



## Physical Activity and Nutrition

### Resources for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Traditional behavioral interventions focus on core deficits associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), despite the presence of health differences. In fact, children with ASD experience significant health differences beyond their core deficits. Recent publications suggest children with ASD are 40% more likely than their neurotypical peers to be overweight or obese. Obesity threatens an individual's quality of life, opportunity for independent living, self-care, and long-term health outcome. Multiple factors have the potential to impact health differences among children with ASD such as; sleep disorders, lack of physical activity, and food selectivity.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the growing health differences among children with ASD, and to identify resources that caregivers can use to promote the health and wellbeing of their child with ASD. It is generally accepted by clinicians and parents that children with ASD have more food aversions than their same-aged typical peers. Feeding problems put children with autism at risk for major health problems such as malnutrition, and psychological and social deficits. Typically, parents report that children are avoiding foods based on texture of the food presented or refusing of novel foods.

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This avoidant/refusal of food can lead to physical, nutritional and even social deficits for children with Autism.

Despite the barriers that are present for many individuals with ASD to be physically active, there are some simple ways that family members can encourage and build in additional opportunities for their children. One way is for family members to identify activities that their child enjoys such as jumping on a trampoline, running, swimming, or riding a bicycle. Once the activity is identified the caregiver should work to increase the duration that the child engages in the prescribed activity.

Many strategies that families are already using throughout day can be utilized to encourage physical activity, such as choice boards, first/then charts, and social stories. Another way is to introduce 'small bursts' of physical activity, 5 to 10 minutes in duration, throughout the day as transitions or breaks from school, work task, and screen time. Small bursts of physical activity can take the form of a dance party, walking around the neighborhood, following along with a yoga routine, playing catch with the dog, or simple exercises found online such as [GoNoodle.com](https://www.gonoodle.com) as well as the resources listed below.

Being physically active as a family is a great way to increase physical activity for individuals with ASD. With respect to food selectivity, slow and consistent introduction of novel food is the general rule when introducing new foods. Parents should try to present the food on the child's plate and provide social praise for tolerating the item being present on their plate. When presenting the food on the plate, try to avoid any demands to eat the food or to interact with it beyond its presence on the plate.

Try this slow introduction to tolerating the food on the plate for at least 3 days in a row with the absence of a refusal. Next encourage the child to touch the food with their hands. If the child touches their food, provide social praise for touching and interacting with the novel food. Finally continue to progress by having the child touch the food to their lips, then their tongue, hold the food in their mouth and then eat the food.

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Throughout this process it is important to model trying the consumption of food yourself, as well as providing social praise for the absence of refusal.

To address the well-documented lack of accessible physical health and nutrition programs, the Center for Health and Community Impact (CHCI) at Wayne State University (WSU) developed the [Physical Literacy and Nutrition Education \(PLANE\) program](#). PLANE has been generously funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grantmaking program. It is a comprehensive 2-year long, both online and in-person program to address the complex issues contributing to health disparities among children with ASD and their families.

The goal of PLANE is to promote positive health and well-being in children with ASD through various types of physical activities and exposure to a variety of health food options.

Please feel free to check out some FREE resources at [www.soarwithplane.org](http://www.soarwithplane.org). The principal investigator (PI) for this program is Dr. Leah Ketcheson, assistant professor of Health and Physical Education at Wayne State University ([leah.ketcheson@wayne.edu](mailto:leah.ketcheson@wayne.edu)).

## **Additional Resources**

Physical Activity:

<https://www.bokskids.org/downloads/>

<https://www.exercisebuddy.com/>

<https://family.gonoodle.com/>

<https://hhph.org/h-y-p-e-at-home/>

<https://www.playworks.org/get-involved/play-at-home/>

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/young-athletes/young-athletes-at-home>

<https://www.shapeamerica.org/covid19-resources.aspx>

Feeding:

<https://www.feedingfundamentals.com/resources-for-parents>

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

cont.

