



# ***RDI in the UK Newsletter***

***June 2010***

***Issue Number: 5***

## **Out With The Old, In With The New You!**

***by Elisa Ferriggi***

One of the wonderful aspects of RDI® is that it aims to improve the quality of life not only for your child and you but also your lifestyle in general as a family. Having a fast past life and cluttered home tends to have an impact on a number of factors...

For the child, being in cluttered spaces can result in the child becoming easily distracted by other objects around the house and these distractions that the child engages in can be competing with your attention, therefore making it more difficult to make progress in making connections and building your relationship. In a cluttered environment it can also make it difficult for the child to make sense of the home environment, especially if cluttered space means 'chaos', resulting in a more dynamic space and too many elements to process. This can leave the child feeling over stimulated, which for some, can result in the child using more static behaviours and coping strategies to deal with the anxiety that it may bring. When the environment is more organised and de-cluttered the child will be more ready to interact.

For parent(s) cluttered spaces not only mean losing things and being unorganised, therefore spending ages looking for them, wasting your time, but also psychologically seeing mess can

## **Editor's Note**

This month we are looking at de-cluttering and slowing down life. We know that our readers will be at different stages with this area, but we feel that it is healthy to review slowing down and de-cluttering on a regular basis. Its' so easy to speed up and before you know it you are in that fast lane again missing valuable opportunities! We hope revisiting this will help you to stay focused and on track.

***by Elisa Ferriggi and  
Sharon Bradbrook-Armit***

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## **Project Corner**

### **Are you heading towards burn out?**

- Do you get ill easily?
- Are your body signs telling you its run down?
- Are you feeling exhausted?
- Do you feel tired most of the time?
- Do you feel stressed and anxious a lot?

make you feel overwhelmed, as it reminds you how much you have to do. Cluttered home, cluttered mind; if you deal with things there and then or even just write things down you will find that your mind is freed up for thinking space. As mentioned in the paragraph above parent(s) end up competing with objects for their child's attention making it more difficult to share experiences and focus on your objectives and your competence as a parent.

Some children with autism find a fast paced life too much, too quick to process. When they are not given enough time to process the environment and interactions they do not have time to stop and study the productive uncertainties and opportunities provided to them in the world to help improve their emotional IQ and dynamic abilities. When the schedule is really busy there may be limited or no time for relaxing, experience sharing and exploring the environment and interactions with people. When life is going too fast for children with autism this can mean it's easier, because everyone else around them compensates for them to keep them up to speed. This is not working on the deficits of autism this is compensating, which in the long run doesn't help the child. To learn more about the difficulties an over scheduled child has I recommend reading 'The Over Scheduled Child' by Alvin Rosenfeld and Nicole Wise.

When parents are overscheduled and living a fast paced life it could eventually lead to 'burn out'! You may have experienced this already, some of the signs of 'burn out' are; needing sugar and caffeine to keep you going through the day; feeling exhausted; stressed and tired all the time; possibly leading to depression; feeling negative about things; feeling ill or being ill frequently; if your immune system is low your body is likely to feel or acting run down (poor skin, hair loss, boils, spots, tummy upset etc). Listen to your body as its

- Are you being more pessimistic?
- Are you being forgetful?
- Do you have less energy than you used to?

If you answer yes to most of these questions, you strongly need to SLOW DOWN and obtain a healthier life style.

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### **Do you need to reschedule the family?**

- Do you spend too much time driving about?
- Do you and/ or your child have too much screen time?
- Do you have enough quality time with your child(ren) every day?
- Can you remember the last time you/ and partner went out/ did something you wanted to do?

### **Project Elements**

- Write up a typical day/ weekly schedule
- Analyse it - what is there too much/ little of?
- Discuss with your family what they want and what you have noticed
- Write up your priorities
- Reschedule your existing

telling you it needs to slow down to continue. A common issue with families is where parent(s) spend a lot of their time acting as a chauffeur going from one place to the next and not getting enough quality time with their child to build their relationship and progress. It is important to factor in time for your self, all your children, and your partner and as a family. Sometimes, schedules need de-cluttering and prioritising to get the most out of each day successfully.

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## **Alysia's Story/ Our Journey Pt 5**

*by Sharon Bradbrook Armit*

**Decluttering in the Home-** This will mean very different things to individual people and may be highly dependent on time factors. For example if I cast my mind back to when Lissi was only two years old, where at that point in time she was our only child, I can remember that her things were starting to take over the house. She had her own bedroom which was full of toys, our main living room had some toy boxes in the corner, our dining room had a wall unit that was full of her videos and we had a conservatory come playroom that had larger toys i.e. a small climbing frame / slide, more toys and lots of books on a unit. Everything was readily available and on show!! However, she actually rarely played with / used anything but a few favoured toys (used more like comfort blankets than toys), videos and a few favourite books. In hindsight I think we had the toys around for two reasons; 1) we hadn't got around to sorting out more storage 2) there was almost a hope that by the play objects being around that she would start to use them appropriately.

