

# Healthy **Sugar Land** Families

A special health section for families in the greater Sugar Land area.



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Sugar Land Medical Experts Advise Parents When to Take Sick or Injured Children to ER



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The Impact of Autism on Sugar Land Families



# 911 Emergency

## Sugar Land Medical Experts Advise Parents When to Take Sick or Injured Children to the ER or Urgent Care

As a stay-at-home mother to four boys ranging in age from three to 14, Anne Sanford is no stranger to scrapes, bumps and childhood illnesses. But her seven-year-old son Aidan's breathing problem was unusual.

"He had a cold for a couple of days and was having trouble breathing," she recalls. "I've never heard that type of wheezing."

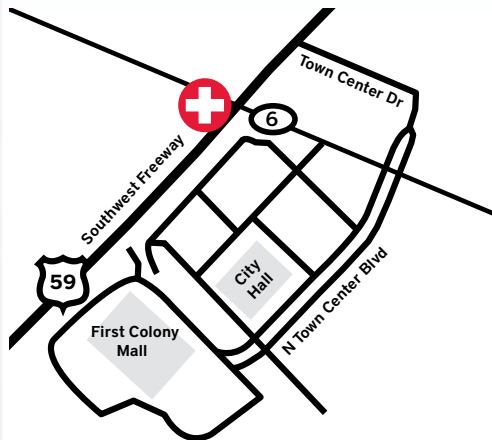
Sanford wasn't worried until the school nurse called her to pick up Aidan from school. A trip to the pediatrician and about five breathing treatments later, and they were headed to the emergency room. It turned out that Aidan was suffering from severe respiratory problems associated with allergens and his cold. He was treated from about 6 p.m. until midnight when his airways opened. Not making the trip to the ER might have been disastrous. "I think his airway could have closed," Sanford said.

Some seemingly mild symptoms, like body odor in young children and a stiff neck when accompanied by fever and a rash, could also be indicative of conditions that require immediate medical attention.

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## Better Safe than Sorry

As in Aidan's case, choosing whether or not to head to the ER may not be clear to parents at first glance. "In instances where the child doesn't appear in major distress, it's helpful to call your pediatrician to choose your course of action," says Dr. Anastasia Gentles, a pediatrician and owner of NightLight After Hours Pediatrics. "The parent can describe to the doctor what they are seeing, and the doctor can tell them whether to go to the ER or not."

But if things just don't feel right, trust your intuition, recommends Rande Kunicki, a registered nurse with Dickerson Pediatrics P.A. of Sugar Land. "You know your child," Kunicki says. "If your baby doesn't look right, don't ask our permission. If it's a wasted trip, who cares?" Dr. Shannon Orsak, an emergency medical physician and a co-owner of St. Michael's Emergency Center, agrees. "If the child is sick or there's some chance to lose life or limb, it's better to be safe than sorry."

## Report Immediately to the Emergency Room

Whether a symptom is an emergency or not depends on a child's age, according to Dr. Charles Hsu, a Sugar Land pediatrician who runs an after hours pediatric care clinic. Hsu says, infants under two months old should go to the ER with fevers over 100.5 degrees. Signs of dehydration in an infant, like failure to wet diapers or make tears also warrant a trip to the ER.

All too often, parents miss the warning signs and lose precious time when emergencies arise.



Little Gemma had to take a trip to the ER

Take children to the emergency room right away if they:

- Show severe wheezing or labored breathing.
- Have a fever over 104 degrees and act extremely lethargic.
- Suddenly develop a purplish pink rash.
- Appear dehydrated following continuous vomiting or diarrhea.
- Get a gaping wound or any severe cut to the face or hand.
- Are throwing up or acting differently after a head injury.
- Have an infection around the eye and cannot move the eye.
- Have abdominal pain and scream when you press on the area.
- Bleed profusely.
- Turn blue.
- Are involved in an automobile accident

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## Time is Not On Your Side

Time is clearly of the essence when treating many of the health conditions mentioned. But when in doubt, it's better to err on the side of being too cautious, the ER experts say. Waiting too long for wound care, for example, is a big no-no. "You see people coming in 24 hours later (with wound injuries)," says Gentles. "If you don't catch a wound within 18 to 20 hours it's not going to be closeable."

