



# Fill'er Up!

## Alert Program™ News



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### Mary Sue's Engine Notes

Here at TherapyWorks we have been dreaming about this newsletter for a long time. "Fill'er Up! Alert Program™ News" is both the title and the goal of our newsletter. We want a forum to connect the ever-growing international community of folks who are using the Alert Program™. And we hear so many inspiring stories from parents, teachers, therapists, and children that we couldn't keep them to ourselves any longer (see more about this under "New Book Coming Soon" section). Each time we hear a new way to implement the Alert Program™ or hear a heartwarming child's anecdote, we rush to tell someone in the office, but we want everyone to know of these uplifting stories. In these days when the evening news portrays such negativity, we want to broadcast the positive: People really are reaching out, helping one another, and making a difference in the world.

*People really are reaching out, helping one another, and making a difference in the world.*

If you are familiar with the Alert Program™, we hope the information in this newsletter will re-energize your engine as you read about the innovative ways the program is being adapted for children and adults, not only in schools, homes, and therapy clinics, but even in settings such as nursing homes, prisons, and adult psychiatric units. If you are new to the Alert Program™ information, we hope this newsletter will highlight the importance of self-regulation (changing how alert one feels to learn, work, or play). And we hope the newsletter will be a means for all readers to fill up and refuel as we find the answers to the question, "How does your engine run?"

### Sherry's From the Slug Family

I wonder sometimes if people come to hear me lecture on self-regulation, not because of my many years of experience developing and using the Alert Program™, but because of my experience in the Slug Family. I should explain that I lovingly refer to my family of origin as the Slug Family. I

have fun analyzing all of our self-regulation strategies and telling stories that most of us can relate to in order to bring home the point that all of us are self-regulators. Of course, the Slugs, because of their tendency toward low engines, have a LOT of experience with self-regulation strategies. For instance, it is very hard for Slugs to sit still for any length of time and still pay attention very well. This has us using more self-regulation strategies than the average Joe.

I'm excited to use this spot in the newsletter to share with you stories about myself and the Slugs around me, stories from my family, as well as stories about others who may be part of a much larger Slug Family.

Long before I was learning about sensory sensory integration and occupational therapy, I used to take a Tootsie Pop with me to all the tests I had in college. Now that I know about self-regulation strategies, it seems so funny looking back on that habit. In those college years, I was just following my inner sensorimotor drive to seek what I needed without even knowing why. Years later, I know neurologically that sucking tends to be organizing to the brain and nervous system. This can come in handy when one is trying to read



Sherry's From the Slug Family (cont'd)

test questions, recalling information that has been learned and



memorized, in order to come up with the best answer.

So as I would suck on my Tootsie Pop I would read the first test question and think, "Am I in the right class? Do I have the right test in front of me?" Since I didn't know the answer to the first three questions, I gazed around the room and I noticed that all the people were indeed my actual classmates, so I was in the right place. I kept sucking on my Tootsie Pop. Finally as I read the fourth question, my confidence soared. I knew the answer to that one! I just kept sucking as I tried to integrate all that I had studied. Then, since I was taking a written test involving a lot of sitting, it was perfect that just about the time my engine was going really low, I got to the chewy part of the Tootsie Pop. Chewing is alerting for me, so it helped me to keep my engine running just right as I completed the test! Two decades later, with my knowledge of self-regulation, I can see in hindsight that it was a smart choice for me, coming from the Slug Family Heritage, to have used Tootsie Pops as a strategy when taking tests.

Moral of the story: If you have a task that involves lots of thinking and pulling information together, you too might want to try something in your mouth to help your brain and nervous system to be more organized, alert, and focused. Children and adults alike might want to try something as simple as chewing a bagel, sucking on gum, or tugging on

a straw to help their engines to run just right!

Sherry Slug Shellenberger

## Engine Fuel: Alert Program™ Stories

Here are three stories to start us off in this first newsletter. If you have a story you would like to share, please fill out the form at the end of this newsletter and send it back to us. We'd love to hear from you!

### BROTHERS LEARNING ABOUT ENGINES:

*Typically or atypically developing, young or old, we all have engines and we all need to self-regulate!*

An occupational therapist (OT) who runs a therapy clinic shared a engine tale with us about siblings learning the Alert Program™. After they became familiar with the engine vocabulary and how their own engines went into high and low, the OT started seeing a pattern. She commented to the one of the boys, "You know when your engine goes into high, it looks like it makes your brother's engine go into high, also." With an astonished look on his face, the boy said, "You mean that engines are

contagious?" With a chuckle, the OT confirmed, "Yes, I guess you could say, engines can be contagious!"

