets](#), dates and times available website [www.thelightsofchristmas.com/](http://www.thelightsofchristmas.com/)
- \* Light up Your Holidays December 1st, 10-2pm 27130 102nd Ave NW, Stanwood
- \* Teddy Bear Breakfast Buffet: December 1st Two Seatings, \$5 ages 10 and younger, \$15 ages 11 and older, more information or to [buy tickets](#) contact Big Brothers Big Sisters <https://bbbsislandcounty.org/>
- \* Langley Holly Jolly Parade: December 1st 1:00pm **FREE** Downtown Langley [www.visitlangley.com/parade](http://www.visitlangley.com/parade)
- \* Coupeville Christmas Parade, Tree Lighting and Boat Parade: December 1st **FREE** Festivities begin at 4:00pm [www.coupevillechamber.com](http://www.coupevillechamber.com)
- \* Winter Wonderland: Friday December 7th through Sunday December 9th. **FREE** indoor and outdoor events for the whole family at Outlet Shoppes at Burlington for more info: [www.skagitchildrensmuseum.net](http://www.skagitchildrensmuseum.net)
- \* Parent to Parent Holiday Party: Saturday, December 22, 12--2pm at Coupeville Rec Hall. **FREE** Family fun!



**PARENT to PARENT**



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(360)632-7539 call/text  
t.wheeler-thompson@co.island.wa.us

Like us on Facebook for updates on events and resources in our community.  
[www.facebook.com/islandcountyparent2parent](http://www.facebook.com/islandcountyparent2parent)



## Local Disability Resources

**Toddler Learning Center: Early Intervention for Ages 0-3**  
Whidbey (360)679-1039      Camano (425)334-4071xt128

**Children with Special Health Care Needs Nurse Ages 0 - 21**  
Melanie Davis (360)678-8246

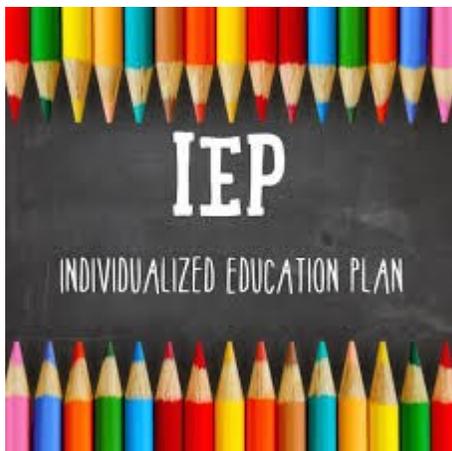
**County Developmental Disabilities Coordinator**  
Island County: Mike Etzell (360)678-7883

**Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)**  
Oak Harbor Outreach: Callie Richards (360)240-4727

**Fleet and Family Support at NAS Whidbey Island**  
Family Liaison Sheryl Prout (360)257-6289

# IEP and 504 Plan Presentation

## IEPs, 504 Plans, FAPE, Evaluations & Advocacy



## Wednesday, January 9

## 6:00-7:30pm

**Presented by Jen Cole from PAVE**

**105 NW 1st Street Coupeville**

**Great information and resources for parents and education providers. Every year your child may face different challenges. Now is the time to ask questions and be prepared for your next IEP meeting. Know your Rights!**

Questions or to RSVP contact Tiffany Wheeler-Thompson, Island County Parent to Parent (360)632-7539 call/text