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# COMMUNITY INCLUSION

contributed by  
AAoM's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

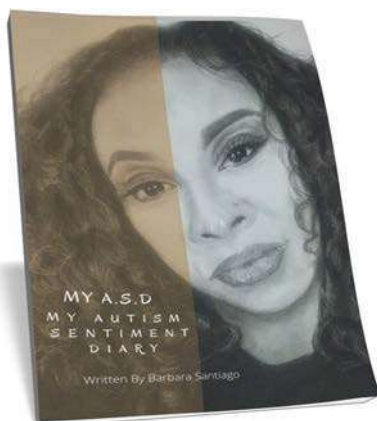
featuring **Barbara Santiago**  
Author, Advocate, and Parent of Special Needs Children



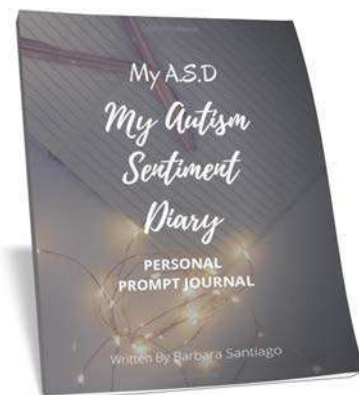
“Do you ever find yourself alone in a crowd of people?” Barbara Santiago writes in her book “My A.S.D: My Autism Sentiment Diary.” If your answer is yes, know that you are not alone here!

Inclusion is defined as the practice of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups. Inclusion is only effective if it includes the voices of those who are being marginalized.

Santiago’s story, like many others, shares her obstacles in isolation of parenting three children with special needs in her Michigan community. The unwelcoming feeling around family and friends and the struggle to balance it all. Santiago states that resources in her low-income community are slim to none. To participate in crucial therapies, such as ABA and other sensory friendly opportunities, she usually has to travel outside of her community. In most communities like Barbara’s, Hispanic and African American children are 1.1x less likely to be accurately diagnosed than their counterparts according to the [Centers for Disease Control \(Full Article\)](#), which in turn these children are also less likely to receive early intervention services. Barbara says, “I know I am only a fraction of the world’s population. But if you have a story, whether big or small, share it. Let the world know that we are not alone in a world full of amazing people with autism. Together it will become OUR autism sentiment diary.”



[My A.S.D Autism Sentiment Diary](#)



[My Autism Sentiment Prompt Journal](#)



# Skill Building Series

This month we are excited to announce the launch of our Parent Skill Building Series. AAoM created simple, practical and easy to navigate webinars for parents and caregivers on a variety of topics to help build everyday skills in the home and community.

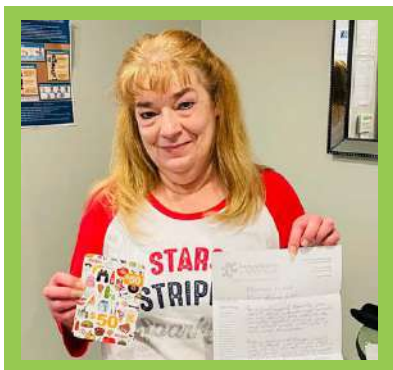
Keep an eye out for the following FREE webinars on our website:

- Understanding Your Picky Eater
- Introduction to Activities of Daily Living
- Early Literacy Skills
- Understanding Your Child's Sensory System
- Fine Motor and Autism
- Crisis Behavior Management
- Fostering Language Development
- Behavior Basics
- Gross Motor and Autism
- Social Narratives
- Play, Leisure & Social Participation
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication for the Home
- Working with your BCBA on Problem Behavior Reduction: Taking and Presenting ABC Data

And here is the link for the [first webinar](#).



