



Travis EFMP News

January 2012

Travis AFB, CA

"OH BROTHER"

By Natalie Weddle, 14 years old

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If you think having a typical little brother is hard, try living with one that has autism. My little brother, Matthew, has a talking disability. A few sentences here and there, a lot of small words, but most of the time it sounds like he is speaking an unknown language. But you have to be careful what you say around him, he's like a parrot and will pick up words and repeat them over and over again. Matthew is incredibly hard working, has a VERY strong personality, and can always make you laugh on your worst days.

There's not enough time in a day to explain the numerous accounts Matthew has made me double over with laughter. When Matthew was about four he had a strange obsession with waking up at five in the morning to throw eggs on the floor. He would do it every morning. It was a couple weeks after we had gotten our puppy and I guess Matthew didn't like her. So one morning he decided to go into the kitchen with her and drop eggs on her. But he wasn't just going to stop with the eggs. He also got out the whipped cream and wiped it all over her.

In that same year, and in the same month I think, Matthew managed to find the wood primer and paint the kitchen cabinets, the floor, and our Vespa red.

The one thing he did that made me laugh harder than I have ever laughed is when we were on vacation in Southern California. Matthew absolutely loves birds so my mom decided to buy him a life sized parrot toy that talks to you. We were on the balcony in our room on the fourth floor and Matthew was having a little too much fun with the parrot. I guess he thought it was real, so he threw it off the balcony to see if it would fly. To his disbelief it did not fly, it plummeted to the ground with a CRASH! To explain to you all of the hilarious things he has done, it would require me to write a book.

Like I said earlier, Matthew has a VERY strong personality. Once you meet him, you will never forget him. If you have seen the movie or read the book "Marley and Me," Matthew is exactly like the dog Marley. He gets into everything, he loves to chew on things, he gets what he wants no matter what he has to do, he runs away, and eats anything he classifies as 'edible,' just like Marley. One time we were in the car and Matthew wanted our mom's attention so he chewed the leather covering off the seat. Another time he wanted to go for a golf cart ride so he ran away from us and headed straight for the golf cart. To his luck and our despair, the keys were in the ignition and ready to go. My mom saw him sitting in the golf cart and ran

Highlighted Upcoming Events:

09 Jan 2012:
Family Night at
the Zone!
5:30-7:30 pm

10 Feb 2012
Annual Special
Needs Valentine
Party!

"OH BROTHER" (continued)

over to him, but not in time for he stepped on the gas. Luckily there was a restaurant about five feet in front of him and he crashed into its wall before he could hit anyone.

Even though Matthew has a disability, it doesn't mean that I treat him any different than I would a typical little brother. He's annoying, we fight like typical brothers and sisters, he gets into my things, takes my things without me knowing, and we tell on each other

to get one another in trouble. I do all the things a typical sister would do to him. I dress him up like a girl, put make-up on him, and stand up for him.

No words can describe how hard of a worker Matthew is. I always thought he had no patience, but looking back on everything he has an amazing amount of patience. He waits for us to try to understand what he's saying and I've ever really thought twice on how

frustrating that must be for him for us to not know what he's saying. He has accomplished things that we never knew he would be able to do. My mom had doubts he would ever be able to walk. He was 18 months when he took his first steps. We didn't think he would be able to learn how to ride a two wheel bike, but last year on his 11th birthday we got him a two wheeler and it didn't take him more than two days to ride it all by himself. We didn't think he would be able to swim, or bounce a basketball, or do any of the activities typical kids get to do. But he did, he did all of that and more.

To help Matthew be able to do and learn all of these things, we sent him to a group home to live with kids who have similar disabilities. It was so hard on us and him especially because we weren't allowed to see him for the first month he lived there. If I were him I don't know what I would have

done. He didn't understand at the time that we were doing this for his own good. Matthew has been going to that home for two years now and comes home on the weekends. Thanks to everything my family has done for him and his ability to learn quickly and his patience, Matthew's speech has improved tremendously. We didn't think he would ever talk, and boy did he blow us away when he started not just saying full, understandable words, but also short sentences. It's truly a miracle all of the things that he has accomplished with such a great disability.

With everything that Matthew has surprised us with, from eating a battery to being able to communicate with us, his future no doubt has a lot more in store from him down the road. Although Matthew has autism, he will always be my annoying little brother.

What Is A SELPA?

The SELPA coordinates with school districts and the Solano County Office of Education to provide a continuum of programs and services for disabled individuals from birth through 22 years of age. We are also available as a resource to the community on issues related to special education.

The SELPA office is located at the Solano County Office of Education, 5100 Business Center Drive, Fairfield, 707-399-4460.

SELPA's role is to ensure that the specialized education needs of each disabled student in the Fair-

The SELPA can help with your special education questions and concerns

field-Suisun, Benicia, Vacaville, Travis, and Dixon school districts are appropriately met. These five school districts or Local Education Agencies (LEA) and the County Office of Education comprise the membership of the Solano SELPA.



Solano SELPA provides numerous services including:

- Technical Assistance
- Dispute Resolution
- Regional Governance
- Program Development
- Legislative Advocacy
- Compliance Monitoring

Bullying and Children with Special Needs

On March 10, 2011, President and Mrs. Obama hosted a White House conference on bullying prevention and put the issue of bullying firmly in the national spotlight. "If there's one goal of this conference," the President said, "it's to dispel the myth that bullying is just a harmless rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up. It's not."

Bullying is intentional behavior that is threatening, harmful, or humiliating. It involves an imbalance of power or strength, and it is often repeated over time. Children who have special needs may be two to three times more likely to be bullied than peers who do not have special needs. They may be more likely to be seen as "not fitting in" because they may have differences in speech, behavior, appearance, movement, or learning. They may have difficulty making friends due to impairments in language and conversation, social interactions and reading social cues, or motor skills that may affect participation in activities with peers who do not have special needs.

