



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

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Help. Hope. Answers. Today

Valentine's Day



Contributed by

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Valentine's Day is a special time of the year to pause and express love to those who are close to us. Communicating this love to each person in our lives takes a unique form. According to Dr. Gary Chapman, author of **The 5 Love Languages®**, everyone expresses and receives love in a unique way. Children with autism are no different!

In my eight years of working with children with an autism diagnosis, I have loved the challenge of finding ways to “reinforcer pair” with them. This is applied behavior analytic talk for “loving them in their own unique way.” For some children, this looks as simple as providing them with their favorite toy. For others, this can entail months of chasing them with hand puppets, blasting them up like a rocket, and working up a sweat to evoke one heartfelt giggle.

As parents and caregivers of children with autism, we do the work of finding ways to show love to our kids—and they return the love tenfold. Just like any relationship, it is always helpful to reflect on new ways to express our affection.





Using the wisdom of **The 5 Love Languages®**, here are a few ideas for expressing love this Valentine's Day:

- 1.) Words of affirmation:** Many children with autism are visual learners and thus respond well to pictures, videos, and written words over spoken words of affirmation. Consider creating a photo book with pictures of significant memories with your child and a few words to describe each memory (<https://www.shutterfly.com/photo-books/kids-photo-books>).
- 2.) Physical touch:** Children with autism seek sensory input in a myriad of ways. Some enjoy the physical touch of loved ones through hugs, tickles, cuddles, and kisses. Others find more enjoyment in the sensory input from the physical environment in which we live. This Valentine's Day, if Michigan winter allows, try spending time outdoors with your child exploring the cold snow. For extra sensory input, take food coloring with you and watch a winter wonderland turn into modern art!
- 3.) Quality time:** Our children receive demands all day long— “get dressed,” “clean up,” “do this,” “do that,” etc. As adults, it is challenging for us to spend time with a child without placing any demands. Perhaps this is the gift we can offer our child this Valentine's Day—one hour of praise, imitation, attention, and freedom to be exactly who they are in that moment.
- 4.) Receiving gifts:** Although chocolate and a teddy bear may be the perfect gift for some kids on Valentine's Day, a beautiful gift for any child is the gift of a new experience. Considering your child's interests and preferences, you could take your child to a sensory friendly movie, bake cookies from scratch, complete a science experiment, visit an indoor trampoline park, or explore the various children's museums in Michigan.
- 5.) Acts of service:** As a twist, the recommendation for this category does not directly involve the child. As parents and caregivers of children with special needs, much of our time is spent caring for others. To give from a fuller cup, try scheduling time for self-care this Valentine's Day. Just 10 minutes of meditation is linked to decreased anxiety, physical pain, and even cardiovascular disease.

Remember, “The number of ways to express love within a love language is limited only by your imagination” (Chapman). Let your creativity soar this Valentine's Day!





COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Cotter Welch

About four years ago, I was at church with my family. My dad, two brothers, and I were all sitting in a back pew. My mom and my overwhelmed sister, however, were tiptoeing through the church in an attempt to leave respectfully, while receiving an abundance of disapproving glances and judgmental stares from fellow churchgoers. I witnessed the pain of my father as he watched part of his family have to separate in order to worship and the pain of my mother as she watched her faith community not include her own daughter.

My sister is the most loving, gentle, kind, caring, compassionate person in the world and she has autism. My sister has autism. She was as excited as any of us to go to church and sing the songs, but sometimes she became anxious because she did not have a schedule to follow along with, or any tools to help ease her anxiety. Because of this, my mom put together a bag that included a visual schedule and sensory tools for my sister to use when we went to church. I began to notice she could stay for longer periods of time and be more engaged in the church service. With the help of the bag, my sister began to make it through service after service, and for the first time since she was a baby, the whole family sat together.

One year later, when I got to choose the project I would organize to complete my Girl Scout Gold Award, I wanted to do something that would help others also be more included in worship services. This is why I created Faith Fidgets. Faith Fidgets are canvas bags with textile fabrics sewed on the outside, filled with various sensory tools, a visual schedule, and a religious book. My goal was to promote inclusion in all faith communities so that everyone can participate in worship services. I wanted everyone to have a chance to worship together as a family and possibly change another family's life as mine was changed.

Three years later, I have completed my project and donated Faith Fidget Bags to St. James, Holy Family, the Birmingham Temple, the Muslim Community Association of Ann Arbor and Vicinity, and MUHSEN, Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs. Faith Fidgets are being used at these places of worship and hopefully creating a lasting impact on worshipers. My hope is that others will see this project and become inspired to make their own Faith Fidget Bags so that the message of inclusion can be spread further than I could spread it alone. With that said, please do not hesitate to contact me at faithfidgets@gmail.com if you feel that your place of worship would put Faith Fidget Bags to good use. I am always looking to expand my donations and with that, my message of inclusion.





FEBRUARY AT A GLANCE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Improving Clinical Supervision Skills (Southfield)
2 Introduction to Child-Centered Counseling (Southfield)	3 SPAR Event – XC Skiing & Snowshoe Clinic (Delta County)	4 ASPPRE Spring 2020 Program (Lansing) CMHAM 2020 Winter Conference (Kalamazoo)	5 Autism Connections (Ann Arbor)	6 The future of behavioral health in Michigan- Public Forum (Multiple Michigan Locations)	7 Movie/Pizza Night (Rochester) Night to Shine in 2020 (Novi)	8 CBT in Transition: The Evolution of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Southfield)
9 Intelligent Lives Film Screening and Conversation (West Bloomfield)	10 V.I.P. Jump (Okemos)	11 SPAR Event – XC Skiing & Snowshoe Clinic (Alger County) Wildcat Wellness Health Fair (Marquette)	12 ACT Open Studio (Grand Rapids)	13 Great Lakes Bay ABA Collaborative Network- The Neurology of Autism (Saginaw)	14 <i>Happy Valentine's Day</i> 	15 25th Annual Ice Fishing Contest (Mayville)
16 World of Winter: Valent-ICE (Grand Rapids)	17 Conventional Literacy for Students with Significant Disabilities and Complex Communication Needs (St Johns)	18 Emmanuel House Food Give-A-Way (Detroit)	19 Art Explorers - Special Needs Art Class (Plymouth)	20 Indepen-Dance (Marquette)	21 The Fowler Center WEEKEND RESPITE CAMPS (Mayville)	22 Parsons Dance Sensory-Friendly Performance (East lansing)
23 SAIL Chocolate Festival (Marquette)	24 Problem Solving & Social Skills: Impact on Learning (Farmington Hills)	25 Achieving a Better Life Experience: Financial Planning for Individuals with Special Needs (Rochester Hills)	26 Goals & Objectives (St. Joseph)	27 EMU Free Neurological OT Clinic (Ypsilanti)	28 Genesee ISD County Wide START Training (Flint)	29

** For more information on any of these events, please contact the MiNavigator line at 877-463-2266.

2020 NAVIGATING AUTISM TODAY CONFERENCE

Friday, March 6th, 2020 | Wayne County Community College District - Ted Scott Campus | Belleville



Tickets and vendor tables available at AAoMConference.org

