AutismDelaware.org

The Sun

Newsletter

Autumn 2020

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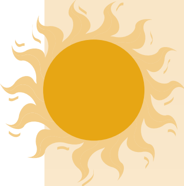

Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Autism℠ DELAWARE

3 steps toward preparedness

Clip Art

→ ***Do you have a plan for handling a disaster or emergency?***

→ ***If you had a week's warning that a hurricane would make landfall in Delaware, what would you do?***

→ ***What if you had only 10 minutes to evacuate? What would you grab?***

→ ***More importantly, how would your child on the spectrum manage the sudden change in routine? And how would you manage your child?***

"Planning tools in Delaware are designed to be adapted to the individual needs of each person with an access and functional need, disability, or health concern," begins Beth MacDonald, the state's Division of Public Health Vulnerable Populations Coordinator—Office of Preparedness. "While the state has no planning tool specific to children with autism, the state's plans include people and children with autism."

To individualize emergency plans for your loved one on the spectrum, MacDonald suggests taking the following three steps toward preparedness.

Step #1: Use Preparedness Buddy. Available as a simple two-sided brochure, this form helps you consider what is needed to adequately care for your child during a disaster or emergency. The fill-in-the-blanks categories include medication, durable medical equipment, allergies, medical and disability service providers, important papers, transportation requirements, and pets and service animals.

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Autism Delaware^{SM}

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An overview with gratitude

Brian Hall, MSW
Executive Director

No one needed to tell Autism Delaware staff that they are essential workers! As soon as Delaware Governor John Carney declared a state of emergency, they immediately began expanding their workload to address the ill effects of COVID-19 on our community:

- Autism Delaware's adult services staff strove to keep as many of our participants working as possible. Through our program known as Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation (or POW&R, for short), staff acquired a supply of hand sanitizer from a community partner, Beach Time Distilling. And Help for Healthcare Workers Delaware taught our POW&R participants how to wear masks correctly and be comfortable wearing them.

- Acknowledging the grief and loss that many of our families were suddenly facing, Autism Delaware's newsletter committee got expert advice, asked families about how they coped, and shared it all in the summer newsletter.

- Building on Autism Delaware's vision for creating growth opportunities for individuals and families, our community engagement specialist developed at-home programming that gave our families interesting and fun projects to do in the safety of their homes. These accessible activities included variations on *The Amazing Race* and *The Great British Bake Off.* Thanks to these creative, optional resources (which did not exist prior to the pandemic), bright new opportunities began to fill the lives in our community.

- Slowly but surely, our families began to report positive outcomes. Autism Delaware's family services staff created a social media campaign to share these highlights—providing a ray of hope to those who are struggling.

- Meanwhile, the financial burden of running a nonprofit continued to fall not only on the shoulders of leadership but also on the entire Autism Delaware community. Staff on our fund development and engagement team extended themselves beyond their usual outreach by creating online platforms that encompassed our first virtual Walk for Autism. In turn, many families were able to fundraise safely while enjoying themselves immensely.

- And Autism Delaware's new chief operations officer, Margie Rowles, and I worked tirelessly with our board of directors to keep our statewide offices open and our staff supported.

To all the Autism Delaware staff and board members, thank you for your ongoing effort. And to all the individuals and families served by Autism Delaware, thank you for "hangin' in there" since March. I think we, as a community, should be proud of ourselves. I am certainly grateful for your continued faith in Autism Delaware as well as for your patience.

3 steps toward preparedness

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The form also serves as a guide to finding someone to depend on during an emergency. Called a "Preparedness Buddy," this individual would check on your child throughout the day and, in case of an emergency, provide assistance.

Altogether, this form creates a personalized emergency plan that can be shared with family, friends, and others who are essential to your child's welfare.

The form comes in seven languages, including English and Spanish. To download a copy, visit https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/php/preparednessbuddy.html.

> ***During hurricane season, accommodations for people with autism will be made available at shelters, but because of the need for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, shelters should be a last resort.***
>
> ***Please do not go to a shelter. You get plenty of lead time, so plan ahead to leave before the storm arrives.***
>
> ***And remember to reserve ParaTransit if you need it.***
>
> **—Beth MacDonald**
>
> **Vulnerable Populations Coordinator—Office of Preparedness**
>
> **Division of Public Health**

Step #2: Register with Smart911.
Through the 9-1-1 emergency system, you share as much or as little information about your child as you think is necessary for quick action by emergency services. Smart911 works anywhere within Delaware plus anywhere out of state if the location has Smart911.

Because Smart911 is a mobile app, registration is attached to a cell phone number, but it can also be an emergency button on a communication device or put on Alexa or a smartwatch. According to MacDonald, Smart911 is especially good for children prone to eloping and offers an option to include a photo of your child.

For details, visit https://www.smart911.com.

