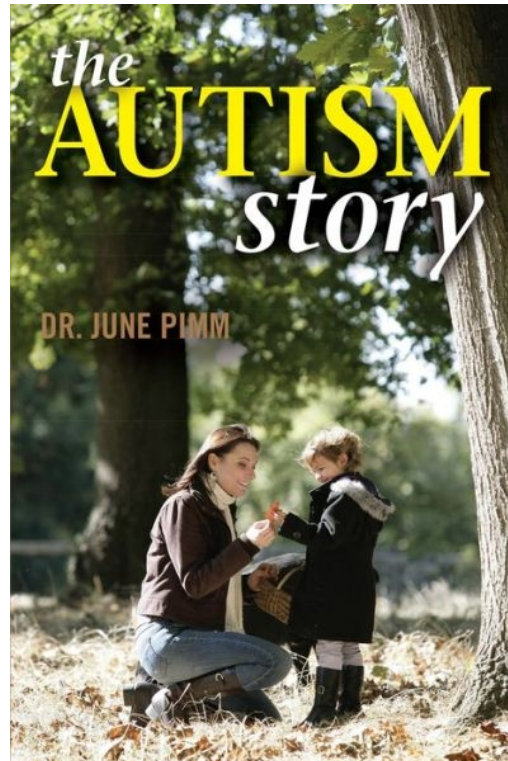


# A Positive Approach to Autism

June B. Pimm Ph.D, C.Psych

<http://www.theautismstory.ca>



# History of Autism

- Autism comes from the Greek word meaning “self”.
- First used in 1911 to describe individuals who preferred fantasy world.
- Initially Autism was referred to as Childhood Schizophrenia
- Dr. Leo Kanner was the first to make it a psychiatric diagnosis in 1943. However, he considered it a rare and debilitating neurological condition present at birth.
- Now Autism is a popular diagnosis found in one child in 68 and referred to as an “epidemic”.
- Yet, at this time, there is no known cause or cure.

# Today Autism is Viewed as a Permanent Disability

- Autistic children are thought to lack the following essential social skills.
- Attachment
- Imitation
- Joint Attention
- Participation in group activities
- Proactive approach to learning
- Positive attentional skills
- Positive behavioural skills

