



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

June 2019

MiNavigator Newsletter Issue 32

Presented by Autism Alliance of Michigan
www.AAoMI.org

Help. Hope. Answers. Today

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY



Finding Our Balance

Contributed by Adam Kuda, Father and Director of Marketing, Comprehensive Early Autism Services

Balance is important in life. As a father of a child with autism, I struggle sometimes to find that balance between not setting limits on what my son can achieve because of his autism, and realizing when a moment is just too big for him that day.

Last year, during an Easter egg hunt, I realized that I was not doing a great job finding that balance for him.



My wife and I knew going in to the event that there would be some challenges: the crowd, waiting in lines, and the chaotic scramble as hundreds of kids run around hunting for eggs. But we thought we could help him manage that moment by being there to hold his hand, calmly showing him how to put the eggs in the basket, and offering encouragement along the way.

Of course, there were the expected tears, but he found some eggs, put them in his basket, and seemed to have a relatively good time. We got our Easter photos and videos and were proud of how great of a job he did given the difficult situation.

cont.



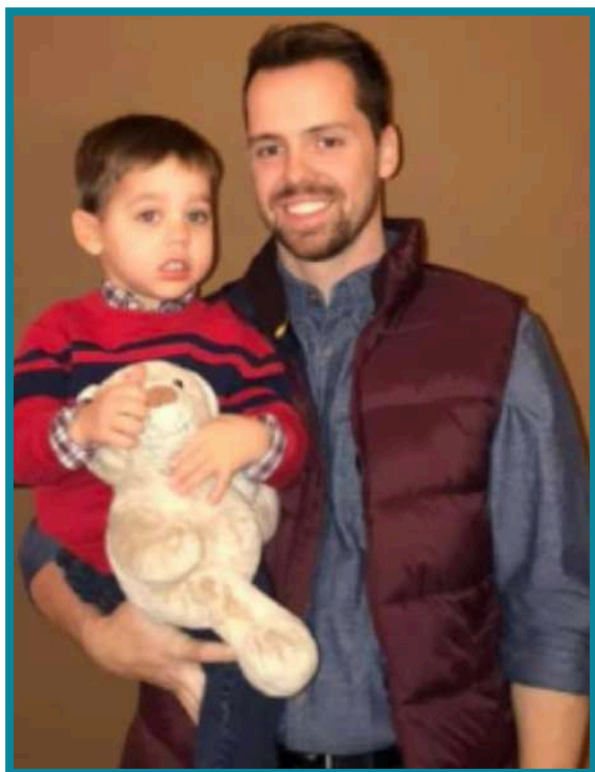


Several weeks later, I stumbled on the video I took of my son hunting for eggs. I expected to smile as I watched that video of my wife holding his hand as they hunted for eggs, but the video was different from what I remembered. This time, my phone was muted.

All of our positive words of encouragement, the fun music, and the kids' laughter all around him were silenced. All that was left was the look of pain on his face standing among hundreds of other children as he just tried to get through the moment.

I felt crushed; like I had finally experienced life from his perspective. I realized that there was no balance there. I was being selfish. I was only focused on what I wanted out of that day, in my moment as a father of a little boy on Easter. I was so concerned with putting him in his nice Sunday outfit, getting pictures with the Easter Bunny, and getting our video of him hunting for eggs, that I wasn't really focused on his needs and what that moment felt like for him.

From that moment, I realized I needed to do a better job of finding balance for my son. Yes, as his father there are times when it's my job to help set high goals for him, to help him get through difficult moments, and encourage him to get back up when he falls. My son works very hard with a team of occupational therapists, speech therapists, ABA therapists, and goes to pre-school at the special school district. Though it's not always easy for him, we challenge him each day to grow. I know early intervention is important to help give him the best chance to live a fulfilling and independent life. So as a father, I push him to challenge himself.