Step #3: Have a conversation about current events with your loved one on the spectrum.
"Now is a good time to talk about all the changes in the environment, such as the large peaceful public gatherings and hurricane planning," says MacDonald. "The point is to prepare someone with autism so he or she isn't surprised or overwhelmed by a sudden shift in the daily routine."

"Preparing is key," adds State Health Operation Center At-Risk Supervisor Edward Thompson, LMSW. "The way toward preparedness is verbal and nonverbal conversation and training and preparedness drills. And every child should be part of this conversation."

Because of COVID-19 and the need for social distancing, Thompson has been focusing on preparedness and suggests the following actions to complete your plan:

- **Assemble a "go bag."** This should be something you can grab easily as you're headed out the door. Fill your go bag with sensory items as well as information about your child, including insurance and contact information.

- **Acquaint your child with the sounds** of the impending emergency. For example, if a hurricane is approaching and you have Amazon's Echo device, say "Alexa, play me a hurricane." For handling the noise associated with emergency vehicles, tell Alexa to play sirens.

- **Create a practice drill.** Individualize the drill to your child's specific needs. Focus on what people will be doing during the emergency.

If your child is capable of handling a task, assign him or her a job, such as "Make sure all doors and windows are locked."

Begin each practice drill by saying to your child "This is what we're supposed to do." Then when the emergency arises, your child will know what to expect, assures Thompson: "My son has autism, is very intelligent, and will follow the rules step by step. While others panic, he will be the calmest in the room because he knows what to do."

- **Get updated emergency information for your county.** Download the link at https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dsaapd/emergency_links_delaware.html.

More resources

AllReadyDelaware: Emergency Readiness Planning for Delawareans with Disabilities— https://www.allreadyde.org/helpful-tools-tips/

Delaware Emergency Preparedness Information—https://www.ready.gov/disability

Effective Communications for People with Disabilities: Before, During, and After Emergencies, **by the National Council on Disability—**https://ncd.gov/publications/2014/05272014

Clip Art

Ask a parent **is a new column that presents a question from a parent, grandparent, or caregiver—and an answer from parents in our community.**

As a parent with a child on the autism spectrum, have you wondered how another parent would handle your particular situation? Or maybe you'd appreciate hearing about another parent's success story and how it was achieved.

To offer a question or your availability to draft an answer, send an email of interest to carla.koss@delautism.org.

Q *How did you keep from being overwhelmed by it all when the state first shut down?*

—Anonymous parent

A What we are experiencing during this global pandemic is unprecedented. In addition to many lives lost, jobs on hold or vanished, and a teetering economy, we are living in a constant state of anxiety and uncertainty. Life as we knew it no longer exists as every day is a new chapter in a book that is still being written. This defining moment has truly given "feeling overwhelmed" a whole new meaning, and most strategies that helped me cope in the past no longer apply.

Take one day at a time—For me, each day is about the same as the day before, and I often check the computer to confirm the day of the week. *Cut and paste this one.*

Focus on what you can control—*Really?* I can't control a virus run amuck and the ensuing consequences. I can't even control the shopping cart or my grocery delivery where substitutions are the norm. *Ever try to make fish tacos with frozen pancakes?*

Connect with others—For the first time, I have used up all my carry-over minutes connecting with family and friends in conversations like these:

"Everyone healthy?"

"Any leads on finding wheat flour? I must be the only person in the universe who hasn't baked bread yet because I killed the sourdough starter. *RIP!*"

"Which mask are you sewing today: Olson or pseudo-surgical?"

"Believe it or not, I bartered elastic ribbon for veggie garden kale."

And then, there is FaceTime, which I only practice with my two children who aren't judging me for my permanently bad hair days. My oldest, Stefan, has autism and hasn't quite figured out how his parents fit into a cell phone and why they aren't delivering his usual must-haves: ice cream and soda. I'm sure that his perspective of the current situation is even more confusing for him than for us. That's my best guess since he is unable to tell me otherwise. Needless to say, we miss him terribly.

From far away Austin, Tex., daughter Megan lets us share dinnertime with our seven-month-old grandson Charlie, who is learning to eat with a spoon. Throwing the spoon from the highchair is more accurate. To our collective delight, he is now hurling nine spoons vs. two just a month ago and has mastered smearing sweet potato on every nearby surface. I so wish I could plant a kiss on his sweet-potatoed cheek.

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Stay fit and healthy—In general, I'm a fairly motivated person, but when it comes to exercise, I'm not. I tried online fitness sessions but following an instructor from the corner of my eye while attempting single-arm planks proved to be too much for my wobbly body. I need machines that I can control, not an exuberant über-fit human. So, I pull weeds, haul garden mulch, and go for walks. *Someone has to monitor mask compliance!*

The only advice I can give is to take a deep breath and to have faith. "This too shall pass."