When Lissi was 3.5yrs we started an ABA programme which in itself had us buying more objects and materials to use, these were kept in boxes out of reach apart from when in a 1:1 session. We also started keeping files of data.

schedule to include your priorities

- Put it up so the family can see and use it as a reminder

Schedules do not have to be regimented or static they can also be written in the form of a to do list for each day that needs to be ticked off, allowing you more flexibility.

It's a project!

*by Elisa Ferriggi*

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## **Interaction Corner**

### **Out with the Old in with the New**

#### **De-Cluttering ...**

- Involve your child in clearing up their room whether that's just a general tidy or big clean out - give them a valid role to play i.e. you pass the toy and they place in the right box (sender / receiver framework) or you pass an item & they place in the 'keep', 'throw' or 'charity' pile.
- Moving furniture / objects - work together as a team to move furniture / objects from one spot to another, this could be in parallel i.e. one item each but moving at the same

Over the years materials changed, files got bigger and more files were accumulated. We also had another two children who in themselves accumulated more toys and we moved house twice into properties that both needed work doing to them. I still have at least one box that has never been unpacked from our first move although it is stored in the garage.

Running my daughter's ABA programme, dealing with school, battling with LEA's going to two tribunals, keeping my brood fed and watered and my house reasonably clean as well as being a Mum to all of my kids left little time or energy for sorting that clutter, life was just too fast! There were days, and if I'm honest there still are, where my house reflects my brain 'jumbled and in need of a good clear up!' But that in itself is a good measure and a warning sign for me to 'slow down'.

I know that I feel and function better when there is less mess around me and knowing now that my daughter had, and to a lesser extent still has, attention difficulties I'm sure that she finds it easier to function in a tidier, but not sterile environment too.

We learnt very early on in our RDI® education that we communicated and interacted with Lissi way too fast for her required processing and response time. That the amount of language we used, although not flowery, often went way over her head. That our delivery and expected response time before we started to fill the gaps with more noisy language was way out of kilt with Lissi's needs. Slowing down and taking out over use of language was paramount to her being able to become more independent, flexible and problem solve for herself, instead of being pushed through the motions.

**Slowing Down in life** - This will also be very dependent on each individual family and particular time frames. I can remember points in

pace to the same location or one item between the two of you - make sure the item is heavy enough to warrant this (an empty basket doesn't need two!)

- Planning - for those children that are a little further into their RDI® Programme let them be part of recognising that there is a mess, what needs to be done and in the claiming of their own role within that.

#### **Making more storage;**

- Include your child in finding of the tools needed, this could be just sorting the right size screws into different piles & counting that the number in the instructions matches the number included with the item etc. Or looking for the tools needed from around the house.
- Include your child in the putting together of a DIY pack. Be sure you understand the instructions first for those children in the early or pre RDI® stages, for those further into their RDI® Programme involve them in the problem solving &/or planning too!!

time when I was rushing from one thing to the next for one or other of my children on a weekly basis, but especially with Lissi. Rushing in order to take her to different treatments / therapies and get back in time for my other children when they finished school or because an ABA tutor was arriving soon. Some of these were only short term, others longer i.e. hospital appointments and groups, Auditory Integration Therapy, Neurofeedback, our ABA providers office, Music Therapy all of which meant travelling for at least 1.5hrs one way for a 45minute to 1.5hrs session.

As stated in previous RDI-UK Newsletters we started our RDI® programme before the Parent Objectives were in place, but even so I knew that I couldn't maintain the pace and pattern we had in place long-term without 'burnout'. Trying to be 'Supermum' is draining! Measuring yourself against others is even more so.

Our last house move was about eight months before we started RDI®. We still had an ABA programme running although we were fading this out. A lot of the things / clubs that my children were part of naturally came to an end due to the house move and I hadn't got around to filling that space as I wanted the children to start to settle and make friends before signing them up for other activities, thankfully! We had time and space to begin RDI® in earnest.

Over the years of our RDI® programme we have included all our children in the whole de-cluttering, decorating and choosing how and when we will tackle the next living area. Our colour schemes are chosen as a family, as are our furnishings, the children are involved in the clearing out process with us working as a team to decide what stays, goes to charity or to the dump. A bit of DIY and Lissi and my youngest, Chester, are off to find the tool kits along with Dad. Washing sorting and putting away is a family

**Timetables / schedules / to do lists...**When making up a daily schedule involve your child, whether they need a picture or written list. Let them see what is on the agenda from your viewpoint and let them suggest things that they would like to do too! If they are not at a point in their development where they can make choices be sure to include some of your child's favoured activities for them, that may or may not also include you.

