



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

May 2020

MiNavigator Newsletter Issue 46

Presented by Autism Alliance of Michigan
www.AAoMI.org

Help. Hope. Answers. Today

HAPPY Mother's Day

Mother's Day 2020

As we approach Mother's Day, we asked some of our AAoM staff, who are honored to be mothers to individuals with disabilities, to share their insights and memories as mothers. It takes a village, so enjoy these thoughts and feel free to share yours at navigator@aaomi.org.

Being a mother of a child on the autism spectrum has been a real education. I've learned that what they say is true: being a mother is the hardest job you will ever have, and being a mother is also the most rewarding job you will ever have. I can say that having a child on the spectrum has taught me so much about myself. I've learned that I am stronger than I thought. I'm definitely more patient than I ever thought I could be, and yet I'm still so blessed.

Edward has taught me that it's not the big things in life that matter. It's the little moments. It's the smiles, the hugs and even the tears you get when you didn't know if you would ever get those emotions. It's watching him grow into a mature adult with dreams and aspirations. Nothing has warmed my heart more or strengthened my resolve more than hearing Edward say that I make him feel like he matters. Those are the moments that make this hard job the best job a mother can ever have.

Joanna, Community Resource Specialist

cont.





In this unusual time, we will celebrate Mother's Day. Some years I never thought beyond the flowers and breakfast in bed. But this Mother's Day, I'll have ample time to reflect on my motherhood. I'll have the opportunity to see my children without their daily routine, without their regular interactions or everyday expectations - just them as they are, right now. With all the unexpected and sometimes unwanted togetherness, I have gained small insights that I otherwise would have missed in each of them. There have been revealing conversations and behaviors that have enhanced my understanding of each of them. I will tuck those insights away for when I need them.

Now with all the "time" we have on our hands, we mothers need to take this special day to appreciate our accomplishments, big and small, inside our families. We are the glue and sometimes that glue needs to be replenished. Take your Mother's day to "reglue" in any way you need. Learn to play your personal solitaire. Those close to you will continue to love you for your struggles and achievements with them. So celebrate yourself, and let those close to you love you more.

Ginny, Upbound at Work Professional Coach

As we get ready to celebrate my 12th year as a mom, I can't help to think of how different it feels this year compared to when our journey started. I used to worry so much about making sure we had all the interventions we needed, all the tests and therapies we could think up and all the professional evaluations that we could get. Today, all I worry about is making sure our sons are healthy and happy, and that's OK! We are living in scary and uncertain times, and my priorities have completely changed from where they were even just two months ago. We spend so much time driving to and from therapies, sports and other organized activities that we are actually welcoming this much needed break from our hectic life. We do make sure they follow up on their school assignments and stay in touch with their friends, but most of the time we just let them enjoy their time and spend quality time connecting as a family. I am once again spending time snugglin in bed with my 10 and 12 year old boys, just like when they were toddlers! We are watching movies, baking and cooking together, and I can't think of anything more rewarding and heartwarming than that. I still think it's important to make sure we get the interventions that we need, and thanks to our wonderful therapists and educators we are still getting some of them, but now more than ever I am focusing on bonding as a family and making sure our boys remembers this crazy and scary times as the time when everything stopped and all we did was spend time together having fun.

Emma, Resource Navigation Specialist





A Letter From Your ABA Therapist

Karoline Kenville, MA., BCBA., LBA, Early Autism Services

Dear Parents,

It's interesting to me how we define "family." We always look at it as people who we share kinship with. I think these hard times have reframed my definition of "family." I'm sitting here thinking how we often joke about us being "like a 2nd family to you." I don't think of myself as a "2nd family" to you; I think of myself as your family. We know the names of all of your children, your routines, your struggles, your victories, and most of all, we know your child with Autism. We share many intimate moments with you: your child's first words, the time they sat and played with you for the first time and sometimes even the difficult experiences, too.

We stand tall next to you through all of these moments. We've cried and laughed together. We sometimes share our weekends and holidays with you. We do family outings with you to support your family every way we can. We take you home with us too; constantly thinking about what we can do differently or ways that we can support you and your family more. We read the latest research to better understand interventions and techniques that might work best for your child. We analyze endless amounts of data to ensure we are making the best clinical judgments. This is your child's life that we are helping make choices for - and it isn't taken lightly. In fact, we hold the weight of that heavy on our hearts and understand the depth of how important every little choice can have an impact on their development. Even during these difficult times where I cannot see you daily in person, we have not stopped thinking about you or being there for you. We all are still here, just differently.