—Marie-Anne Aghazadian
Parent-advocate, retired executive director of the Parent Information Center of Delaware, and former member of the Autism Delaware^{SM} Board of Directors

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A ***How did I keep from being overwhelmed?*** **At the start of the state shutdown, I did not.** Caring for my elderly parents, who have been isolated in their home, as well as my 26-year-old son with severe autism has been the most demanding experience I've ever had.

Because my husband is an essential worker, he was unable to offer much help. With no time off for either of us, I quickly became exhausted. This was the first time since my son's diagnosis at the age of two that I had no help from any person or organization. My son suddenly had no program to attend, no job or therapy, camps, outings, respite, Special Olympics, friends or family to visit—Nothing! He was given a once-a-day, half-hour Zoom lesson at home which, while something, did not come close to the structure and social interaction he had been used to and truly needed. It was hard for him—and our family.

To be sure, I am thankful for my many blessings, the most precious being my son. I have not lost a loved one to COVID-19 as have so many. I pray my son is never stricken with this horrible disease, hospitalized, surrounded by strangers, searching for me, unable to understand.… My heart goes out to all those affected. We've all been affected in one way or another.

The isolation has been especially hard for everyone. My friends are all busy and exhausted so we haven't talked much. We don't want to complain or bring each other down. I imagine others must also feel the loneliness and anxiety that I have felt during this time.

Then, around the sixth week of the shutdown, I found some balance—or rather, it found me. After I tried to implement too many new goals at once, my 6-foot 2-inch guy let me know the changes have been hard for him. While lying on the sofa icing my black eye and rechecking my coronavirus tracker for the hundredth time, I found "the middle." I channeled some tenets learned long ago:

- Keep my goals manageable.
- Build in breaks for him (and me).
- Give lots of reinforcement.

And they worked! Our days became a little less stressful.

Some other changes I made were simple but powerful. First, I carved out time for online meditation. Next, I discovered that limiting my consumption of news, social media, and the coronavirus tracker really helped. Finally, I developed a basic family meal plan that repeats every week and is sourced from online grocery shopping. And with a few hours of help, my parents were set up with online ordering too. *Why didn't I do this before?*

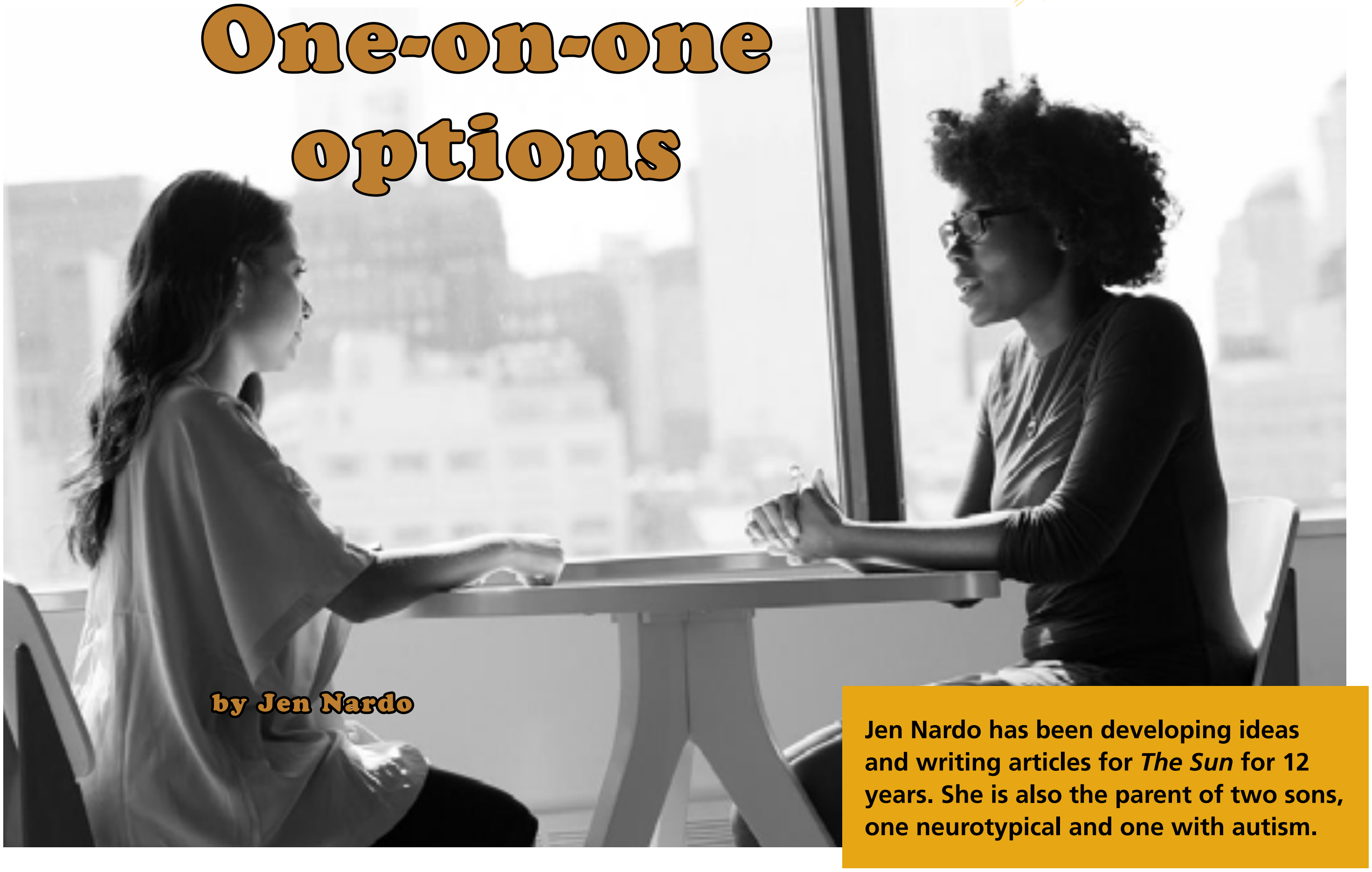
While handling all this by myself has definitely been hard, I'm not quite as overwhelmed anymore. I know things will look different as we reinvent our workplaces and strive to provide support that protects everyone. I cling to the hope for a safe return to the level of services and support Autism Delaware provided before the pandemic.

