



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

# MiNavigator

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[www.AAOMI.org](http://www.AAOMI.org)

*Help. Hope. Answers. Today.*

## Summer Thriving

*Contributed by Hetal Patel, M.A., CCC-SLP, Children's Hospital of Michigan, Stilson Specialty Center*



Summer months are fast approaching and kids on the spectrum will be ending the school year and taking a break from the classroom and school therapies. The break from school gives caregivers an opportunity to spend more time with their child and address goals that were targeted during the school year. Working on personal and treatment goals over the summer months, allows for carryover across different contexts, situations and with different conversational partners.

This is the time of year that parents may receive summer packets for extended learning from schools, hopefully ahead of the end of school year rush, to have input on summer plans. Summer is a perfect time to engage with a child to increase his/her play, sensory and language skills in a natural environment. Exploring activities around the community and home not only increase social skills, but build an even stronger bond and relationship with a child.

There seem to be many resources for the early years for parents to help facilitate play and development with young children- guidance from songs, fingerplays, and public television. As children grow, sometimes there are difficulties joining in their interests or play. Randy Lewis, former VP of Walgreen's Corporation speaking of his adult son says "I've never even played a simple game with my son, not even a game of catch." As members of the autism community we have to remind ourselves, that sometimes the very personal struggle of learning how to play with one's own child, can be frustrating. Any ideas that we can share for natural play, cognitive and language stimulation may be helpful. Also, these may help manage the risk of regression or excessive device time over the summer months that may become a problem when transitioning back to school in Fall.

**Here are some ideas for summer fun, that allow for many different learning opportunities:**

**Go to the park or play in your own backyard-** Think of all the imaginative play that could happen here. You could pretend to go on a bear hunt, or play a game of I-spy. This is the perfect place to let some energy out too. You could act out different actions or pretend to be an animal. Just going for a walk provides for different auditory, visual, and sensory experiences. You could plant flowers and watch them grow and bloom, have your child water them each week. This is a great way to build ownership and responsibility.

**Cook together-** Make a simple summer treat together, such as popsicles, lemonade or fruit kabobs. Following directions and vocabulary concepts can be targeted. Cooking and eating together is a social experience. Think of how many holidays are centered around making a meal and then coming together to eat it. This could be the perfect opportunity for the picky/sensory eater to explore and try new foods.

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**Have a dance party-** Turn up the music and dance the night away. This could be the start of a new family tradition. This is the perfect opportunity to dance together or to have the child imitate your moves. Have the child sing along as well, to build language skills. Look around the community for kid friendly concerts.

**Read together-** Whether at the library or at your house, books foster vocabulary development and attention skills. They allow children to hear and learn about different experiences. This might be an opportunity to introduce a book about something that is difficult for the child. Look into your local library for different summer reading programs. This could be a great opportunity for social interaction with peers.

**A Day In-** Spend a day at home exploring your own house. Go into the kitchen and smell different spices and fruits for a sensory experience. Give the child a weekly chore. Have them help with laundry. This is a perfect task to target sorting, following directions, math skills (measuring and pouring the detergent), and sequencing the various steps together. Call family members and friends and say hello and see what they are doing for the day.

Encourage a conversation about activities before they happen, have the child help you plan if possible. After the activity is complete, discuss what the experience was like. As we all know, children with ASD thrive on routine and structure, and providing this structure throughout the summer will hopefully help everyone involved transition to a fun filled Summer.

## Caregiver Training

*Contributed by Tammy Morris, M.A., CCC-SLP, Chief Program Officer*

Training of parents and other caregivers involves a systematic, individualized curriculum based on the treatment approaches and philosophies used in therapy, with an end goal of transitioning successful behaviors to the natural environment. As we often discuss, our goal as clinicians is to make ourselves redundant or unnecessary. The process of treatment basically moves us from targeted stimuli in controlled environmental contexts back into the classroom with peers, groups, activities of everyday life and with natural stimuli across all contexts.

Training emphasizes skill development and support to allow caregivers to become competent in implementing strategies across contexts. Typically this includes measurable objectives and concludes with caregiver demonstration of the skill, prompting or cueing hierarchy, modeling, or reinforcement. Training involves didactic presentation of information and requires clinician knowledge of adult learning styles. This cannot be accomplished by simply having the caregiver sit and observe rehabilitation therapies or a behavior technician.

Caregivers may require assistance facilitating generalization of skills, maintaining health and safety, reducing behaviors that are self-limiting, and increasing adaptive, social, and communication skills.

### Below are examples of caregiver goals:

*Jack's parent(s) will collect data on the task analysis, capturing Jack's use of the visual schedule, one day per week over the next 4 weeks.*

*Jane's caregivers will complete a daily check to monitor Jane's use of her personal calendar to record upcoming appointments until Jane sustains 90% accuracy across 4 weeks duration.*

Parent involvement has become widely accepted as part of a comprehensive intervention program. However, not all parents come into the treatment environment with the expectation of a role or inclusion in treatment goals, and may respond with variable participation rates. Research suggests that when parents serve as active participants in their child's treatment, the results are positive. In addition to clinical best practice inclusion of caregiver training as part of the treatment plan, insurers will also typically require the caregiver training as part of an approved treatment plan.

It is important that clinician and parent collaborate early to establish a rhythm for this exchange of information, to establish parent preferences for learning, and to allow the clinician time to determine the best approach to each individual caregiver's needs. Clinicians are rewarded when the result is; increased parent confidence, stress reduction, and improved family functioning. These benefits are worth both planning and measuring.



