



# INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

## « Affinity Therapy »



### Current research and practices on autism

## Autism : a revolution is underway in the USA !

"Affinity therapy" is a concept introduced in the US on 2014, April by Ron Suskind, famous New York Times journalist, and Dan Griffin, therapist, to describe the amazing way Autism Owen Suskind went through Autism with his "affinity" - that is to say, his special interest devoted to Disney movies. Shortly before, K. Barnett had also, recounted his satisfaction for standing courageously against the advice of experts to promote his autistic son's passion for the movement of light in space whereby he became a researcher in astrophysics.

The considerable echo in the Anglo-Saxon media of Suskind's book (*Life, Animated*. 2014) and to a lesser extent that of K. Barnett's (*The spark*. 2013) now forces specialists, including American ones, to undergo a radical change in the consideration of specific interests in the treatment of autism: once belittled as "obsessions" or "passing fads," they tend to become the mainstay of treatment. That is in accordance with the opinion of the highly functioning autistic Temple Grandin's cattle chute. Long ago had she not already established the benefit that it is possible to draw from autistic passions? Thus, this symposium aims to show how most autistic people use the fundamental support that are their affinities.

This symposium aims also at studying, developing and analyzing different behavioral, cognitive and psycho-dynamic methods that use the autistics' special interests either as a positive life enhancing or as a way for developing social skills; and mainly studying these methods' therapeutic consequences which take into consideration autistics' affect and objects, as well as their obsessions and passions. Indeed, the methods recommended in France by the Health Authority seek to correct behavior or cognition in autism, but how is that possible when highly functioning autistic suffer from a deficit taking into account the emotional life? The Denver program attempts to remedy to this: letting children express their choices within the proposed learning syllabus; it is a program which is interested in the motivations and does not neglect the

conscious affectivity. However, a shift occurs when the passions are taken into consideration. By introducing an element that goes beyond the will of the subject, an emotional element which is something in the shape of a "stronger than oneself," then the mainstream of the treatment shifts from the educator towards the autistic child. It is no longer the educator's technical knowledge which runs and leads, but the subject's passion or affinity; then the educator's job will be to stimulate and sustain, but we know that passion cannot be controlled. More and more consideration about the autistics' specific interests, not as enhancers of learning but as the basis of treatment, announces a return of psychodynamic methods. That is why a major place will be given to institutional practice with autism.

**Scientific referents:** Myriam Perrin, PhD, and J-C Maleval, PhD.



With the Suskind family:  
Ron, Cornelia and  
their son Owen



...and Dr. Dan Griffin, Owen's therapist

## REGISTRATION

Online registration and information:

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## March 5th & 6th

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Ille & Vilaine  
LE DÉPARTEMENT