# Direct Support Professionals Recognition



## Pioneer Resources of Muskegon recognizes **Brenda Scott**

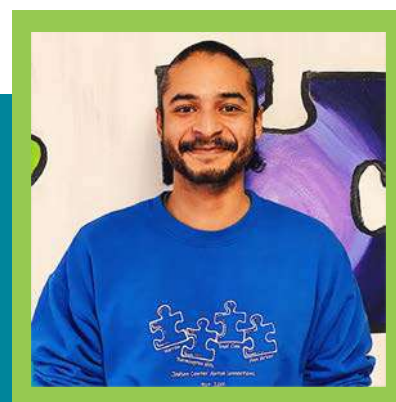
Brenda Scott is from Gretchen's house - Pioneer Resources. She is dedicated to the tenants needs at the home. She goes out of her way to make sure their goals are completed, like making it possible for one of the tenants to go see her elderly grandmother as her health deteriorates.

## Services to Enhance Potential of Dearborn recognizes **Bob Cook**

During these unprecedented times STEP was faced with booting up Virtual Skills Building in a short period of time to ensure that our Consumers would continue to receive the Services that they deserve. I would like to nominate Bob Cook, he's been a huge part of our success when it comes to Virtual skills building. He took the objectives and ran with them. He truthfully enjoys virtual skills building as much as the clients love seeing his face every day on zoom! Bob's classes have the highest participation in the agency. He enjoys teaching music class to the consumers virtually, which is very popular!

## Judson Center of Farmington Hills recognizes **Vincent Daniels**

Vince started working for Judson Center in the summer of 2018 with the Summer Program. Shortly after, Vince joined our ABA program in October of 2018 as a Behavior Technician. From the start, Vince showed exemplary skills working on the floor with clients. Vince demonstrated strength in his ability to provide quality treatment and behavior plan implementation on a consistent basis, no matter the client or challenges they may present. Additionally, Vince is a reliable staff who can be depended on, and who will go out of his way to step up and provide assistance to other staff when necessary. Vince was promoted to a Senior Behavior Technician in August of 2019. He continues to model excellent behavior while working with clients, as well as support and lead his team by example. We are lucky to have him!



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## MCR Industries, Inc. of Kalamazoo recognizes **Regina Ewert**

Regina Ewert has gone above and beyond in trying to help both her teammates within the Skill Building unit and coworkers in other departments. It is not uncommon for Regina to voluntarily take on additional progress notes to help a teammate out, or to fill in at Supported Employment sites (often on short notice). When Regina is approached by a supervisor and asked to complete a task, her response is typically, "I can do that". This year has proven to be challenging due to the many changes brought on by the coronavirus, but Regina has been diligently filling in for Supported Employment when asked, working from home when necessary, and helping the consumers become reacquainted with their volunteer activities since we have resumed providing in-person services. Regina does her best in everything she is asked to do as part of her job.



## Mid-Michigan Industries – Mt. Pleasant recognizes **Jessica Schreuder**

Jessica works in our Montcalm County location with a young man with autism. She supports him in both his community living supports activities and also serves as his job coach. She has remained with him for almost 3 years in this role. Jessica's quiet demeanor, her laid back personality and her patience are all attributes that the individual has responded very well to. In the past three years, he has been able to gain self-confidence in his job duties, to stay on track with his goals, and to maintain his independent employment placement. Her support has bolstered his self-confidence in interacting with others in the community as well. He is able to recognize and respond appropriately when the environment is too stimulating. He really enjoys working with Jessica and they have a great relationship. She truly exemplifies excellence in a DSP.



## North Eastern Michigan Rehabilitation Opportunity Center (NEMROC) – Alpena recognizes **Barry Nelson**

Our Rehabilitation Director did not waste any time picking out an outstanding Job Coach from our direct care professional employees. Barry Nelson works with clients in a variety of settings including car maintenance, cigarette litter pickup and kindling bundling. He demonstrates a talent and demeanor that allows him to work

effectively with the more challenging individuals. He brings humor to the work at hand to make it fun for the individuals he job coaches. Barry is always willing to step up and fill in when necessary. Management has more than once received a compliment from various local business professionals about his ability to coach individuals.