Then once you have that basis put it all into a sequential order. As your child progresses you should find that you are able to spotlight, for example, that there may not be enough time to do something before lunch and together you can move it to a different time slot in your day - this all helps to build up your child's flexibility!!

*By Sharon Bradbrook-Armit*

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## **Home Schooling Corner**

A thematic approach for Summer; A thematic approach is a way of linking RDI to home schooling. It's summer so themed ideas

effort.

Does it all take longer, you bet, at least until they have learnt the process! But what's the hurry when you get to spend some quality time together doing things that our kids will need to have under their belts for their adult lives?

I think the overall motto for us, as a family, has to be 'less is more!'

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## Residential Care Home and Core Deficits

*by Silvia Haywood Panella*

Residential care homes provide not only living accommodation for Adults with Learning Disabilities and/or Mental Health problems, they also provide opportunities for growth and for learning daily living skills such as getting dressed, cooking or doing laundry.

The nature of this type of accommodation means that teaching living skills has its rewards as well as its challenges. To make learning effective and successful, we need to take into consideration different aspects. We're going to look at slowing down and de-cluttering:

Let's take it for granted that we all agree that de-cluttering and slowing down our lives and interactions are paramount skills required for an effective RDI® lifestyle. It's easy to say, easy to conceptualise, easy to believe in, but as we all know de-cluttering and slowing down sure is hard to do! It's especially hard in a residential setting when you have a number of adults with Learning Disabilities say. Let's look at the two things together rather than separately purely for reasons of space.

Probably your first thought when hearing the expression "de-cluttering" was of those peculiar day time TV shows; the ones where people clear out the rubbish from their attics so they can buy a

include;

Project elements over several days:

- Have pictures of a range of summer plants and so that you can plan together which ones to buy. Build in productive uncertainty by choosing a few extra pictures as a back up plan.
- Plan together your trip to a garden centre - keep it simple as you can always go again: assign roles so everyone is clear what their role is, take the pictures of chosen plants (and back up options), if the garden centre is near a regulatory walk will help to slow it down,
- At the garden centre use the pictures to choose and keep a 'declarative' frame of mind : slow down and remember to use non-verbal communication.
- If your child or young person is at that stage then one of their roles could be to hand over the money and pay (building in numeracy and communication).
- Potting the plants: frame this carefully so that the pots are at the right heights. Carrying pots

holiday, wedding dress, dinosaur skeleton etc. It's a good metaphor for de-cluttering our lifestyles; getting rid of the rubbish to focus on a clearly identified goal. But it's also more than that. Let's stretch the metaphor to say that our communication is like that attic, full of stuff, some of it useful, some of it rubbish, and some of it has been hanging around for 30 years and has no practical use whatsoever. We need to declutter our communication as much as we declutter our lifestyles. English is such a vast and complicated language, it's full of old boxes that we think we might need one day and so we don't want to throw out. Now's the time to throw them out! Here are some pointless expressions:

- Back in a minute
- Won't be a minute
- Just be a sec
- Won't be a sec... (which is it? you will or you won't)
- Shalln't be two ticks
- You know? (of course I know, you just told me)
- The truth of the matter is.....
- To be honest..... (have you been lying to me previously then?)
- Obviously...
- Well thinking about it now...(weren't you thinking before?)

The list could go on and on and on and on and on. De-clutter the lives of our service users, de-clutter our language, simple concise unambiguous.

Slowing down fits perfectly into this mould, slowing down the processes that organise our life, simple processes within a de-cluttered time scale with de-cluttered language. Again it's simple to imagine, easy to picture, very hard to do. Here's an idea: Try to imagine that you're programming a computer in the mid 80's, (did you have a ZX spectrum, a BBC Micro?) remember that first

together is a great way to start. Then there's turn taking putting the compost into the pots. Plan carefully what the child's role is going to be when you start putting the plants in. Is it going to be taking the pots out of the pack (if so you may need to loosen them first)? Are you going to take turns slowly putting plants into the pot so you can model it for them?

Doing one pot a day is a good way of slowing down, de-cluttering and building up your child's competence. Once finished you can move the pot together into its position and then water it together.