But there are other times now when I don't let the moment own us. And I just say, "it's OK if you're not feeling up for it today", and we do something he enjoys instead. I've learned to not put too much pressure on him, or myself, to get the perfect picture with Santa. I don't make him stay until the end of a birthday party just because everyone else is still there. I don't try to force him to give me a high five when we say goodbye each day just because I want him to. I stopped trying to make my experience as a father be what I imagined it would look like. Instead, I focus on the wonderful relationship I have built with him—a loving bond between a little boy and his dad.





Dad to Dad Insights:

This month we asked a few of our AAoM staff and board members, who are honored to be fathers to individuals with disabilities, to share a tip with other dads. It takes a village, so enjoy the benefit of these perspectives and feel free to share yours at navigator@aaomi.org.

Your son is not a reflection of you.
He's his own young man.
Help him become his best self.

Ron, AAoM Board Member

Appreciate your wife and try to
cool the stress at home. You need
each other and your child needs a
mom and dad working together.

Steve, AAoM Board Member

I try to balance both maintaining
high expectations, but also meeting
my daughter where she is.

Bill, AAoM Board Member

Having a 17 year old on the spectrum, looking back, work
took precedent and I wished I had assisted my wife much
more in trying to assess the situation and find better
solutions. I'm not sure things would have changed, times
were different in the autism world, and access to
assessments and therapies have come light years ahead.
Two minds are better one, so help your wife out.
Also, find time each week to do something with your
child, just you and them. We are never quite sure what
Jake finds fun, but he won't miss a Scout meeting, so
that's what we do every week. Their actions will tell you
what they like, find one to share.

Bruce, AAoM Board Member





JUNE AT A GLANCE

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | | | 1 Celebration Cinema Sensory Showtimes (Multiple Locations) |
| 2 Sensory Friendly Planetarium Shows (Jackson) | 3 Youth Mental Health First Aid Training (E. Lansing) Promoting Social-Emotional Health in Young Children (Cheboygan) | 4 PLAY Project Intensive Workshop (Ferndale) Sensory Friendly Jump (Lansing) | 5 Fishing (Ontonagon, Gogebic) Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Children with Autism (New Baltimore) | 6 Employment & SSI/SSDI (Troy) | 7 MARO Spring Leadership Conference (Traverse City) | 8 Anthony's Autism Awareness 2nd Annual Autism Walk (Port Huron) FREE Autism Caregiver Bootcamp Series (Farmington Hills) |
| 9 C.A.S.T. for Kids Townsend Lake (Clarkston) LEAD Lansing (East Lansing) | 10 Fishing (Marquette) 2019 CMHAM Spring Conference (Novi) | 11 Self Determination Training (Sterling Heights) | 12 Summer Fun Kayaking & Paddleboarding (Midland) | 13 2019 Wraparound Conference (Traverse City) | 14 Special Needs Prom (Detroit) | 15 About Autism Spectrum Disorder Swim Day (Ypsilanti) |
| 16  Abrams Planetarium Sensory friendly show (East Lansing) | 17 OUCARES Pee Wee Summer Day Camp (Ages 3-6) (Rochester) Friendship Camp (Rodney) | 18 Developing Early Literacy Skills (Howell) | 19 Pre-Employment Skills Training - For Adults with ASD (Rochester) | 20 Summer Dance Mix (Redford) Berlin Fair - Disability Awareness Day (Marne) | 21 Integrating the Arts to Reach All Learners (Roscommon) | 22 Sensory-Friendly Saturday Star Trek: Exploring New Worlds (Dearborn) |
| 23 Rejoicing Spirits -no-shush worship service (Birmingham) | 24 Teens To Work - Expanded Program for 2019 (St. Claire Shores) | 25 JCC Special Needs Summer Camp Session 1 (West Bloomfield) | 26 Inclusion- FAPE in the LRE (St. Joseph) | 27 Autism and Motivation presented by Ron Sandison (Troy) | 28 Positive Steps Toward Employment and Independence (Romeo) | 29 Silent Fireworks (Port Huron) 30 LEAD Kalamazoo (East Lansing) |

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



AUTISMHERO WALK

July 28, 2019 | The Detroit Zoo
Register today at www.AAOMWALK.com



AutismAlliance
of Michigan
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