Now more than ever, we must press our legislators to continue funding disability organizations facing the economic challenges ahead. Fundraising is ever more critical too. Just as the state declared, and as I now clearly realize, disability services are truly essential.

Meanwhile, I have to keep going for my son and our family while also finding time for myself. Each day of this autism journey, we learn and grow. Personally, I have the experience of parenting with the combined challenges of severe autism and a pandemic. This is pretty incredible.

—Susan Patel
Parent-advocate and member of the Autism Delaware Board of Directors

One-on-one options



by Jen Nardo

Jen Nardo has been developing ideas and writing articles for *The Sun* for 12 years. She is also the parent of two sons, one neurotypical and one with autism.

When the state shut down because of the COVID-19 quarantine, were you suddenly expected to maintain your child's social interactions, handle your child's increased anxiety level—as well as your own—and take on the role of therapist and teacher—and you are trained for neither!

If you answered "Yes," please know you were not alone. That said, consider the following options that helped me and may help you with any further one-on-one needs you may be expected to fill for your child:

Maintain social interactions

Take advantage of video communication websites, such as Zoom and Skype. Setting up a once-a-week call, whether with a family member or other parents, presents the opportunity to practice conversational skills and turn-taking. The call may not last long, but that's okay.

Practice social greetings with each other, and maybe plan an activity. Listen to a song together—which may lead to dancing! Playing an *I Spy*-type game can help hone the turn-taking skill. And after the call, talk about the people you just saw, and ask your child questions to test his or her memory, like "What color was grandpa's shirt?"

Handle increased anxiety levels

As the shutdown continued, I noticed a rise in my son's anxiety level. He'd scream at something he normally could deal with, and he needed more reassurance. I figured the problem was his lack of physical activity and having so much time on his hands. So whenever I had his attention, I added a little yoga or calisthenics to the day's activities.

To help my son manage his own anxiety level, I downloaded the Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame app. With familiar muppet faces, it offers breathing exercises and is easy to use.

Take on the role of therapist

Here are some links for children needing applied behavior therapy that I found useful:

- 13 ABA Therapy Activities for Kids with Autism You Can Do at Home on the Meraki Lane website.
- 18 Social Skills Activities for Kids with Autism and Sensory Issues also on the Meraki Lane website.
- 31 Days of Occupational Therapy with Free Materials on The OT Toolbox website.

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Take on the role of teacher

My "student" made good use of the info in the following:

- Apps for Students With Special Needs—As School Buildings Shutter, by Jayne Clare, on the Edutopia website.
- Access a digital library for kids on the Epic website.
- Transform your electronics into the latest in commmunication technology with the SoundingBoard app, on the AbleNet, Inc., website.
- My PlayHome and Tales2Go, on the Apple App Store website.
- Improve reading and writing skills with an app on the LetterSchool website.

Mix the lessons—Turn your walk for exercise and to relieve stress into an art project. Collect items from nature, such as leaves, flowers, pine cones, sticks, and shells. Whatever you find can be glued onto a piece of cardboard or cloth to make a collage. Include a botany lesson by talking about the life cycle of leaves as the seasons change. Use this opportunity to also talk about where your collected items occur in nature and what types of animals may use them. Find the seed pods in the pine cones, and plant one to watch it grow.

Counting is a challenge for my son, so we gather one type of item, like leaves, and count them while sorting them by color or similar shape. This lesson also hones organizational skills.

Writing the names of your collected items can become a language-arts lesson. My son is good with sight words, so we start with words that have symbols on his Picture Exchange Communication System® (PECS). When we are done, we have created a life-sized PECS.

