

# AHA's 8th Annual Spring Conference



Pat Schissel  
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Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Association (Sunday, April 13<sup>th</sup> at Adelphi University Garden City Campus in the Ruth S. Harley University Center is an exciting and unique event. This conference, focusing on older teens and adults, is titled **Issues in Independent Living for Adolescents and Adults on the Autism Spectrum**. Without adaptive tools for life only 2% of individuals' diagnosed with high functioning autism, Asperger's Syndrome or a related condition work in the field they are educated for. That is a staggering statistic! The waste to society is enormous. The emotional drain on individuals and families cannot be measured. This conference is one way to help change this.

The mission of our conference continues to be to increase awareness of the countless challenges, difficulties and strengths of individuals on the autism spectrum. The focus of this annual regional conference is to establish more effective supports and services from transition through adulthood so as to create increased independence for individuals on the spectrum. Each year our speakers identify the few resources that are currently available and some of the creative strategies being used.

We gather an outstanding group for our conference committee each year from the AHA board and members along with representatives of the groups that collaborate on the conference with us: Adelphi University's Ruth S. Ammon School of Education, The Asperger Institute at NYU Child Study Center, The Cody Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities at Stony Brook University, The Fay J. Lindner Center for Autism at North Shore-LIJ Health

Systems, and GRASP/The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership.

Our keynote this year is Peter Gerhardt, Ed.D., advisory board member of AHA and President of OAR, the Organization for Autism Research. His topic is Sexuality and the Autism Spectrum: Adolescence through Adulthood. He will focus on how communication difficulties, sensory issues and behavioral challenges impact the sexual relationships of those on the autism spectrum. Dr. Gerhardt brings his research, humor and 25 years of experience to this discussion.

After the keynote there is a choice of 12 workshops to choose from, each participant can choose 3 workshops. The workshops and panels in 2008 cover some of the following topics: Travel, Emotional Self-Regulation, Quality of Life, Effective Relationships with Health-Care Providers, Gastrointestinal Problems, Communication Strategies, Job Interviews, Sensory Understanding, and Guardianship. Our speakers are experts in the field of high functioning autism. We are proud to have long-standing supporters and friends who count this conference as a 'must do' each year and recommend it to others. Lynda Geller, Ph.D., Valerie Gaus, Ph.D., Stephen Shore, Ed.D., Michael John Carley, M.F.A., Zosia Zaks, M.S., Joseph Levy, M.D., Dave Makowski, Ph.D., and more

Registrants who send in their forms postmarked by March 15<sup>th</sup> will receive a free MP3 audio CD of the entire conference (a \$50 value) mailed to them about one month after the conference. This means they can listen again to a workshop or hear one they may have missed.

Brochures will be on the AHA website in mid-February or mailed late February.

There are representatives from agencies and other resources for the 300 or so family members, professionals and individuals on the spectrum who register.