**Attention caregivers:** Your participation in a brief survey could lead to the improvement of the availability and type of behavioral services offered to families who have a loved one diagnosed with autism. Specifically, we need your help with understanding how often, and for how long, children diagnosed with autism are placed on a waitlist prior to receiving behavioral services in the state of Michigan.

Researchers from Eastern Michigan University are collaborating with the Autism Alliance of Michigan to recruit caregivers who are interested in sharing details of their recent experience pursuing behavioral services for their child. Participation is voluntary, lasts approximately 15–30 minutes, and responses are completely anonymous.

Your responses will be used to (a) support the need for expanding behavioral services throughout the state of Michigan and (b) inform the type of services offered (such as trainings and other resources) that will address the needs of both the child and caregiver while they await behavioral services.

If this sounds like something you and your family experienced and you are passionate about sharing this experience to aid in our efforts to better understand your needs, please complete the survey at the following link:

<https://is.gd/waitlistsurvey>

EMU's Behavior Analysis Research Lab and the Autism Alliance of Michigan thank you in advance for taking time to share your experience with us so that we may improve the availability and type of behavioral services in Michigan.

See the accompanying flyer for additional information and please feel free to pass it on to other eligible caregivers who may also be interested in sharing their experience.

For more information about the study's purposes and procedures, please feel free to contact Adam Briggs, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LBA (Primary Investigator) via email at [abrigg11@emich.edu](mailto:abrigg11@emich.edu).

Study approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

**UHSRC Project ID:** UHSRC-FY20-21-69 | **Study Approval Date:** 11/05/2020



# Autism Services in Michigan Survey



**Are you a caregiver of a child with ASD?**



**Do you live in Michigan?**

**If so, then we would like to invite you to complete an approximately 15-30 minute survey!**

The Autism Alliance of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University researchers wonder: how long children with ASD are on behavioral therapy waitlists and the needs of caregivers while on the waitlist

**Complete the survey:**

**<https://is.gd/waitlistsurvey>**



Approved by Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee, Project ID: UHSRC-FY20-21-69



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# Upcoming Community Events



**January 12 – February 16:** [Powerful Tools for Caregivers of Special Needs Children](#)

**January 12:** [Parent Mentor Training](#)

**January 13:** [Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy](#)

**January 14:** [Behavior Intervention in a Virtual World with Special Education](#)

[Mediation Services](#)

**January 20 – March 17:** [Uniquely Me Women on the Spectrum Connect Winter 2021](#)

**January 21:** [The After I'm Gone Program](#)

**January 25 – March 1:** [Beginner American Sign Language Class](#)

**January 25 – March 22:** [Smartphone Photography Winter 2021](#)

**January 27:** [Child-Centered Play Therapy](#)

**February 4:** [Rethinking Guardianship: Facilitating Lifelong Self-Determination](#)

**February 11:** [Comorbidity and Autism: When ASD isn't the only diagnosis of concern](#)

**February 13:** [Increasing and Improving Multi-Cultural Competency among Behavioral Health Practitioners, Clinicians and Key Decision Makers](#)

**February 18:** [The After I'm Gone Program](#)

**February 19:** [Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during the Pandemic \(Live-Online\)](#)

# Driverless Vehicle Needs Study



## WE NEED YOUR VOICE

Ford and the Autism Alliance of Michigan have teamed to learn about the needs of the ASD community with respect to autos and transportation

## TO BE HEARD

Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder; adults who have Autism Spectrum Disorder are needed

## AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To volunteer, please [click here](#) to complete the survey\* before January 31, 2021

Access and the opportunity for people with disabilities to live a quality life begins with allies in the community. To make that happen, we need your help.

\*30-minute online interview - must have computer with microphone & camera