Take out those bins of sidewalk chalk, and let your child practice writing skills, counting, and drawing on the sidewalk or driveway. After the next rain, "the canvas" will be ready for the next lesson.

Play-Doh® is a great way for a child to tune into his or her imagination while also strengthening hand muscles and working through a sensory sensitivity.

While working on an art project, give as few instructions as possible so that your child can figure it out by turning to his or her own skills. It doesn't matter what the finished project looks like. The important thing is, your child did it all by him- or herself.

Remember what's important—As you're working the one-on-one options with your child, remember to be patient. Just observe. When I do this, I get a better understanding of how my son's mind works.

And remember how uncertain and scary it is for our kids who can't process information like we can. The more patience, love, and assurance we give them, the better all of our lives will be.

Delaware Family Voices

Care Notebook

Are your child's medical records and individualized education program (IEP) materials all in one place and easy to access?

If not, a Delaware Family Voices Care Notebook may help. Available in digital or hard copy, this organizational tool is a central location for storing all of your child's information. The digital form also lets you share it easily with your child's healthcare professionals while providing access from any location, no matter how far away from home you are.

To start the care notebook process, you need some training on how best to use it. This 40-minute webinar includes one-on-one guidance from Delaware Family Voices executive director Ann Phillips. A beginner's binder will also be given to you before the training begins.

If this training interests you, call Delaware Family Voices at (302) 669-3030.

More care notebook help

Managed by university faculty and staff plus leaders and staff from Utah Family Voices, the Medical Home Portal website offers a sample of a downloadable care notebook with template pages in both English and Spanish.

Got questions about your child's Medicaid MCO (managed care organization) coverage?

Get answers on Delaware Family Voices MCO Call!

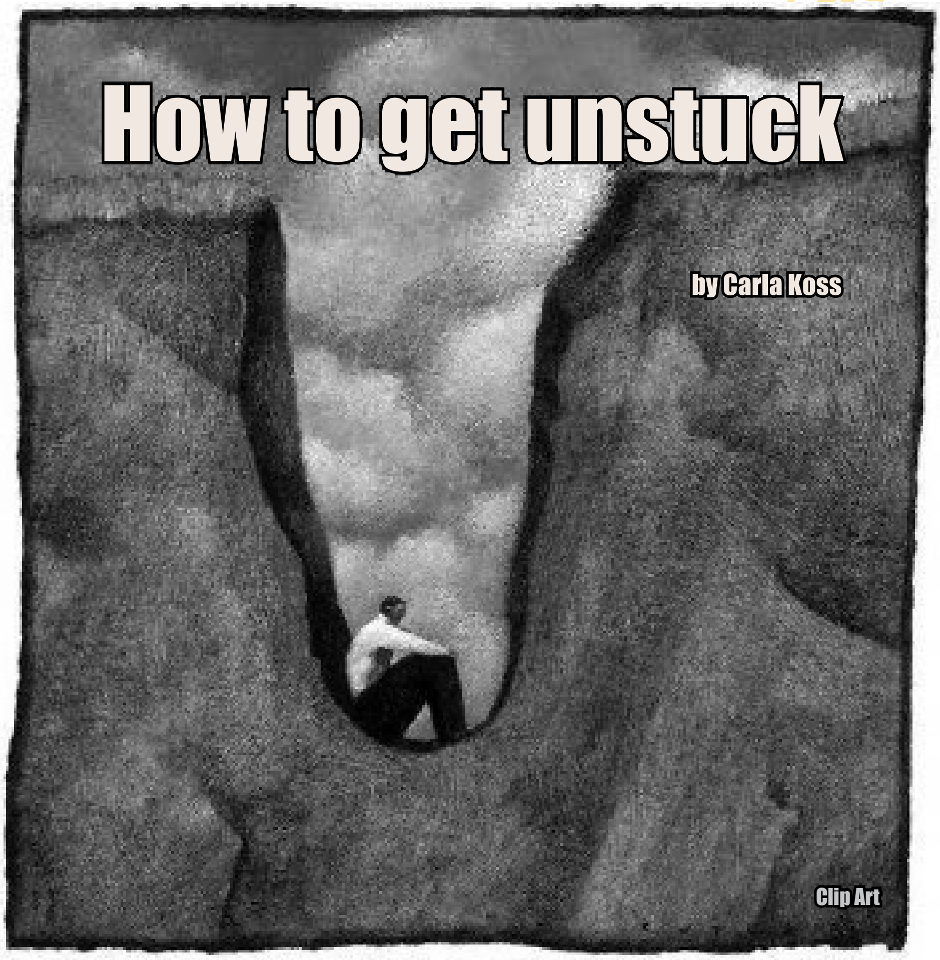
When: **Second Tuesday of each month**
11:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M.

How: **Call 1-800-220-9875.**
Use access code 40369724#.

