



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

May 2020

MiNavigator Newsletter Issue 45

Presented by Autism Alliance of Michigan
www.AAoMI.org

Help. Hope. Answers. Today

Strategies for Managing a Crisis in the Home



1. Stay calm.

- Your loved one's outburst is likely due to frustration built by an inability to communicate their wants/needs. Failure to remain calm may increase the magnitude and/or duration of the episode.
- Even when you do not feel calm, model calm behavior. Your loved one may emulate your calm presentation.
- In general, people have a tendency to think more clearly when we are calm. Remaining calm will help you consider the next steps.
- Create a sense of safety by exiting a dangerous environment or removing dangerous items. Example: if you can move your loved one out of the kitchen and into the family room, you may feel calmer as the amount of damage to person and property can be reduced if you are surrounded by pillows instead of pots and pans.

cont.





- Be patient.
- Be patient.
- Be patient.

2. Keep vulnerable individuals safe.

- If possible, remove small children from the area. If they are old enough, give them an escape plan.
- Have a secure place for vulnerable individuals to seek safety in the case of severe aggression.

3. If possible, ignore the behavior and not the individual.

- In some cases, problem behaviors such as aggression and self-injury may be reinforced by attention. If possible, do not provide the behavior with attention as this may increase the future likelihood of the behavior.
- Try not to ignore the individual as this may make the problem behavior worse. An individual who is attempting to communicate with their behavior might attempt to increase a dimension of the behavior (magnitude, frequency, etc.) if they perceive they are being ignored.
- If you can calm the individual, try to figure out what the individual may need and provide them with an appropriate way to request it.

4. Don't say too much.

- If your loved one understands vocal speech, use it sparingly. "Sit down... breathe" may be more effective than "Son, you know I love you so please listen. I need you to sit down and do your breathing technique".
- When we are upset, it is difficult to listen to people and complex language. Some people with autism are already at a disadvantage in understanding language. Keep your language short and to the point.
- When possible, praise attempts to self-soothe.

5. Use a variety of communication strategies, when possible.

- Have a variety of picture cards available, each with a different activity your loved one enjoys.
- Allow them to show you what they need.

cont.





6. Collaborate with other caregivers and, if possible, all individuals in the home.

- Consistency is important.
- Successful strategies should be shared and implemented by all caregivers.
- While collaboration is important, try to limit unnecessary talking. One individual should speak to the individual in crisis. More than one person speaking may extend / exacerbate the crisis.

7. Set your loved one up for success.

- Recognize and avoid triggers to the behaviors, if possible.
- Use a schedule to remind them of daily activities. Knowing a transition will come in five minutes, makes that transition easier.
- Use a kitchen timer to signify a change. Teach your loved one (when they are not in crisis) that the timer indicates a transition period. You can use this in the future to help in understanding a transition.
- Practice self-regulation and self-soothing before the crisis. Practice both daily, if you can. A well-practiced behavior will more likely be successful in a crisis as opposed to a behavior that has never been practiced before.
- Learn to take ABC data. This simple procedure can help you identify why an individual may be engaging in the behavior. Understanding why a person engages in a behavior is an important step in reducing that behavior.
- Have a calm space in your home to which your loved one can go, when/if needed.
- Know what the most highly preferred items and activities are. Have a supply of these, if possible.
- Learn to recognize precursor behaviors. These behaviors, which often occur before the crisis, may be an opportunity to find what your loved one needs and give you an opportunity to teach them a more appropriate way to request it.
- After a crisis, and if your loved one can communicate, calmly discuss the situation with them. Listen to them, do not interrupt, and acknowledge their perspective. Discuss and collaborate to help them develop a better strategy in the future.
- After the crisis, discuss the situation with other caregivers. Discuss strategies for maintaining safety during a potential future crisis moment.