# Don't Mourn for Me

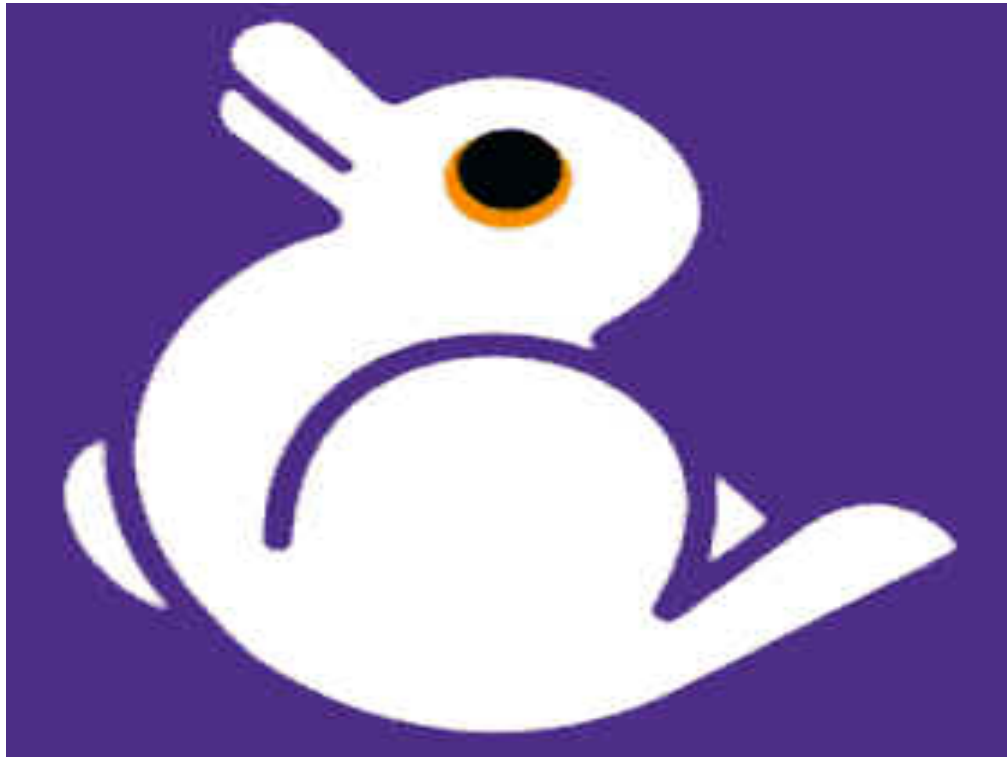
## Poem by Autistic Jim Sinclair

- When parents say “I wish my child did not have autism”
- Parents mean “I wish this autistic child I have did not exist, and I had a non autistic child instead”
- “This is what we hear when you mourn over our existence. This is what we hear when you pray for a cure. This is what we know when you tell us of your fondest hopes and dreams for us: that your greatest wish is that one day we will cease to be, and strangers you can love will move in behind our faces”

# Martin Seligman and Positive Psychology

- Today the emphasis in the field of Autism is on treatment for negative symptoms.
- Positive Psychology knows this will not strengthen the autistic individual's level of social functioning.
- “Positive mental health is not just the absence of negative health” Martin Seligman.
- Health is a state of physical ,mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization 1946)

# What Do You See?



# Is Autism in the “Eye of the Beholder?”

- In 1968 Robert Rosenthal administered standardized I.Q test to class of grade 6 students. Did not score.
- Randomly assigned children to “late bloomers” expected to improve.
- Re assessment showed “late bloomers” increased in I.Q points at end of year.
- Teachers significantly changed their behaviors toward children based on “diagnosis”

# Another Way to Look at Autism?

- Could we move from the view of Autism as a pathological condition with little hope for recovery?
- Is there a psychological theory more appropriate for these children?
- We have found the Developmental model's concepts of social interaction, attachment, joint attention more positive and helpful.
- Joint attention is considered a crucial component in enhancing development for children on the autism spectrum