For more information, call Delaware Family Voices at (302) 669-3030.

How to get unstuck

by Carla Koss



Clip Art

When family life has been disrupted—whether the disruption is caused by a divorce, pandemic, or the death of a loved one—anyone can feel grief and loss.

"The goal is to move through the grief and loss, not get stuck in it," notes Daniel Hoover, PhD.

Holding a faculty position in the psychiatry department at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Hoover is also a clinical child and adult psychologist at the Center for Child and Family Traumatic Stress at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Md.

"Some people, both on and off the spectrum," continues Hoover, "get stuck in grieving because of false notions of guilt or a misunderstanding." A prime example of this distortion is the child who believes "Dad left because I'm bad."

Whether the individual blames him- or herself or another person, Hoover recommends reworking this distortion.

How? Through cognitive reframing: "Take a look at the distortion, and help the child come up with alternative ways of thinking," states Hoover. For the child who blames himself, cognitive reframing reworks the distortion by using verbal affirmations and concrete statements, such as "I am not the cause."

For this process to work most effectively, it helps if the grieving person can make use of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques. Because many people on the autism spectrum are not up to this work, Hoover originated and oversees Horizons Clinic for people affected by developmental disorders.

"The framework for treatment at Horizons," continues Hoover, "is an evidence-based model called Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy® [or TF-CBT®, for short].

"The science shows that TF-CBT works well when treatment strategies for components of grief are added to address particularly traumatic loss and grief in children as well as for more typical or 'normal' responses to events."

At the Horizons Clinic, the framework is also modified to fit children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). *Why?* "Kids with autism have their own particular and unique ways of dealing with trauma, their own slant," explains Hoover. For example, "there may be periods of deep and intense sadness as a child remembers the person he or she lost. The child feels a keen sense of sadness that may not be so obvious as an expression of grief in a child with ASD. Even the high-functioning child who says 'I don't feel

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Dr. Hoover's recommended resource

Ready to Remember: Jeremy's Journey of Hope and Healing, **by Robin F. Goodman, Danny Miller, and Judith A. Cohen with *Caregiver Guide* by R.F. Goodman, J.A. Cohen, and Sherri Wilson. Los Angeles, Calif., and Durham, N.C.: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (2011).**

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anything' is not numb; the child just may not be in very good touch with feelings.

"When trauma's effects become intense," continues Hoover, "then the autism gets dysregulated, so the child may regress into anger, sadness, and stereotypies, such as hand-flapping and other tics."

Moving an individual on the spectrum through the grieving period and toward healing:

1 **The child must get in touch with feelings.** To help the child get in touch with feelings, Hoover recommends concrete actions, such as using an object that reminds the child of the person he or she lost or engaging in a certain routine that reminds the child of the person. "The emotion is there," notes Hoover, "so concrete actions will elicit feeling that can't otherwise be accessed or expressed. It's important to remember that people with autism are more literal and have a concrete understanding of death and loss."

Through his work, Hoover helps people get a sense that some part of the past relationship is still in them. For example, one of Hoover's clients insists he doesn't think about his deceased grandfather but wears his grandfather's Steelers jersey a lot—in a family of Ravens fans! So, Hoover relies on the jersey as the boy's object of connection: "I have him repeat sentences about the relationship he has with his grandfather's jersey, such as 'I wear my grandpa's jersey and watch football. I got my love of football from my grandpa.'

"It helps to figure out the right something that the child and the deceased have in common. Sometimes, much creativity is needed to read between the lines of the child's behavior."

2 **The child must accept the permanence of death.** Recognizing the permanency helps move an individual past grief, but to do so, the individual needs to be able to connect with the deceased loved one. Hoover recommends using the family's beliefs about death or their culture's.

"For example," states Hoover, "some families believe they'll be together again in heaven or the dead person is an angel who watches over loved ones on Earth. One family I worked with believed that their dead family members were ghosts, but this concept scared the child, so we worked at creating a less scary explanation of death.

"The family can use pictures of the deceased, talk about that person, remember what the person was like, anything that supports the grieving child—even if he or she doesn't want to look at the loss. You can also just sit with a grieving child and show your own grief, encourage the child to relate to the loss as you are," adds Hoover.

Experiencing separation or divorce

When a parent disappears from a child's life or shows up only once in a while, the child on the spectrum may grieve the loss of that parent, even if the child denies it. Like the child who has experienced death, the child who experiences the breakup of the family must get in touch with his or her feelings and accept the permanence of the situation. The goal is to help the child move through the grief and loss and not get stuck there.

According to Hoover, it's helpful to provide the child with a concrete reminder of an activity he or she shared with the absent parent. Some form of contact is also helpful.