Bullying can take many forms including physical bullying, verbal or written bullying, emotional intimidation, and cyberbullying. Children who have special needs and who experience bullying may be more likely to experience manipulative bullying (i.e. being coerced or controlled by a peer), conditional friendship (i.e. "pretend friends", a relationship in which "friendship" involves bullying), or exploitative bullying (i.e. features of a child's disability are used to bully them). With any child it may be difficult to find out that he or she is being bullied. A child may be afraid, embarrassed, or reluctant to "tell on" another child. With a child who has special needs it might be particularly difficult to discover if he or she is being bullied because he or she might not recognize, understand or express what is happening.

What can parents do to discover if bullying is occurring? Probably the most effective thing you can do is observe your child's behavior, moods, and appearance and monitor any changes. For example, is your child suddenly reluctant to go to school? Children often tell us things through their moods or behaviors that they might not tell us in words. Talk with your child. Ask questions that help your child to give you information in his or her own words (e.g. "Do you feel sad? What is making you sad?"). Listen and take what he or she says seriously. Let your child know that he or she is not at fault and that you will take appropriate action. Focus on your child and keep your emotions from making the situation more difficult.

If you discover that your child is being bullied, then document what is happening. Note dates, names of children involved in bullying, possible witnesses, and what happened. Take photos of any injuries or damaged clothes and possessions. Talk with school or program staff, and ask them what they have noticed, what actions they have taken, and what solutions they can suggest. Make sure the school or program addresses the bullying. Write a letter that details what has happened to your child and that requests corrective action.

Follow up to find out what actions have been taken. If your child receives special education services and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you can call an IEP meeting to discuss the situation and solutions. If necessary, you can file a written complaint with the school district and other agencies (e.g. state department of education, U.S. Office for Civil Rights).

Public schools (K-12 and colleges and universities) have a special responsibility under federal law to address bullying when (1) it is based on a person's race, color, national origin, sex or disability, and (2) it creates a hostile environment that interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from school services, activities or opportunities. If a school knows about bullying and fails to stop it, then it may be in violation of federal civil rights laws. Once a school knows about bullying, it must take immediate action to determine what has occurred. If bullying has occurred, then the school must take prompt, effective steps that are reasonably expected to end the bullying and hostile environment and to prevent the situation from recurring. A school must do these things whether or not a student has made a complaint.

The list of resources below provides much useful information on the issue of bullying, in general, and bullying of children who have special needs, in particular. "Walk a Mile in Their Shoes – Bullying and the Child with Special Needs" by AbilityPath.org is a new and very valuable resource for parents of children who have special needs.

Resources:

"Walk A Mile in Their Shoes – Bullying and the Child with Special Needs." AbilityPath.org <http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-of-development/learning--schools/bullying/articles/walk-a-mile-in-their-shoes.pdf>

National Bullying Prevention Center (focus on children who have disabilities and special needs) <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

Bullying Among Children and Youth with Disabilities and Special Needs http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Bullying_Among/

"Vulnerable Targets: Students with Disabilities and Bullying." Federation for Children with Special Needs". <http://fcsn.org/newsline/v30n3/bullying.php>

"Eyes on Bullying Toolkit". Eyes on Bullying. <http://www.eyesonbullying.org/toolkit.html>

StopBullying.gov <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/>

EFMP-FS
Airman & Family Readiness
Center

351 Travis Ave.
Travis AFB, CA 94535

Phone: 707-424-2486

susan.tonarelli@us.af.mil

www.travisspecialneeds.com



Upcoming Events:

- **09 January, 5:30-7:30 pm: *Family Night at the Zone.*** 500 Chrissy Ave, Travis AFB. Join us for an evening of support, relaxation and fun. Please bring a side to share. Sandwiches and drinks will be provided.
- **11 January, 3:30-6:30 pm: *Autism Community Symposium*** Solano County Office of Education, 5100 Business Center Drive; Fairfield, CA. Visit www.solanocoe.net for details
- **19 January, 6:30 pm: *Autism Support Group*** Matrix in Fairfield. Visit www.matrixparents.org for info.
- **28 January, Parent Academy Workshop**

Solano County SELPA Community Advisory Committee is sponsoring this half-day workshop designed to provide current and relevant information to parents on special education issues for children across a variety of ages and disabilities. Workshop presenters include local professionals within the county and school districts of Solano and other regional resources. The CAC's primary goal for this event is to foster family and professional partnerships through parent education for the benefit of our children with disabilities. This event is FREE but pre-registration is required. The deadline for registration is January 20th. Register TODAY! Space is limited and is expected to fill fast. Visit www.solanocoe.net or call 707-399-4462 for details.

Special Needs Webinars, Webcasts, and Podcasts

- Military One Source has a fantastic 2 part webinar entitled "***Choosing an Exceptional Life: Family-Directed Resource Organizations***" **January 11 and 18, 1000-1100.** Find out more information and register at www.militaryonesource.com, under Community/Webinars. If you are unable to listen in on the live webinar, check back with Military One Source after it becomes available through archived webinars.
- The UC Davis MIND Institute offers educational video webcast on-line. Visit their website at <http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mindinstitute/> to find lectures, studies and more on special needs topics.



Education on-line and free!

- "A New Spin on Autism" Podcast available on-line. [Www.webtalkradio.net](http://www.webtalkradio.net). Find answers and entertainment by Lynette Louise
- Special Needs Talk Radio: <http://talkingspecialneeds.com> / Broadcasting for the special needs community. Become empowered and confident through a variety of shows and topics available on this website.