Untreated, deep wounds lead to scars that could have been prevented and could lead to possible infection, Gentles says. It's best to have the child seen within eight hours of a deep wound, added Scott Stover, Clinical Director for the Emergency Department at Methodist Sugar Land Hospital.

If possible, take your child to an urgent care center yourself rather than sending them with a relative or caregiver, advises Hsu. When this happens in his practice it can make it difficult to get a thorough medical history, he says.

# EMERGENCY ROOM OR URGENT CARE?

How can parents tell which kind of emergency requires which kind of facility? Read below for basic guidelines.

## HOSPITALS WITH EMERGENCY ROOMS

Experts recommend heading to a hospital's emergency room for life-threatening situations including chest pain, difficulty breathing, high fevers in infants, severe bleeding or head trauma, loss of consciousness, sudden loss of vision or blurred vision.

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Methodist Sugar Land Hospital  
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281-274-7000

## URGENT CARE CENTERS

For minor emergencies, urgent care centers are best. They are less costly and usually have shorter wait times. Most accept insurance and can handle minor burns or injuries, sprains, coughs, colds, sore throats, ear infections, fever of flu, and broken bones. Call ahead to check hours of operation, insurances accepted, and services covered.

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## Be Prepared

It's impossible to predict when accidents or illness may strike your child. But as in sports, the best defense is a good offense, say the experts, and that starts with education. Parents should make sure they read all they can about any preexisting condition their child may have, such as asthma, keep reference literature on hand, and ask their pediatrician about anything they don't understand. "No question is stupid," says Kunicki.

Keep an updated list of immunizations and medications your child takes, adds Orsak. And if you do have to take your child to the emergency room, be confident you've made the best decision. "Ninety point nine percent of the time your instincts are your best weapon," Kunicki says. **SLM**

*TONYA ELLIS and her husband Keith are parents to three children under age six and thankfully haven't had to take any of them to the ER within the past year.*



# Living with Autism

The Impact of Autism on  
Sugar Land Families

Written by Lee Butler  
Photography by Lisa Mangos

Most sufferers of autism will have these three disorders in common: problems with social interaction; impaired verbal and nonverbal communication; a pattern of repetitive behavior with narrow, restricted interests.

Autism has become a national issue and is being recognized much more frequently than in past years, mainly as a result of better diagnosis. It is estimated that roughly 20,000 Texas students have some type of autism. Diagnosis of autism is complex, with many families not being aware of the symptoms until their child is in school and it is called to their attention by educators.

## A Team Approach to Treatment

Due to the increasing numbers of affected children, many public schools are treating autism as a separate part of the Special Education process. Schools in the Fort Bend Independent School District, along with many other districts, even have a person specializing in the disorder. They work with the parents of the child and coordinate the home care with that offered at the school. Recent Texas laws have set forth eleven areas, including specific teaching strategies and social skill supports that parents and educators must discuss prior to deciding on an autistic child's education plan.

## Never-Ending Battle

Autism is an isolating and exhausting disorder that can wear down even the most diligent and hopeful parents. While the Buckle family fights autism on a 24 hour-per-day basis, they have hopes that their fight will eventually not be in vain. Although Anne Marie has made considerable improvement, it is a never ending battle.

In addition to twin daughters, Sharon and Ed Buckle have two other children, an 11-year-old son, Joseph, and a 3-year-old daughter, Erin. Neither of the parents or the other children is autistic, but the lives of all of the family members are profoundly affected.



Sharon and Anne Marie share a special bond

## School Make-Ready a Major Chore

At the Buckle's home, the day starts early. Sharon and Ed get up at 4:30 a.m., in time to share a cup of coffee before preparing breakfast, the day's lunches, and beginning their long day. Joseph and Grace are up and starting to prepare for school by 6:15 a.m. while Anne Marie is begging for "40 winks." When she reluctantly gets out of bed, the school-day routine is started. Sharon must spend the next hour with Anne Marie prompting her to work through her "get ready" list in time to leave for school at 7:30 a.m.

"The treatment of autism is a partnership between family and school," says LaToya Harris-Smith, the autism program coordinator of FBISD. "When we work together, dramatic returns can be derived." Smith has noticed a definite rise in the number of children in FBISD who either have autism, or symptoms resembling autism. "There has been a considerable increase in the past years," she says. One local family, the Buckles, have become advocates for their autistic seven-year-old daughter, Anne Marie.