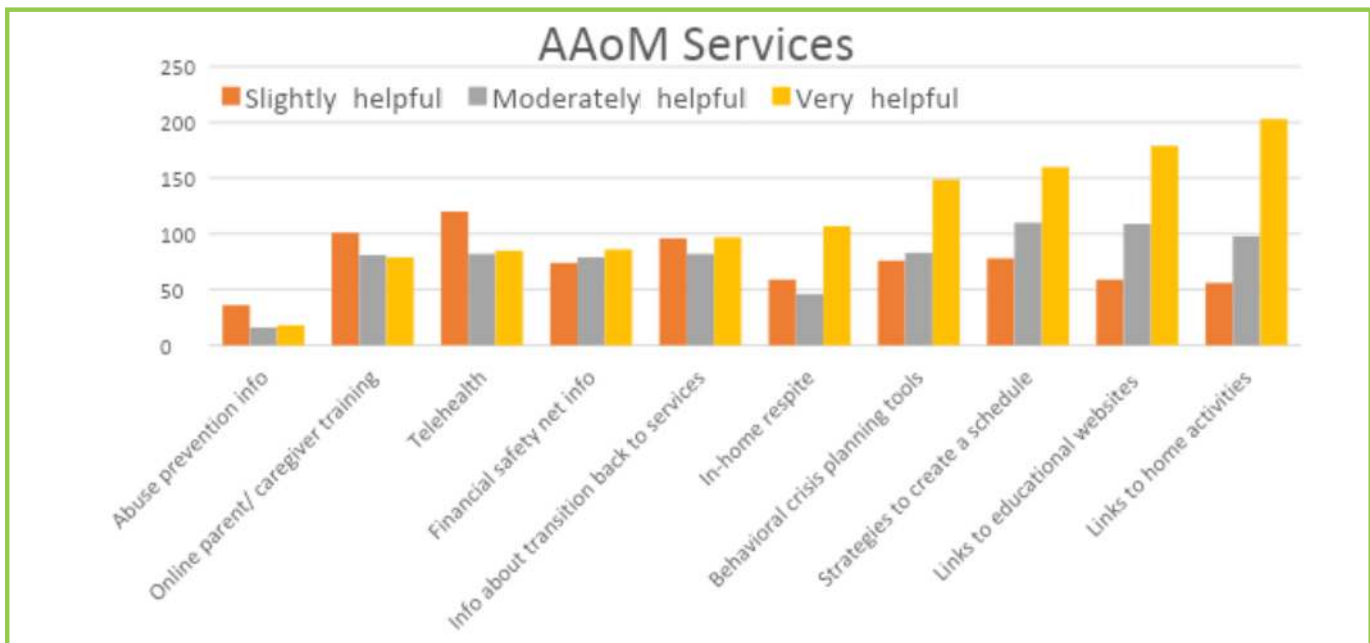


COVID-19 Survey Results

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Autism Alliance of Michigan designed and executed a survey to understand how to best support our families across the State of Michigan. The COVID-19 survey was emailed to 1000 families in the AAoM database. A link to the survey was also posted on Facebook, the website, and sent in the newsletter. At the conclusion of data collection, >400 families with an individual with ASD in the household completed the survey.

Overall, families completing the AAoM COVID-19 Crisis Survey expressed experiencing substantial disruption in their lives as well as experiencing stress from the changes. Nevertheless, most families are managing that stress and feel that they are doing reasonably well during the crisis.

When asked for ways that AAoM could be of assistance, the following was suggested:



AAoM’s response to areas of assistance needed:

Home Activities & Educational Website Links

- MiNavigators are a resource for families for home and educational activities. COVID-19 newsletters and Facebook page included a variety of online/free resources.
- AAoM updated resource directory with COVID-19 resources.

Strategies to Create a Schedule

- AAoM COVID-19 newsletter provided articles and resource lists on this topic.
- AAoM Facebook shared resources on creating a schedule.

Behavioral Crisis Planning Tools

- MiNavigators are available to help parents and caregivers navigate through establishing a crisis plan.

cont.





- AAOM will develop a crisis planning webinar and materials for parents and caregivers in the near future.

In-Home Respite

- At this time, Michigan's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" orders make accessing in-home respite difficult. In-home care must balance the risk of increased exposure for the individual with ASD, their family members, and the respite provider against the benefit of a break for the family members who have been responsible for care with little relief. Families can contact MiNavigators for additional help and guidance.

Back-to-School Transition Information

- MiNavigators are available to answer specific questions for parents and caregivers on transitioning back to school.
- Our team will continue to update our resource library based on the needs of our families, including transitional resources.

Financial Safety Net Information

- AAoM COVID-19 newsletters, including financial relief resources specific to COVID-19.
- MiNavigators have a provider network of financial experts that can be shared with families.

Telehealth

- AAoM has worked closely with providers across the state to provide information and resources for initiating telehealth services.
- Newsletters have included information on telehealth services for families and providers.
- Our MiNavigators have a list of providers across the state providing telehealth services.

Online Parent/Caregiver Training

- AAoM is currently offering free virtual webinars, please visit our Facebook page or call MiNavigator for more information. AAoM will continue to offer a variety of webinars and training, please visit our website and Facebook page.

Abuse Prevention Information

- MiNavigators are available to provide families with appropriate mental health resources.
- AAoM COVID-19 Newsletters provided tips and information on mental health and wellness, self-care, and online parent support groups.