- Once all the plants are in the garden. If your child is at that stage then you can take some digital photos and embed it into a Word document. Then your child can do some free writing about the flowers and you've integrated some literacy - which may please the local authority.
- Aim not to plan too much at one time that the focus is on the interaction and developing opportunities for your child to feel competent. These

program you ever learnt? I bet it went something like this:

```
10 PRINT "I am cool"  
20 LET X=X+1  
30 COLOUR X  
40 PRINT X  
50 GOTO 10
```

(if you don't understand the computer language - it doesn't matter!) What we have here is a set of simple instructions, clear, unambiguous and with no room for mistakes. The lines are carefully formed to list exactly what is required and no more. Here's a cluttered BBC Basic program:

```
10 If I'm honest with you I'd like you to PRINT "I  
am cool"  
20 LET X=X+1 you know  
30 The truth of the matter is that COLOUR X  
40 PRINT X and obviously then you need to  
50 GOTO 10 and be back in a sec, or I won't be a  
sec
```

It's not a great program - I'm neither over whelmed nor, am I underwhelmed I'm just whelmed (did I say English can be a bit confusing?!) )

Not going to get very far with that program. Now obviously I am not comparing our service users with computer programs, I'm being a bit satirical to make a point and demonstrate a concept. please don't take it literally! The point is this, simple, uncluttered lives and language are at the heart of an RDI® lifestyle whether in a care home or at a family home. Within a care home there may be more obstacles to overcome, such as meeting the needs of 10 or so service users, but this is all the more reason to de-clutter our communication and slow down the lifestyle.

Enjoy de-cluttering

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elements of the project can take place over one or two weeks. Keep it simple because if it's successful then you do the project again but add some variations.

### **Elaboration**

An extension activity would be take your photos and go and non-verbally walk in parks or stately homes to find the plants and share some more experiences.

*by Margaret Hobson*

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### **Other Info**

#### **Yahoo Support Group**

Join RDI-UK Yahoo support group. This is a parent-centered group for parents involved in, or wanting to learn about, a Relationship Development Intervention programme. Certified and trainee RDI® consultants are also welcome.

**Facebook** – Bright Futures facebook group, has information on RDI® as one of it's running topics.

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### **RDI Consultant Training**

The Tavistock Clinic in the UK will be hosting the beginning and intermediate professional Seminars!

Beginning Seminar: August 24-27, 2010.

## Research Corner

By Jessica Hobson

Article Reviewed: Ozonoff et al. (2010) A prospective study of the emergence of early behavioural signs of autism. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49, 256 - 266.

When do the first signs of autism begin to emerge in very young babies and toddlers? Are they present at birth, as Kanner (1949) suggested in his description of the children as arriving into the world without the predisposition for affective contact with others, or do they show up later in development? Do the signs emerge suddenly or more slowly? Traditionally, researchers attempting to study the onset of features of autism have relied on retrospective parent report or videotapes. These methods may have made it difficult to see what now appears to be a gradual process of decline in social responsiveness, beginning around 6 to 9 months of age in many cases.

In this study, Ozonoff and her colleagues describe 25 infants who later went on to be diagnosed with autism and 25 infants who were later determined to show typical development. All 50 infants were evaluated at the ages of 6, 12, 18, 24, and 36 months of age. Key social communication behaviour was assessed by trained, sensitive judges who were unaware of the babies' risk for later developing autism, on the basis of fine-grained videotape analyses. At 6 months of age, the babies in both groups were similar. They looked at other people's faces and smiled and vocalised to other people just as often, and they were rated as equally socially engaged. Beginning at the 12 month visit, there were significant differences emerging in each of these areas. Babies who would later go on to receive a diagnosis of autism were looking at faces much less frequently, smiling at others less, not

Intermediate Seminar: August 31-September 3, 2010.

Location: Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London, UK, NW3 5BA.

Course Organizer/Instructor: Dr. Jessica Hobson.

The single most important tool for a family is the RDI Consultant.

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### De Clutter

Have a clear out and with your unwanted items recycle them on the Autism Free Stuff UK yahoo group. The "Autism Free Stuff UK" group is open to families who have autistic children in the UK and are looking for related items or to get rid of items. This is a place to exchange and give away.

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### Raise Awareness

If you would like some brochures, leaflets, or mini books of My Baby can Dance and The RDI Book for FREE to share with your friends, family or support groups, please send an email to [elisa@thinkautism.co.uk](mailto:elisa@thinkautism.co.uk) stating how many you would like and where to send them to.

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**The UK**

vocalising to others, and rated as much less socially engaged. The differences between the groups grew steadily over time across the remaining visits.

**The researchers concluded that:**

- The onset of autism is generally a slow, rather than rapid, process
- For the most part, babies may be born looking relatively normal in terms of social relatedness but then this is followed by a slow, gradual process of decline in social responsiveness such that somewhere between 6 and 12 months of age symptoms begin to appear.
- This slow decline in social communication may begin prior to 6 months for some infants, and may not appear until much later for others, but in general losses between 6 and 18 months were subtle and took place gradually, resulting in a sustained reduction in social responsiveness over time.

**Relevance and Reflections:** Early-occurring difficulties engaging with other people may be fundamental to the condition which gives rise to the full criteria for autism later in development. These difficulties may begin and develop gradually and worsen over time. Such difficulties with social-communication and engagement may be relevant for other later emerging areas of difficulty in language, symbolic play and flexible thinking, and may be a pivotal area on which to focus efforts in treatment.

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