To the Buckles, it was obvious that something was not right when Anne Marie was less than 18-months of age. Her twin sister, Grace, continued progressing in her social and motor skills, while Anne Marie suddenly started regressing. Things that she previously did, such as beginning to feed herself, she stopped doing. A visit to a pediatrician and other specialists gave no firm and certain identity to the problem, just an assurance that it was normal for children, even twins, to develop at different rates. It was only after consulting with several other specialists in childhood disorders that a suspicion, later confirmed, that Anne Marie was, in fact, autistic. Anne Marie was then 28-months of age.

"We recognize how important it is for Anne Marie to receive an appropriate education, especially given her disability. We also know that our involvement in every facet of her life at this time increases her chances for an independent future." – Sharon Buckle

The school preparation is not without difficulty. Anne Marie may decide that she doesn't like what has been prepared and refuse to eat. The Buckles, however, have hopes that this will be one of the things that Anne Marie will be able to do independently eventually...get ready for school. However, right now she requires one-on-one attention.

Ed leaves for his office at Midstates Petroleum, a small independent oil and gas production company, in Houston, where he is an engineer. He drops Joseph and Grace off at St. Laurence Catholic School, usually arriving barely in time.



Grace with her twin sister, Anne Marie

Anne Marie is a student at an elementary school in the Fort Bend Independent School District. And, her younger sister Erin attends St. Laurence Weekday Children's Program.

Sharon is constantly rushing between their home, three schools, children's activities, and Anne Marie's therapies. Lunch, if any, is usually on the run and frequently in the family car.

Upon the diagnosis of autism, the Buckles decided to become proactive and not take a "wait and see" approach to the condition. They immediately started learning all they could about it while getting additional testing for Anne Marie to rule out other possible disorders and diseases. Simultaneously they started intensive intervention for Anne Marie, which continues to

this date. Anne Marie has benefited over the past five years from continuous year-round therapies, including speech, occupational and physical therapies, as well as horseback riding, social skills therapy, plus one-on-one tutoring and Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA).

The Buckles have attended numerous conferences, training seminar, and support group meetings addressing ways to improve Anne Marie's chances for a meaningful, successful and independent life.



Anne Marie enjoying the park

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“As parents, we find navigating the murky waters of autism treatment frustrating,” Sharon says. “We feel blessed to now have a team of professionals working together to help Anne Marie reach for her stars and maximize her abilities.”

### After-School Activities

Proper physical development is very important to an autistic child. For Anne Marie, it is basketball night. At 4:20 p.m., Anne Marie dons her basketball uniform, grabs her “blue bag” (therapy materials) and jumps into the “Mommy Bus” ready to go to tutoring. After leaving Anne Marie at tutoring, Sharon returns home to pick up the other youngsters for their evening activities, which will also include basketball.

As a college educated couple, Sharon and Ed realize they have some advantages a lot of other parents do not. “We recognize how important it is for Anne Marie to receive an appropriate education, especially given her disability,” Sharon says. “We also know that our involvement in every facet of her life at this time increases her chances for an independent future.” **SLM**



The Buckle Family-Ed and Sharon, Grace, Anne Marie, Erin, and Joseph

**Caring for Children Takes Teamwork**

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## AUTISM Play Group OF FORT BEND

Fort Bend now has an AUTISM Play Group for children ages 1-12 (up to 5th grade) including their parents and siblings. This group will provide social opportunities for children with Autism & their families while building a support network in Fort Bend County. The group will meet the 2nd Saturday of every month, locations will vary. The playgroup is open to residents & non-residents of Fort Bend County. For more information, please contact Susan at [susanbgar@earthlink.net](mailto:susanbgar@earthlink.net) or 281-726-2665.

*LEE BUTLER is a retired long-time news reporter in Texas, a Korean War Veteran of the U.S. Marines and the father of five adult sons. He is a native Oklahoman, but has lived in Texas the majority of his adult life.*