One of Hoover's clients is a child in foster care who appeared to have little feeling about the fact that his mother was not in his life. He even denied the significance of his routine phone calls with his mom. "He didn't talk well on the phone," says Hoover. "Despite this, if he didn't get a chance to tell his mother about his interests or activities on a regular basis, his behavior became difficult; he regressed. He would act like he doesn't care, but his relationship with his mother is more important than it would appear on the surface."

Helping the parents

Currently, TF-CBT doesn't work for all people with autism, points out Hoover. A lot depends on the level of cognitive support that an individual needs. So, Horizons Clinic is working on expanding the evidence-based model to accommodate all levels of need.

For now, the clinic works with the parents of verbal and nonverbal children with two goals in mind:

1 so parents can understand how to see their children and read between the lines of their behavior and

2 so parents can be sensitive to the needs of their children as individuals experiencing grief and loss.

"We help parents open their eyes," explains Hoover, "to see what's contributing to their child's behavior and how they are stuck. We provide education on grief, loss, and trauma. And we show them ways to help their children get some healing in everyday life."

A two-time First State award winner for writing, Carla Koss has 25 years' experience as a writer-editor in the medical and disabilities fields, has served as managing editor for the Autism Delaware^{SM} quarterly newsletter for the past 10 years, and is the agency's current content strategist-writer.

Awarding scholars' committed to autism in Delaware

Autism Delaware awards the annual Daniel and Lois Gray Memorial Scholarship to qualified students enrolled at the University of Delaware. To be considered for this scholarship, the student, upon graduation, must work in an autism-related field in the state of Delaware. Created to provide financial support toward this goal, the typical scholarship amount is $1,000.

Congratulations to the 2020–21 scholarship winners:

Wilmington resident Corinna "Cory" Gilden has received the Gray memorial scholarship for three years in a row. She is continuing doctoral work in urban affairs and public policy with a focus on parental involvement and satisfaction with the individualized education program (IEP) process. The Ph.D. candidate is also exploring how states can more appropriately be held accountable for actively including parents in the special education of their children with disabilities. A former teacher and longtime autism advocate in Delaware, Cory is a research assistant with the National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities as well as the parent of a son on the spectrum.

Middletown resident Aurora Reible-Gunter grew up with a brother on the autism spectrum. This experience raised her awareness not only of the disabilities faced by an individual with autism but also of the capabilities that can be supported with help. Carrying a 4.0 GPA in her UD course work, Aurora has worked as a teaching assistant for the university's course entitled Introduction to Communication Disorders in Children and as a research assistant in UD's Speech Language Acquisition and Multilingualism Lab. Aurora's work and field of study are a foundation to a career as a speech-language pathologist.

Newark resident Paige Smolka works as a full-time paraprofessional at the Delaware Autism Program (DAP) while also working full-time toward a master's degree in special education with an autism certification. In fact, it was her experience as a para that led her to believe she would be in a better position to advocate for her students and their families—as a teacher. With a 4.0 GPA, Paige expects to graduate in May 2021.

Clip Art

Supporting adults with ASD seeking higher education

Autism Delaware awards financial support to qualified adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who live in the state of Delaware and are pursuing college or another post-secondary educational experience.

Congratulations to the following 2020–21 Adult with Autism Scholarship winners:

Newark resident Amarachi Anuma is majoring in information systems at the University of Delaware's College of Engineering and hopes to become an IT manager or director.

Two-time scholarship winner Austin Archer, of Wilmington, is pursuing a bachelor's degree in computer science/cyber security.

Felton resident Alexa Bowman is majoring in biomedical engineering. One of her fields of interest is biomedical engineering in veterinary care.

Melissa Gatti, of Bear, is pursuing a bachelor's degree in computer science with the goal of becoming a programmer or software engineer.

Continued at top of p. 11

Supporting adults with ASD **Cont'd from p. 10**

Cameron Otwell is attending classes at the Owens Campus of Delaware Technical Community College. The Laurel resident plans to earn a degree in advertising design and hopes to become a clothing designer.

Dover resident Ronald Pan is pursuing a master's degree in nursing. His goal is to become a psychiatric mental-health nurse practitioner.

In addition to financial support through the Gray memorial and adults with autism scholarships, Autism Delaware offers the Autism Teacher Certification Scholarship for qualified teachers who are practicing in Delaware and pursuing an autism certification.

More scholarship information can be found at [AutismDelaware.org/About/Scholarships.](AutismDelaware.org/About/Scholarships)

Welcome, Beth!

Beth Bouchelle joined Autism Delaware's staff as a fund development and engagement operations specialist in February. Since then, Beth has been streamlining operations by consolidating the autism agency's four databases. As a result of this gargantuan effort, both staff and clients will be better able to manage essential information about donors and gifts, volunteers, special events, and marketing and communications.