# Joint Attention an Important pre school skill at 3 years old



# Joint Attention can occur later in Autism





# Demonstration Autism Class



# Joint Attention





# Positive Approach to Learning



# Interactive Play





# Lack of Attachment



# Joint Attention





# Positive Approach to Learning



# Group Participation





# Joint Attention



# Shared Activities

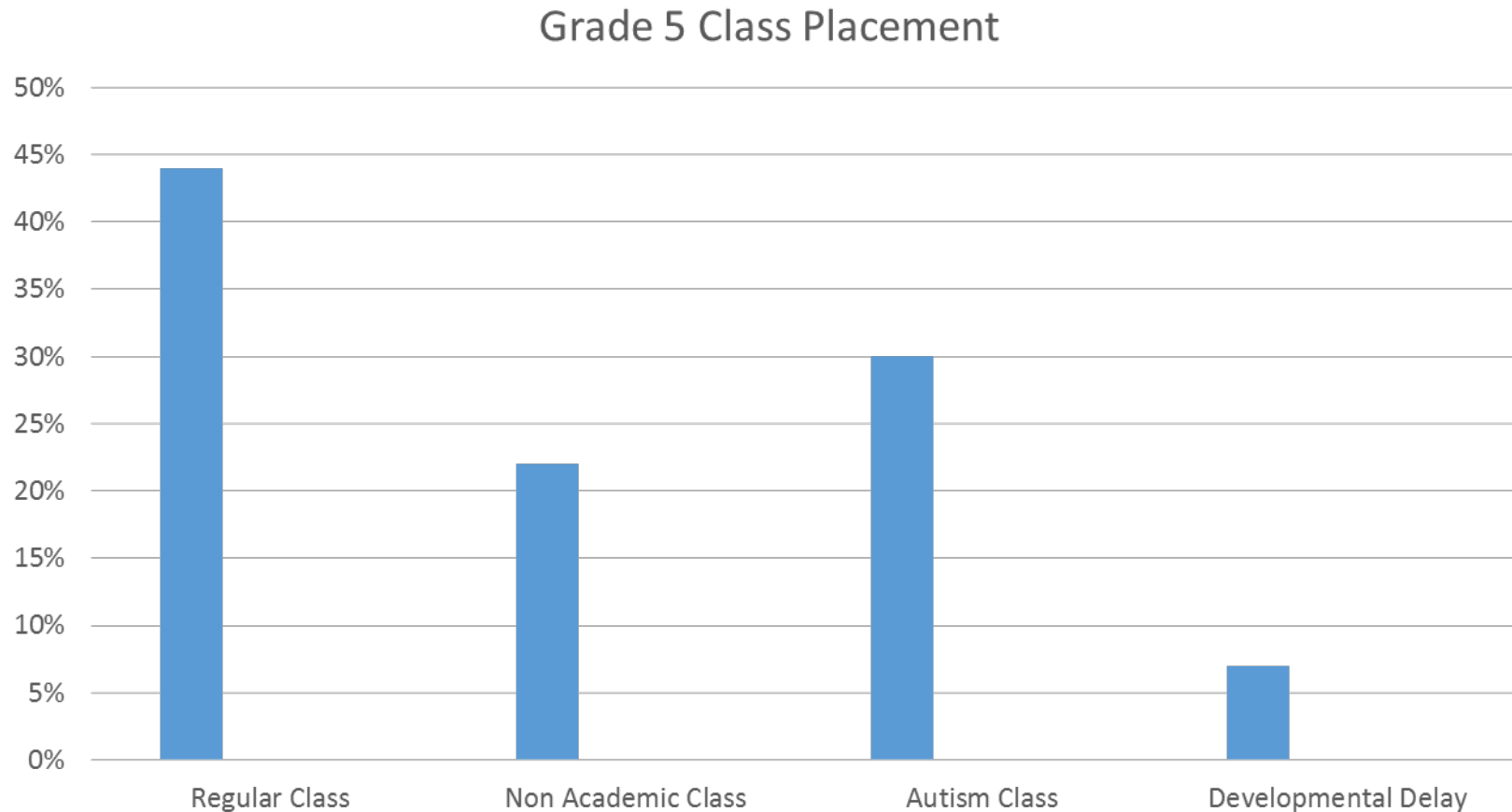