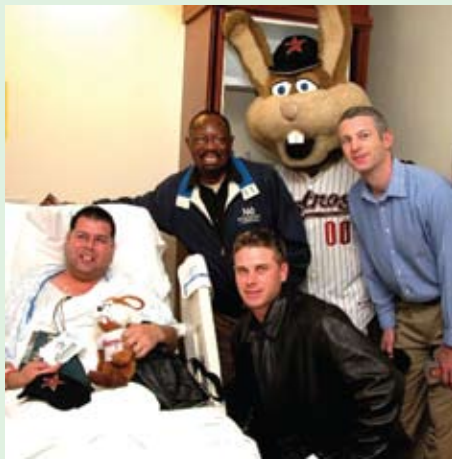


# HEALTH

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# BRIEFS

## Astros Caravan Visits Patients at Methodist SL



Patients and employees at Methodist Sugar Land Hospital got a sneak preview of the baseball season when the Houston Astros 2008 Caravan rolled through Fort Bend County. Pitcher Brandon Backe, former Astros slugger Jimmy Wynn, radio announcer Brett Dolan, and Astros mascot, Junction Jack,

recently visited a handful of Methodist Sugar Land patients like Enrique Rivera. The 2008 Astros Caravan trek included visiting and signing autographs in 19 cities in 13 days, including several stops in the Houston and surrounding areas.

## Methodist SL Hospital Honors Students



Student winners of Tobacco Free Fort Bend's annual anti-tobacco poster contest were recognized for their artwork. The annual contest is used to educate students and the community about the dangers associated with tobacco use and second hand smoke. Sugar Land Mayor David Wallace was on hand to help congratulate the FBISD middle school award winners. Each art entry included a visual depiction of the dangers associated with tobacco use and a written fact substantiating the piece. Back Row L-R: Mary Ann Dolezal, Mayor David Wallace, Walter Lemieux, Alif Musa J., Jaalon Pratt, Hyun Kim, Mary Hamilton, Leena Taneja, Francis Goerlich . Front Row L-R: Danielle Bloom, Emily Gorski, Alexis Landoski, Susan Malas, Meredith Johnson.

## Food Pantry News

The East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry received more than 500 lbs. of mac and cheese from The Stafford Chiropractic Clinic's second annual Macaroni Mountain food drive. Two years ago, the doctors and staff came up with a creative way to help those in need within the community. Patients who donated at least 10 boxes of macaroni and cheese



were given a free exam for new patients or a free chiropractic adjustment for existing patients. The hundreds of boxes of donated mac and cheese were assembled into a "macaroni mountain" and displayed in the office waiting room. For more information about East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry, Inc., or to make a donation, visit their website: [humanneeds.org](http://humanneeds.org) or stop by their offices at 425 Stafford Run in Stafford. The Interfaith Food Pantry is open Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday from 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m. and Wednesdays from 6 -8 p.m. Call 281-261-1006 or email [ministry@humanneeds.org](mailto:ministry@humanneeds.org).

## Methodist Hospital makes "100 Best Companies to Work for" list

The Methodist Hospital System is ranked No. 10 among FORTUNE magazine's 2008 "100 Best Companies to Work For,"



making the list for the third year in a row. Methodist is ranked in the top 10 for the second year in a row and is the highest ranked health care organization in the country, and the only health care system in Texas to receive the prestigious distinction this year. It is also the highest ranked company in Texas. Only 13 companies in Texas were chosen. Methodist ranked No. 8 in the category of large companies and ranked No. 3 for the hiring of minorities, and No. 10 for the hiring of women. The Methodist Hospital System, which includes a flagship teaching hospital, three community hospitals and a research institute, was awarded the high ranking for providing an exemplary workplace for employees. The Houston Business Journal also recently ranked Methodist as one of the best places to work in Houston. The Methodist Hospital consistently is ranked by U.S. News & World Report as one of America's best hospitals, ranked in 14 of 16 adult specialties in 2007.

### OakBend Medical Center Announces New CEO

The Board of Directors at OakBend Medical Center named Joe Freudenberger as the Chief Executive Officer for the hospital. Freudenberger has been the acting CEO since October 2007 having joined OakBend as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) earlier in 2007. Freudenberger has been facilitating organizational improvements in healthcare settings for over 20 years. During the last 11 years he held CFO and Chief Operating Officer positions at Cypress Fairbanks Center and more recently at Memorial Health System of East Texas. Freudenberger has been married for 24 years to his wife, Laura who is a partner at Briggs Veselka Co., CPA firm in Houston. They have three children, ages 19, 17 and 15 years.



## SUBMIT HEALTH NEWS

If you have health news pertaining to Sugar Land families, email it to [editor@sugarlandmagazine.com](mailto:editor@sugarlandmagazine.com)

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