

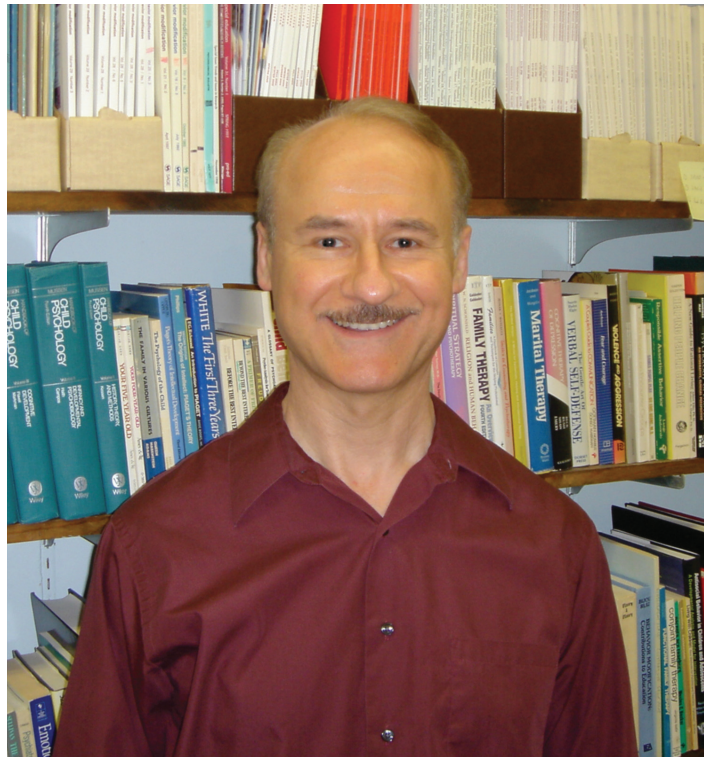
PROFESSOR EDWARD (TED) CARR

By Stephen M. Edelson, PhD

The autism community lost one of its giants in June due to a tragic car accident involving a drunk driver. Professor Edward Carr's wife, Dr. Ilene Wasserman, also passed away as a result of the car accident. Dr. Carr was a consummate lecturer, researcher, and humanitarian. During his 30-plus years in the autism field, he contributed significantly to the areas of applied behavior analysis (ABA), functional communication, and severe behavior problems. In the past couple of years, Dr. Carr began a paradigm shift within the autism field by integrating both behavioral and biomedical interventions.

Much of his thinking about this merger was described in detail in an article with Dr. Martha Herbert titled "Integrating Behavioral and Biomedical Approaches" and an article which appeared in the last issue of *The Autism File* titled "Integrating Biomedical and Behavioral Science: The Happy Future Ahead."

I invited several people to write their thoughts about Dr. Carr including his graduate students and his son, Aaron Carr.



Dr. Carr's graduate students: Emile Mulder and Lauren Moskowitz, with feedback from Lauren Adamek

Ted dedicated his career to helping people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) by trying to understand the functions or purposes of problem behavior (challenging or maladaptive behaviors) as well as the contexts in which those behaviors occur. The first part of his career was spent investigating the motivation or function of problem behavior, the consequences that maintain problem behavior, as well as developing interventions to address those functions. The research of Ted and his colleagues and graduate students helped to demonstrate that interventions that are

based on the functions of problem behaviors are about twice as successful as those that are not.

Even when assessing the antecedents and consequences of behavior, Ted also saw that, within this traditional behavioral model, it was still sometimes difficult to identify reliable antecedents or consequences of behavior, and many behaviors still seemed completely random. This led Ted to examine the role of setting events (i.e., broad contextual factors that make problem behavior more likely to occur) in altering the relationship between antecedents and consequences. Thus, the next part of Ted's career was devoted to studying the contexts that make problem behavior more likely to

occur and working to develop interventions that addressed antecedents and setting events in addition to only consequences, as had traditionally been done.

Ted's most recent line of research sought to show that biological or internal setting events such as fatigue, mood, temperament, and physical illness all play an important role in determining behavior and that by altering these factors or adapting to them, we can greatly improve quality of life for people with ASD and their families. In addition to examining this expanded model, Ted's future line of research intended to examine systems factors. Systems factors, including a lack of family support or school support, greatly impact setting events, antecedents, and problem behavior and can often be barriers to intervention success.

Ted's mission was to identify and target all of the factors that contribute to problem behavior in individuals with ASD in an effort to mitigate the problematic contexts that lead to those behaviors and improve quality of life for these individuals and their families.

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Dr. Carr's son: Aaron Carr

The most looked upon people throughout history didn't succeed in life because of a simple mind. It is the ones who had thought outside the box that remain with us even after the end of their days. When Martin Luther King spoke, he wasn't just talking about black people, he was talking about all people. And my father's strong dedication to autism contained a similar theme: what can be done to help one group succeed can be applied to help any group succeed.

My father dedicated his life to autism because he knew that he could have a major impact on the field, but it was his understanding and compassion for humanity that was the formula to his success. In life all of us look for incentives that drive us to work and be productive members of society.

If a CEO for a big business puts up with all the stress and hard work his job entails, he will end up with a meaty paycheck every week. That's what the CEO wants, and if he does his job right that's what he will get. An individual with autism may have different wants and needs, but whatever they are, my dad felt that they could be used to reinforce that person to work hard in the community just like the CEO. This way they could live their lives with meaning, just like any productive member of society. Keeping autistic individuals in group homes under the influence of psychotropic drugs just won't cut it. They have too much potential and this is why my dad spent over 30 years trying to better the lives of this population.

But, without people like us helping out, individuals with autism don't have a fair

chance. In the short life we live, everyone deserves a fair chance. People like Martin Luther King and my father have proved it.

Dr. Ted Carr will be missed greatly by his colleagues in the autism community and at the State University of New York at Stony Brook as well as his friends and relatives. Truly, a tragic loss to all of us.

References

Carr, E.G., & Edelson, S.M. (2009). Integrating Biomedical and Behavioral Science: The Happy Future Ahead. *The Autism File*, 32, pp. 106-109.

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