Submitted by Harry Clabaugh Lambertson, IV (see page 5 for info)

### KRISPY KREME® AND THE ALERT™ PROGRAM?

At a recent lecture, a teacher told us one of the most clever fundraising efforts on record! She explained that she works in a rural town with parents who are home schooling their children. One of the parents suggested that she attend an Alert Program™ training to bring back the information to their home school

group. The teacher didn't have the funds to attend, so the parent offered to raise the money. You guessed it! She decided to sell Krispy Kreme® doughnuts outside a large department store. Now the one with real charisma for being a salesman was her son, who has Asperger's Syndrome. As each potential customer walked out of the store, he asked politely, "Would you like to buy a doughnut?" If they said no, he would follow them, explaining in great detail that they needed the money to help someone go to the Alert Program™ training and if they didn't want the doughnut then they should just give him cash! This proved to be an effective albeit unusual sales approach! The parent collected enough money to send the teacher to the Alert Program™ training and we hear everyone felt it was money well spent.



### COLLEGE STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT ENGINES:

An occupational therapy professor wrote us a letter about her success in using the Alert Program™ concepts with her college students: "I am writing for several reasons. First is the most fun—I have the opportunity to teach college freshmen about sensory preferences. I have 5 sections of at least 18 students each who will be getting a 50 minute lecture and hands on active learning session based

entirely on the Alert Program™. I think your approach is something EVERY student should have the opportunity to learn about. I share it with my private practice clients and now I am sharing the information with college freshmen. I'm psyched about this and thought you'd want to hear about it." We did and we agree....Typically or atypically developing, young or old, we all have engines and we all need to self-regulate! To all of you instructors out there, keep up the good work in supporting kid (and adult) engines!



## Under the Hood

Under the hood of our TherapyWorks' office engine, we have many wonderful Alert people, each a crucial part of our drive train!



*Ron Winkle & Norina*



*Jennifer Gardner*



*Gabe Tovar*

## Research or Re-Search Engines

Hope the word is spreading that TherapyWorks will support any and all who want to do Alert Program™ research. We get frequent calls from folks who are interested in finding out about completed research and how they can get involved. We keep a list of names of those doing research. Unfortunately, we often hear the beginning of great research projects, but don't hear as often about the findings. If anyone does an Alert Program™ research project,

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***Hey, When are You Coming to My Neck Of The Woods?***

You might have heard that we (the authors of the Alert Program™) now lecture full-time, sharing what we have learned from children about our program since 1987. At our trainings, we offer our successes, mistakes, and guidelines so participants don't have to waste time re-inventing the wheel.

We teach the two day Alert Program™ courses about twelve times per year in large cities around the country. We wish we could visit every small town across the land and personally teach everyone who is interested, but since we are only two people, that's not possible. We aim to reach the largest number possible so we pick areas that have the largest populations and are easily accessible for those who will need to travel. Because we don't get to all the smaller communities, at our two day trainings we demonstrate numerous methods that participants can take the Alert Program™ information back home. They "pass it on" to their schools, clinics, homes, and other settings. It's the best kind of "whisper down the lane" we know of!

If you haven't heard, we have fun at

our courses, being playful with our own, adult engines to learn more about our clients' or children's self-regulation. We truly practice what we preach by using sensorimotor strategies throughout the day; we make sure all participants leave the course with their engines running "just right" and their gas tanks "topped off," full of new ideas and knowledge to support children.

### ***Do You Run a Therapy Clinic at TherapyWorks?***

No, TherapyWorks does not run a therapy clinic. By limiting our travel, Mary Sue and Sherry do have time to volunteer in the Albuquerque Public Schools and other local organizations. We always look forward to time when we can learn from our finest teachers, the children. In the near future, Mary Sue and Sherry hope to work with a local women's shelter, training their staff, and teaching the children about their engines. Also, in the works, is an opportunity to work in a nearby Home School Program. And we're meeting with administrators at two charter schools who are interested in learning more about how their schools can adapt the Alert Program™ for their students. We love all these exciting ways to learn more about "engines."

large or small, please send copies to our office. And let us know if you would like your name added to our "master list" of those doing Alert Program™ research.

Even children can be remarkable promoters of research and the Alert Program's™ concepts! A boy contacted our office recently and asked if he could speak with one of the authors. Sherry gladly returned

the call and was delighted to discover this 13 year old's zest for research. The boy explained that he was curious why sour Skittles® helped his engine to concentrate and attend. He planned an elaborate science project to answer his own question. We wonder if he will discover that perhaps "sour + chewy + sucking = just right" for his engine. We look forward to hearing of this up and coming researcher's results!