These findings are as of the 3rd week of social distancing restrictions. As the COVID-19 crisis continues, family needs may shift and our MiNavigators are here to help connect families with resources. CALL/EMAIL our MiNavigators (navigator@aaomi.org or 877-463-2266) with any questions or concerns at any time.

cont.





Teletherapy Services

**Contributed by Janet Ringle-Bartels,
Speech-Language Pathologist, Owner/Executive
Director, Children’s Therapy Corner**



The vernacular of our time: COVID-19, “Stay Home, Stay Safe”, wear masks, social distancing, use hand sanitizer, school and store closings, daily newscasts about the world, our state and our communities.

And the ever-present question: “How are we coping?”

Interesting to be asked to write thoughts and guidance during such an unprecedented time. We are all facing and living with this pandemic in our own way, with our own pressures and uncertainty. It is hard to know how to address families who are facing the necessity to stay home and stay safe as they consider the family requirements as well as the needs of their children. First, my praise to families and my hope for your strength and your fortitude to continue every day knowing there is encouragement from others. Hopefully, that includes professionals who can give you support to work through daily needs. And second, how can that support be accomplished?

Teletherapy has been that beacon of hope for Children’s Therapy Corner (CTC) as we needed to find an alternative to direct face-to-face intervention for the children and families we serve. It is an opportunity through the use of technology to reach out and provide a level of intervention that is not always the preferred method. This is an unprecedented time, however, and in the ‘out of the box’ thinking we can create ways to touch children and be available to support families as needs arise.

Teletherapy is the online delivery of remote speech-language, occupational, physical, psychological and mental health therapy sessions via live video conferencing. There is application of family training for ABA services through teletherapy and initiation for some children who are appropriate for direct intervention for ABA. Different insurance companies are beginning to support this method as well as components through Community Mental Health agencies.

cont.





Be highly alert to the fact that this coverage is inconsistent, however, and do not just expect coverage or that your therapists can assist in this manner. Some school districts are working through this methodology to follow the guidelines of children's IEPs. All of CTC's therapists are using teletherapy, and for children with ASD, this includes speech-language, occupational, physical, psychological and ABA services.

When you try something new, it can seem awkward at first, perhaps strange and definitely not common. Children's Therapy Corner just completed our fourth week of providing this option to our families.

Here are some thoughts shared by our therapists from their perspective of teletherapy:

- Parent coaching has been very successful. I feel that empowering parents with skills and providing them praise for their efforts has been even more impactful. We can support them to be creative with the child's toys and their home environment.
- In feeding, I am able to see the child's home environment for increased comfort level and to consider seating/posture and possible environmental distractions.
- Older feeding kiddos are cooking in the kitchen and teaching me how to cook the same meal in my kitchen and we can enjoy this process together. We still make messes and have positive interactions with food.
- One of my kiddos loves videos where you can watch cars drive over random objects. So he used his organizational skills to plan what materials we needed, how to set up the camera and objects, and directed me on how to run items over. He also used problem solving skills when the camera angle was not working and when technology failed.
- Parents have reported that they look forward to having time to spend focusing on their child.
- Sometimes internet connections are not perfect, and the lag can impact giving feedback, but families are willing and wanting to continue sessions. To work around this, I explain what I am looking for, provide an example, and then the family can execute the activity while I can jump in to coach and support. By having to sit quietly for longer, I have learned a lot on how parents interact with their child and I can utilize some of their strategies as well!
- I have not had to discontinue any sessions because they were not clinically appropriate. I have children varying in skill from minimally verbal to conversational; some can attend to the video and some are all parent coaching. I have had to be creative in changing camera angles, consider microphone/audio work, and needed parents to narrate when the kids go off screen or even bring them back to the camera area, but all have been successful in their own way.

cont.





- As the feeding therapist, we started supporting positive interactions with food, and I am asking the occupational therapist to come into a session online to see if she has some ideas for utensil use to continue his skills. His whole team (SLP Feeding, SLP, OT, PT) has collaborated and is updated on progress.
- I have had almost every family tell me that they are very thankful and appreciative of the level of support that CTC has provided via teletherapy. They have all been very excited to get fresh ideas of ways to incorporate therapeutic objectives into their everyday lives.
- We have been able to have open conversations about just checking in with parents and asking how they are doing as well as what has been the biggest daily challenges for their kiddo during all this.
- Sessions have been a clinical mentoring opportunity to remind therapists that it's okay to shift our focus and meet the family where they are today to help support them as best we can. That can mean helping with daily routines, developing strategies to increase getting some movement breaks, discovering simple calming techniques to try, or finding activities that they can do as a family to alleviate a little stress.
- Goals and objectives are important, if you can do them...but remembering that just our presence and support for the child and family is therapeutic in itself! I cannot imagine the daily toll that parents of children with special needs are experiencing and all that they are balancing for their families. I am sure that just having a therapist's support, ideas and listening ears can be so valuable.