# Graduation



# Five years after Graduation only 30% remain in an Autism Class



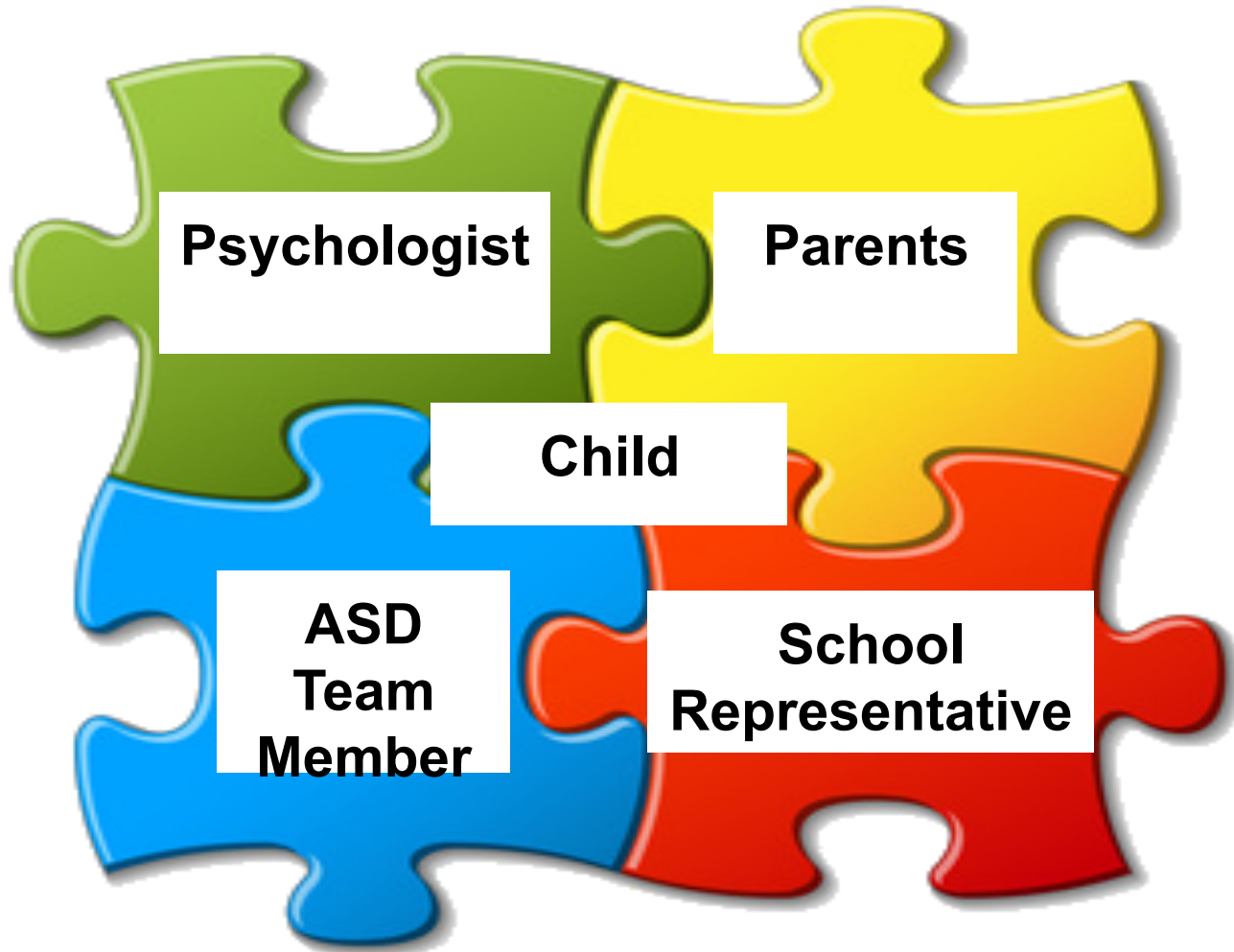


# Intake Demonstration Project

- Based on success of pilot class using a positive developmentally based approach a standardized intake process was created.
- Purpose of intake session was to introduce the child in a positive way to the school and to model this approach to school staff.
- Over 600 students have participated and the results have been very impressive.