## Jennifer's Book Review:

### "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"

by Mark Haddon

I discovered a little gem of a book that will be a treat for any of you out there who live with, teach, treat and most importantly love and care for special kids needs or adults. The book is a short novel written from the perspective of a young boy with autism, named Christopher. Book quotes include:

"A brilliant autism novel has been overdue—and this is it! *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is delightful. Mark Haddon shows great insight into the autistic mind, and he brings his young narrator protagonist quite wonderfully to life. I found it very moving, very plausible—and very funny." *Oliver Sacks, author of Uncle Tungsten*

"Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. Although gifted with as superbly logical brain, Christopher is autistic. Everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning for him. Routine, order, and predictability shelter him from the messy wider world. Then, at fifteen, Christopher's carefully constructed world falls apart when he finds his neighbor's dog, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork.

"Herein lies the key to the brilliance of Mark Haddon's choice of narrator: The most wrenching of emotional moments are chronicled by a boy who cannot fathom emotion. The effect is dazzling, making for a novel that is deeply funny, poignant, and fascinating in its portrayal of a person whose curse and blessing are a mind that perceives the world literally." I particularly was aware that in the

## ALERT! ENGINE NEWS! NEW BOOK COMING SOON!

Stop the presses! We have just decided to write a new book. As Mary Sue mentioned in her column, we have been delighted to hear story after story of how the Alert Program™ has impacted homes, classrooms, and therapy clinics. We want to share all these inspiring stories so we placed the following ad in Advance for OT. Feel free to print it out and pass it onto a friend or colleague.



Dear Alert Program™ Supporters,

Do you have an extraordinary, heartwarming, or unique Alert Program™ story? We are collecting inspiring stories for our e-newsletter and upcoming books. We are interested in stories from children, parents, teachers, and therapists in home, school, clinic, or uncommon settings, ages 1-100+. We'd love to hear your uplifting anecdote, unusual adaptation, new engine vocabulary, or successful self-regulation strategies. Short or long...rough draft or polished draft... all correspondence will be appreciated! And if writing is "just not your thing," email to let us know you have a story idea you'd like to tell us. Please email your stories (or story ideas) to: [APstories@NMIA.com](mailto:APstories@NMIA.com)



We look forward to hearing from you!



Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger  
Co-authors of "How Does Your Engine Run?"  
A Leader's Guide to the Alert Program™ for Self-Regulation (1996) and Take Five! Staying Alert at Home and School (2001)

To inquire about Alert Program™ products or trainings, call *Therapy Works* at 877-897-3478 or fax 505-899-4071

beginning of the book I was alienated from Christopher, I kept thinking, "Why does he have to do that?" and "Why can't he be more normal?" But the gift of the book is that as it went on I found myself understanding his reality and empathizing with a view of the world

very different than my own. By the end of the book he made sense to me...and after all is said and done, aren't empathy and tolerance things the world can always use more of?

## “Alternator” Words: Alternative Engine Words

We chose the engine analogy because it is one of the most common ways that elementary aged children catch on to the idea of self-regulation. Just a reminder: you do not have to use the engine analogy! Find what words the children like. What words have meaning in their lives? The whole goal is to find vocabulary to communicate about the inner experience of self-regulation. For example, many pre-schoolers like the Winnie the Pooh story: Pooh Bear is “just right” ....Tigger is “high”....and Eeyore?... You guessed it! “Low.”

Recently, we were told a unique variation to the engine vocabulary by Diana Henry, an occupational therapist who currently is a full-time RV-er, touring the country and offering sensory integration trainings. In Minnesota, she was giving a workshop and said a participant reported her students use the words: “Pop Corn” for high, “Pudding” for low and “Corn Chips” for just right (sharp and crisp). Doesn’t matter what words the children use as long as it supports them to find ways to get to a level of alertness that helps them do what they want to do!

Send us the engine vocabulary that you hear children, parents, teachers,

*Brothers Learning About Engines  
(cont’d from page 2)*

*“Please call directly at 404-888-9564 if you have any questions about this article.” Harry Clabaugh Lambertson, IV. Virginia Highlands, Atlanta GA.*



## Have a Story to Share?

***If you would like to share a story, an Alert Program™ adaptation, unique engine vocabulary, or any other ideas to be considered in our newsletter or books, please fill out the information below and return it to our office.***

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

Here’s my idea you might want to include in your newsletter or book:

- I’m e-mailing this to you at APstories@NMIA.com
- I don’t have access to e-mail. I’m faxing this to you (505-899-4071). I’ll call to confirm you received the fax.
- Please call me for more details (it’s hard to capture the story here in writing).

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