Margie Rowles named new chief operations officer

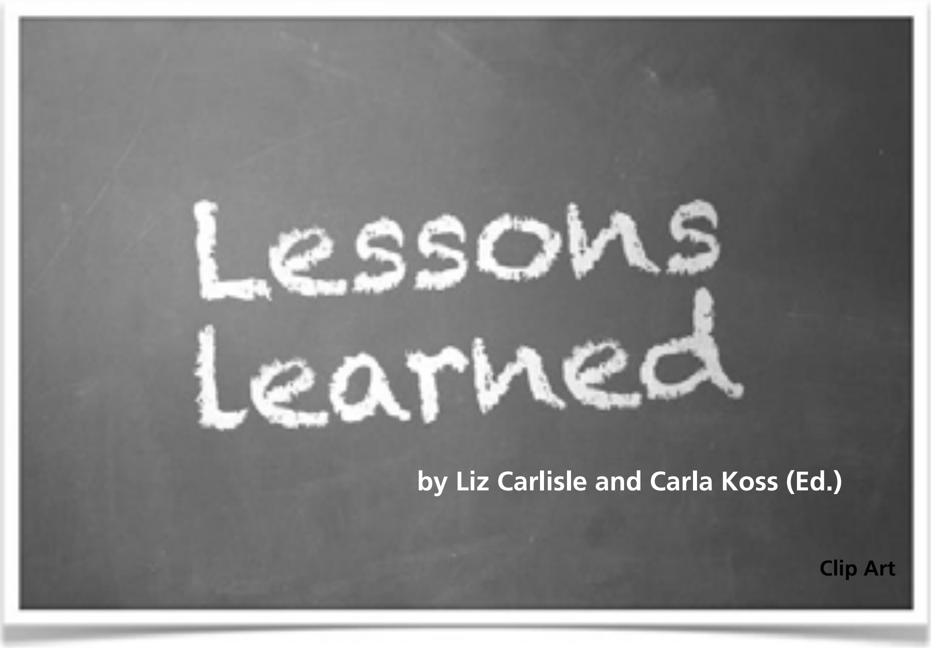
Do you know who supports the staff members who support individuals and families affected by autism? Margie Rowles!

For every individual and family who turned to Autism Delaware for help over the past 16 years, Margie directed the operational and administrative support needed by each staff member addressing the ever-growing need faced by people affected by ASD. In acknowledgment of this extraordinary effort, Margie was promoted in February to Autism Delaware Chief Operations Officer. Congratulations, Margie!

The annual Blue Jean Ball presented by Hertrich Toyota of Milford is virtual this year.

Stay tuned for more info about the online auction.

[Meanwhile, by making your usual Blue Jean Ball donation to Autism Delaware,](#) you continue to help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder. Your generosity at this time is very much needed and very much appreciated.



Lessons Learned

by Liz Carlisle and Carla Koss (Ed.)

Clip Art

Many of us have learned something during the state-mandated shutdown in the war against COVID-19. Clayton parent Roxanne Gadaingan has learned how to engage the mind of a young man with autism who comprehends neither the risks of exposure to the virus nor the abrupt changes in his life.

This young man is her son, Jon. As a participant in Autism Delaware's adult services program, Jon was accustomed to going out most days for job training at Cedars Food Pantry in Wilmington. But when Delaware joined the rest of the nation in trying to manage the highly contagious virus, Cedars Food Pantry closed its doors. And Jon went home, confused by the sudden change in routine.

Autism Delaware's adult services continued to provide support for Jon to the extent that it was safe to do so. Called Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation (or POW&R, for short), the program maintains staff who could take Jon on a few outings.

Jon Gadaingan in costume for the 2019 Boo at the Zoo festivities at the 3 Palms Zoo & Education Center.

"These brief outings have been very good for Jon," says Roxanne, "but he is feeling a little stir-crazy, and we feel bad that we can't just go to the mall or to dinner, do our 'normal' outings."

Not only did Jon struggle with the idea that an unseen virus was the reason for the change in his daily routine, but he also fought wearing a mask. To help Jon learn why and how to wear a mask comfortably, the POW&R staff worked with him on mask-training.

Home life changed for Jon, too, when his mom started working from home. As the manager of a promotional merchandise shop, Roxanne's work often takes her attention away from Jon. And his younger brother Roy works at Bayhealth, so to avoid bringing the virus home from work, Roy isolates himself by living in a camper.

To ease Jon's stir-craziness and feeling of isolation, Roxanne dug into a toolbox of creative activities that engage Jon's brain and occupy his time. "We've been doing puzzles, coloring, baking, and going for rides," she says."We look for dandelions and go for walks, and Jon helps me in the shop with tasks he's able to do."

With no immediate end of the pandemic in sight, Roxanne continues to isolate Jon from COVID-19 while looking for new opportunities to keep his mind and body active.

A professional writer-editor with 30 years' experience in the healthcare, mental health, and behavioral health fields, Liz Carlisle has served on the Autism Delaware^{SM} newsletter committee as a contributing writer-editor for the past six years and is the autism agency's current executive assistant to the executive director as well as its publicity coordinator.