## A Physician's Checklist

Current American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines; calls for screening of all toddlers at 18 and 24 months of age. M-CHAT-R (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers - Revised) is the most commonly used autism screening tool in children between 16 and 30 months of age. Screening tools are available for download on AAoM's Clinician Portal.

## The Clinician Checklist

- Complete Autism Alliance of Michigan Online Clinician Referral**  
(<https://autismallianceofmichigan.org/clinician-portal/>)
- Complete autism screening tool**  
(CSBS-DP Checklist/M-CHAT/CAST)
- Refer for audiologic evaluation**
- Refer for Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapies for further evaluation and treatment planning**
- Refer to EARLY-ON** (birth to three years of age)  
1-800-EARLY-ON or [www.1800earlyon.org](http://www.1800earlyon.org)
- Have the family contact their home school district's Department of Special Education** to request an assessment with the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) to determine eligibility for special education programming and to identify appropriate classroom placement and support services (three years of age and older)
- Provide parent education resources**  
Is Your One Year Old Communicating with You? (AAP pamphlet)  
Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders (AAP booklet)

## To Label or Not to Label

*Contributed by Jill Matson, CPNP, RN, Clinical Specialist & Navigator Manager*

The preschool years are when diagnostic criteria are the most 'gray' for practitioners and families. Delineating play, behavior, communication, environmental factors, and other clinical issues can be complex. Parents often wonder why they 'need' an autism diagnosis if clinicians present with hesitancy during this period. One of the commonly used phrases during this period is "there are a lot of things that look like autism, and autism looks like a lot of things."

A comprehensive assessment and diagnosis provides important information about the child's behavior and development. It allows for identification of your child's specific strengths and challenges. An assessment provides useful information about which needs and skills should be targeted for effective intervention. A diagnosis is often needed to access autism-specific medical and educational services. Additionally, by going through the process of comprehensive assessment, individuals can be evaluated for other medical, genetic, developmental, and mental health problems that may also present in childhood.

### Educational Eligibility

Assessment completed by the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) of your local school district to establish eligibility for school based services.

### Medical Diagnosis

Assessment completed by a physician, psychologist, or team of clinicians to obtain a medical diagnosis required by insurance providers to qualify for outpatient autism therapies.

In the public school system we often refer to autism eligibility as a "ticket to services." There is consensus among educators and clinicians regarding the benefits of early intervention. However, because autism is a lifelong disorder, many educators and clinicians are hesitant to apply the label. Prioritization should be placed on programs and services. If children are receiving adequate supports and services the educational eligibility and working diagnosis may not be as critical during early childhood.

Regardless of age at diagnosis, many autism assessments rely heavily on caregiver report and observations. Parents should be encouraged to spend equal amounts of time getting to know their child's unique gifts and challenges as seeking resources and intervention.



# JUNE AT A GLANCE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THR	FRI	SAT
Please visit our community calendar for full event listings at <a href="http://www.navigatorsmallianceofmichigan.org/events">www.navigatorsmallianceofmichigan.org/events</a> .				1 Summer Safety and Fun (Clinton Township)	2	3 Sibshop (Bloomfield Hills)
4	5 ESDM Advanced Training (Ann Arbor) ADOS-2 Workshop (Ann Arbor)	6 SAIL Stepping Stones to Independence Workshop #5 (Marquette)	7 Social Security Disability Application Assistance (Grand Rapids)	8 Functional Assessment of Severe Problem Behavior of Persons with Autism (Detroit)	9 M-CHAT-R Screening, Referral & Follow -up (Grand Rapids, Marquette, Mt. Pleasant, Detroit)	10
11 St. Francis Camp on the Lake- Adult Summer Camp (Jerome) Test Ride a Pony (Davidsburg)	12 Summer ACTION Drummers (Grand Rapids) Parent Engagement Training (Detroit)	13 Special Needs Adult Program at Rivertree Community Church (Jackson)	14 Applied Behavior Analysis Open House (Dearborn)	15 Summer Sizzler (Clarkston) Autism: Functional Analysis (Detroit)	16 Behavior Technician Learning Series (Taylor) Spartans Stores YMCA Family Hope Program (Wyoming)	17 Information & Resources for Families with a New Diagnosis (Southfield) Camp Zip Summer Cooking (Ann Arbor)
18 St. Francis Camp on the Lake Summer Camp (Jerome)	19 OUCARES Summer Day Camps (Rochester) Camp Zip Summer Day Camp (Ypsilanti)	20 Autism Summer Safety and Management (Belleville)	21 Experience It! Social Groups: Ages 5-13 (Plymouth)	22 TEEN NIGHT! (Grand Haven)	23 DWMHA Care Coordination Training - Autism & ABA Benefit (Detroit)	24 ACEing Autism (Ypsilanti)
25 OATS Mane Event / Open House (Clarkston)	26 Kaleidoscope Art Camp Session 1 (Grand Rapids)	27	28	29 Detroit Mercy Titans Basketball camp for Special Needs (Detroit)	30	



**July 30th**  
at the Detroit Zoo  
**#AutismHeroWalk**  
Register today at  
[www.aaomwalk.com](http://www.aaomwalk.com)



**1 MILE WALK.**  
**3,000 PEOPLE.**  
**1 IMPORTANT CAUSE.**



The mission of Autism Alliance of Michigan is to lead collaborative efforts across the state that will improve the quality of life for individuals with autism through education, access to comprehensive services, community awareness, inclusion efforts and coordinated advocacy.