I believe I can speak for all BCBA's and Techs when I say we are a dedicated group of people. We are passionate about the science behind what we do and watching the results of it being implemented is monumental in our ability to show up each day. It is our strongest reinforcer to see your child make progress. Even though progress might slow down a little bit during this time, I want you to know we are still here. Use us. Call us. Try telehealth to meet with us to talk about things you could be doing.

Remember the functions of your child's behavior that have been discussed with you. Remember that sometimes it gets worse before it gets better; but do not give up! Consistency is key to this process.

cont.





Remember that routines and structure will help your child who needs to know what to expect and sometimes breaking some tasks into smaller parts can reduce problematic behavior. Transition warnings and timers can be your best friend during this time - use them. Remember how powerful follow-through is...even if it's difficult at first, don't stop - stay consistent. Use visual supports to help communicate and give reminders - these are so powerful. Most of all, do not forget how powerful praise can be. Label the behaviors you want to see again and avoid labeling the ones you do not want to see. Reinforcement is a powerful tool for changing behaviors when used correctly.

Stay connected to your ABA team. Join a parent training session that your company is hosting or reach out to the Autism Alliance of Michigan to find one. Use social media for parent support groups, set up a 1-on-1 parent training with your BCBA at least once a week to discuss solutions and reminders of what has worked in the past. Vent to us about the challenges so we can help create solutions. Share with us your victories so we can celebrate with you. Use us to help navigate this difficult time. We have not gone anywhere.

We are family, in this together, and will prevail together.

Sincerely with love,
Your BCBA

SPARK is national online autism research initiative that connects people who have a professional diagnosis of autism and their biological family members with research opportunities to advance our understanding of autism.

To **enroll** in SPARK study with Michigan Medicine, please visit www.SPARKforAutism.org/Umich
Contact our team: 734-232-0196
Michigan-
SPARK@med.umich.edu



- SPARK registration can be done **entirely online** in the convenience of one's home and **at no cost**.
- DNA is collected with **saliva kits** that are shipped directly to participants.
- Once the participant's family has returned their saliva samples, they receive a **\$50 gift cards**.
- If SPARK researchers identify a gene change that is linked to autism, this **information is returned** to families at no cost.
- SPARK also shares **individualized reports** with families based on their responses to certain surveys.





Learning Opportunities Around the Home

Here are ideas for fun, simple activities to do in the home:

- 1.** Create greeting cards for your loved ones to send in the mail. This is a great way to work on spelling and writing while also telling your family members that you miss them.
- 2.** Make a sensory bin using different items from around the house.
- 3.** Make a bird feeder by putting cereal on a string or pipe cleaner. Watch and discuss the birds.
- 4.** Engineer structures (e.g. igloos, houses, etc.) with sugar cubes, a deck of cards, or other household items.
- 5.** Grow your own food. This can be achieved by using seeds from your vegetables and placing them into soil or by placing ends of stalks/vegetables into water.
- 6.** Make an I Spy Bottle by filling empty, clear bottles with dry rice and small items/trinkets (shells, beads, bells, buttons, charms, paper clips, dice, coins, etc).
- 7.** Create a mini terrarium in a mason jar.
- 8.** Make musical instruments with old coffee cans, beads, or any other small items lying around.
- 9.** DIY colorful jellyfish with paper plates and yarn.
- 10.** Recycle your empty tissue boxes and make them into different animals with markers or paint.

cont.





- 11.** Engineer paper planes and see which design flies farther.
- 12.** Get creative with side-walk chalk or create your very own ice chalk for hot days.
- 13.** Create puppets with items around the house (e.g. paper bags, socks, etc.), and have the family perform a puppet show.
- 14.** Paint characters and images on stones. When they're dry, put together a story.
- 15.** Make an obstacle course in your yard or in an open space in your house.
- 16.** Use empty toilet paper or paper towel rolls to make a DIY marble run.
- 17.** Create lunch sack kites with paper lunch bags, streamers, ribbon, etc.

Resources

[Easy Indoor Activities for Energetic Kids](#)

[Wearing a Mask Social Story — PAAutism.org, an ASERT Autism Resource Guide](#)

[Coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Yale's Guide for Families with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

Webinar: Support for Individuals with ASD: Coping with Family and Virtual Interactions During COVID-19: <https://www.autism.org/support-for-individuals-with-asd-coping-with-family-and-virtual-interactions-during-covid-19/>