# Intake Room





**Psychologist**

**Parents**

**Child**

**ASD  
Team  
Member**

**School  
Representative**

# Psychologist and Parent Interview



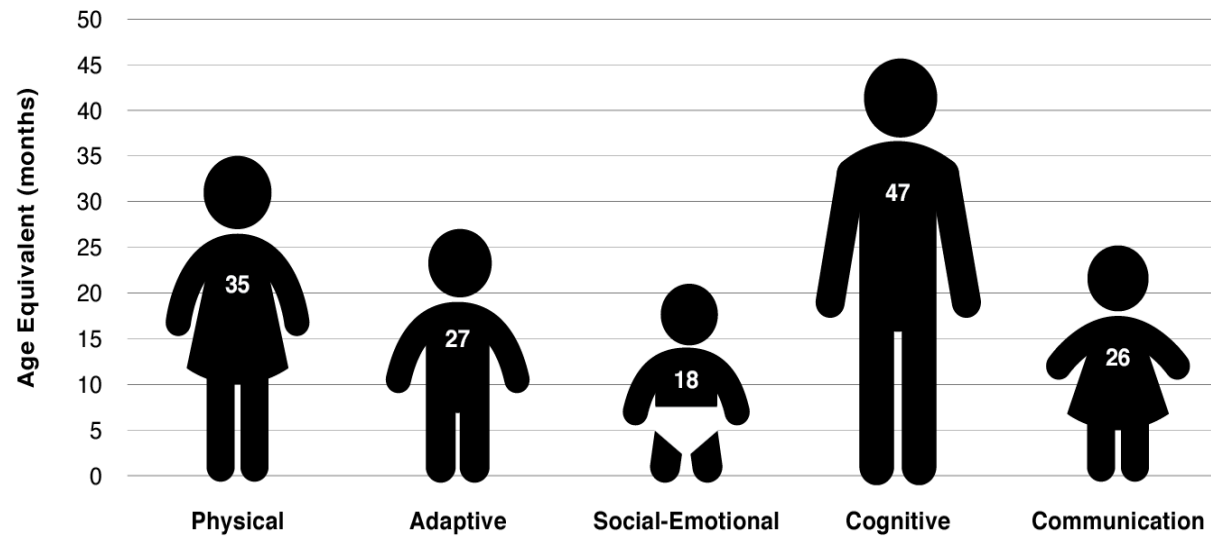
# Child and Adult Interactive Play



# School Representative Observation

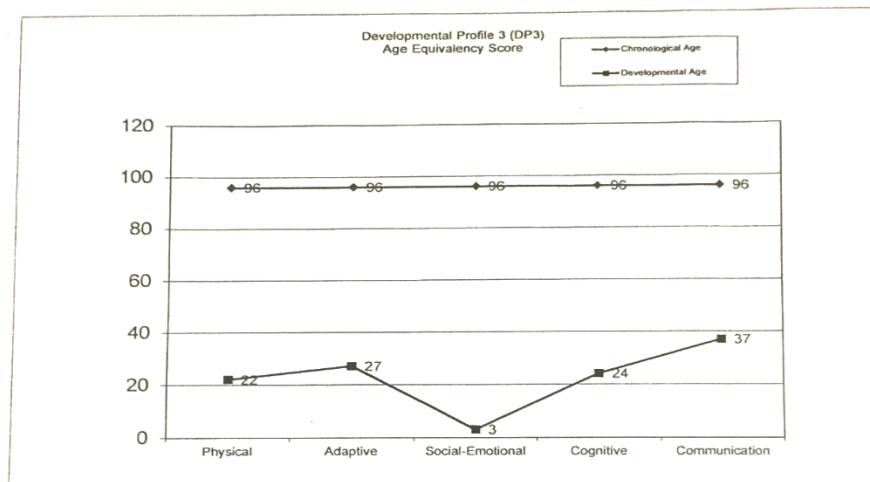


## Developmental Scale





Age at Time of Assessment:	8 Years 0 Months (Total Months: 96 )
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Based on the information provided by : Parent  
This student's current developmental level is:

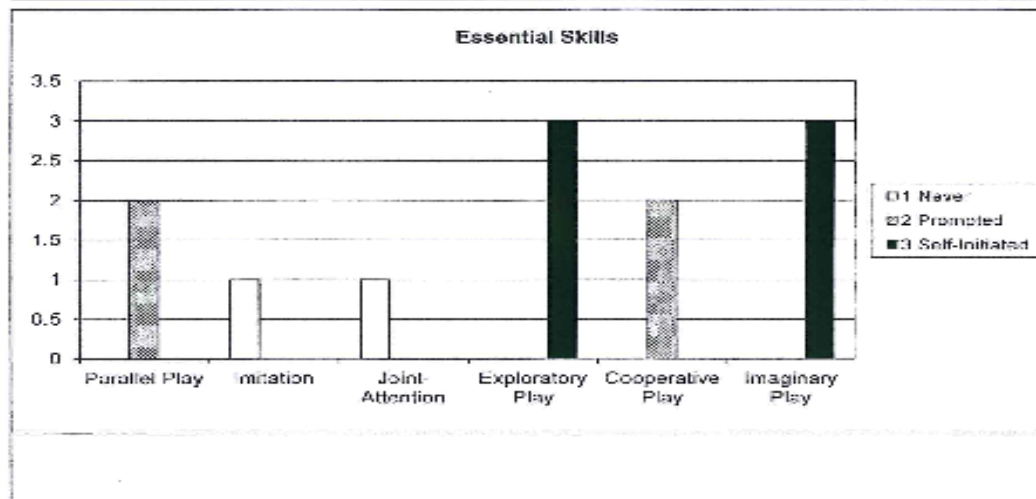
- 1 years 10 months ( 22 months) in Physical Development
- 2 years 3 months ( 27 months) in Adaptive Skills
- 0 years 3 months ( 3 months) in Social-Emotional Development
- 2 years 0 months ( 24 months) in Cognitive Skills and
- 3 years 1 months ( 37 months) in Communication Skills

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June Pimm, Ph.D., C.Pysch  
Autism Coordinator



Age at Time of Assessment:	4 Years 6 Months (Total Months: 54 )
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For further information see attached.

#### Examples of Essential Learning Skills

**Parallel Play** - side-by-side play without interaction

**Imitation** - child imitates actions of others

**Joint Attention** - shares activities and experiences with observer spontaneously

**Exploratory Play** - explores environment in a meaningful way

**Cooperative Play** - engaged interaction

**Imaginary Play** - communicative intent to create pretend environment

# Results Shared with School



# Improved School Performance



# Happy Parents and Child



# Referrals for Support Dropped from 54% to 24% after Initiation of Intake Process