If you are able to initiate teletherapy with your therapy provider, here are some points to consider:

- Be certain that your medical insurance carrier or CMH provider covers teletherapy during this Stay at Home Mandate. Be sure to check both coverage and discipline specific allowances for reimbursement. Not all services are appropriate for all children's needs. Financial costs are not a surprise that anyone wants.
- Does your therapist/ABA provider believe that your child's needs will be appropriately met with this service delivery?
- If supplemental resources/home programming/materials are needed, be certain they are provided and prior to any session.
- Always know that as the parent/guardian you are also an expert and a professional in regard to knowing your child, your family dynamics, and the impact of being at home.

cont.





- Be certain your therapist is listening and sharing ideas, not just telling you what to do. Be in this together.
- Ask for what you need (resources, educational materials, etc.). Never forget that we as professional therapists work for you!

Together as therapists and with our families, we are learning and growing during this difficult time. We can't wait to be back together face-to-face, but this is one way to be together in an unprecedented way at an unprecedented time. Whatever your situation, reach out and get assistance. Call others and share your frustrations along with triumphs. See your child's smile, be aware of the little miracles, recognize the chance for creativity and play, enjoy your child, consider the chance to 'be in the moment' with your child, and don't worry today about skill development (and that advice is coming from a therapist). Breathe, find something each day for which to be grateful, and be sure to take care of yourself.

Thanks to Annie, Tracy, Jenna and Julie for their insight and for being such an amazing part of CTC!

Career Readiness During COVID-19: Strategies for College Students and Recent Graduates

COVID 19 has left many recent college and high school graduates, as well as laid off workers, confused about next steps.

Here are a few options to consider during this time:

Activities to Build Professional Polish

- 1.** Have your resume and cover letter professionally reviewed and polished.
- 2.** Craft several inspiring cover letters focused on the different organizations or industries in which you are interested. Keep the base of the letter the same, but figure out what is best to convey for each specific opportunity.
- 3.** Research companies or industries for which you would like to work. Ask yourself what you like about the company and its culture, location, work and/or benefits. What reasons do you see yourself being a good fit?
- 4.** Practice interviewing. Use software, a friend, a neighbor or a professional service.
- 5.** Build a paper or virtual portfolio. Find out what is best for your industry. Many IT, sound or even performing arts candidates are often best served by having separate websites featuring their abilities. For other industries, a LinkedIn page is the standard.

cont.





6. Seek a mentor. Reach out to someone you know in your industry and ask to start a conversation about what working in that industry is like.
7. Network. Use social media to like pages and add your comments or questions. Be thoughtful and professional. Do not spam, troll or message individuals directly.
8. Review your social media pages. Do your sites reflect someone that is going to be professional? Do you have your security set at the right level if you want only your friends to see your more personal pictures, messages or videos?
9. Ask someone else to give you a professional review. Have them act as if they are an employer, although some do not like and will not look at social media for qualifying individuals.
10. Be ready to respond to gaps of information or time on your resume when interviews are offered.

Websites for free or low-cost training and professional certificate courses:

1. [Coursera](#)
2. [LinkedIn Learning](#)
3. [Udemy](#)
4. [Asana Academy](#)

Professional credential sites or training organizations offering webinars or educational access:

1. [Civil & Engineering Consultants Inc.](#)
2. [Aveta Business Institute](#)
3. [Microsoft Fundamentals](#)
4. Visit your local college or university website to see what they are offering.
5. Ask your employer for recommendations for professional organizations, links or training you may be able to use at this time.

During this unusual time, remember to remain focused. Allow for downtime to process your emotions, but continue as best you can to gather information, develop a list of questions to discuss with a career counselor and keep networking professional and positive. And remember, a good attitude and the ability to keep moving forward are still some of the most important personal characteristics of good employees. Whether you are working on soft skills, hard skills or identifying your workplace needs, interests and tolerances, reaching out for assistance is always a beneficial course of action.

Contact our Employment Program, Upbound At Work, with additional concerns (877-463-2266 / upbound@aaomi.org).

Resources

Webinar - Caring for children and adolescents with autism during COVID-19: [Caring for children and adolescents with autism during COVID-19](#)

Behavioral Healthcare During COVID-19 (Social Distancing During COVID-19): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX-SMH8XYFk&feature=youtu.be>

Communication Support Resources for Individuals with COVID 19: <https://www.patientprovidercommunication.org/?fbclid=IwAROFIRDpRAAZLzKt8MMH4kKSvFlxU4vCHX76yDk8G90ibQeHiaETmGinAo>

