



AutismAlliance
of Michigan
Help. Hope. Answers. Today.

MiNavigator Newsletter

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Fathers Day 2021



Some kids want to grow up to be a doctor or a lawyer. Other kids want to grow up to be astronauts, veterinarians, and race car drivers. My kids are at the stage where they want to be members of the Avengers. The thing they don't realize is that, regardless of what they want, all of their parents only want them to be one thing when they grow up... happy.

Regardless of whether that child wants to be a doctor or an Avenger, they certainly deserve to be happy.

That's the primary concern a parent has when they realize that their child is going to be labelled, diagnosed, or otherwise stigmatized with intellectual or developmental disabilities. My focus, as a father, has always been on making sure my sons are happy. Their sensory issues, their communications issues, and their "funny little quirks" are secondary to their ability to be happy.

So, what makes your life happy? Is it your ability to wear a t-shirt with a tag on the back of the neck? Is it the ability to tolerate the sound of fireworks? Probably not. Likely, it's opportunities, choices, relationships, and a sense of community. That's what we all need.

- Robb Drzewicki, Autism Dad

cont.



LEARN MORE! FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [AAOMI.ORG](https://www.aaomi.org) OR CALL 877.463.2266



An Autistic Father's Insight on Parenting

Ron Sandison, a Father and Author with Autism

Father's Day is especially meaningful to me as a dad with autism. I try not to take the responsibility for granted with my hectic schedule of writing and speaking. When I was diagnosed with autism at age seven, the experts informed my parents I would probably never get married and have a family. My five-year-old daughter Makayla is God's greatest gift and the only person who can break my autistic rituals and calm my sensory overloads.

After I finished a radio interview for my new book, *Views from the Spectrum: A Window into Life and Faith with Your Neurodivergent Child*, my mom called and said, "Yesterday Makayla told me, 'I feel like my dad is hard to talk with because he is busy all the time. I wish he would slow down and spend time with me and mommy.'"



I felt heartbroken and realized how quickly my little girl is growing up, and I did not want to miss one moment of her childhood. After the call, I took Makayla to the park and played her favorite game of tag. As I chased Makayla around the playground, I saw a mom with her five-year-old autistic son who was humming and playing with sand. The autistic child watched intently as the sand particles slipped through his fingers. The mother sat next to her son and played with the sand. I felt inspired by this mom's unconditional desire to slow down and enjoy the moment.

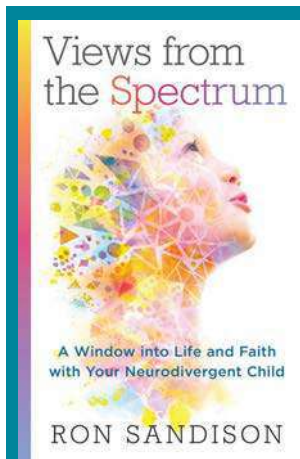


- I have learned three valuable lessons of fatherhood:
1. Enjoy the time you spend with your kids because they will grow quickly.
 2. If you spend time with your children while they are young, later in life they will want to spend time with you.
 3. Praise and encouragement in childhood results in confident adults.

Summary of Views from the Spectrum

Raising a child with autism is both a challenge and an adventure--and sometimes parents need to know there can also be wonderful potential for blessings. *Views from the Spectrum* shares the inspiring stories of twenty amazing young adults with autism and how each of their family's unwavering support and faith in God led them to accomplish what was thought impossible. As a thriving adult with autism himself, Ron Sandison is determined to educate the world on the gifts and talents autism can cultivate--even when they differ from our expectations of typical success.

cont.



Click below to view Ron's latest book

Views from the Spectrum: A Window into Life and Faith with Your Neurodivergent Child

Advice for Fathers:

Every child is different. They all have different wants/needs, perspectives of the world around them, and ways to communicate.

It is important to learn new methods and communicate to keep a strong bond. If one method doesn't work, always try something different.

Learning these new skills and methods also helps you become a better person all around. For every problem, there are multiple solutions.

My Multi-talented Dad:

Growing up my whole life, I learned a multitude of skills beyond my work thanks to my dad.

This is someone who could fix your kitchen pipes, mow your lawn, eliminate weeds, wash dishes, cook meals, go golfing, etc.

All of this and working a full-time job, I felt as if he was a "jack of all trades". He could do everything with a smile on his face.

Every time I come over to visit, we have great conversations and he lights up whenever I talk about my hobbies or work.

Then when I leave, I feel refreshed and ready to tackle whatever comes next.

When I become a father in the future, I hope to embrace what he has taught me and become the best father I can be!

- Drew, AAoM Data Entry Clerk and Son with Autism



COVID-19 Vaccine Updates

Adapted from MDHHS-Spread Hope Not Covid FAQ

In the five months since COVID-19 vaccines have become available, more than 4 million Michigan residents have been vaccinated — accounting for more than half of Michiganders 16 years of age and older and as of May 13, 2021, all Michigan residents 12 years of age and older are eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Getting vaccinated means faster return to social activities and peace of mind knowing you and your loved ones are protected. While it's understandable that you may have questions about vaccine safety and want to be cautious, it's important that all eligible individuals be vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination is key to raising the level of immunity in the population and limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Successful vaccination can be challenging for people with autism and other developmental disabilities, but agencies across the state have begun offering vaccine clinics that are able to provide additional support, if needed. For more information on these clinics, contact an AAoM Navigator by calling 877-463-2266 or emailing navigator@aaomi.org.

Additional information on COVID-19 vaccination can be found at: [MDHHS COVID-19 Vaccine Information](#)

COVID-19 Vaccination Social Story:

<https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/GettingACovid19VaccineSocialStoryIDD-F.pdf>



Art, Autism and Motherhood.

Contributed by Autism Alliance of Michigan's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

Gwen, Rylan's mother, said that Rylan was adopted at 3 weeks old. He was a typical baby, but once he started school the challenges started. Rylan was diagnosed with ASD and Tourette's. In Kindergarten, he went to a private Christian school in Colorado and management was challenging for the school, mom and Rylan. Shortly afterward, mom changed careers going from a full time Marketing/Public Relations professional to Rylan's full-time Independent Living Project Manager.

After lots of challenges she decided to take Rylan out for a semester in 4th grade. During this time they met Mrs. Lennon who told Rylan he could do an Art Show in her studio. The original idea was to create a Pokemon exhibit, but Gwen said "absolutely not". When I asked, Rylan stated the Pokemon, Snorlax, best describes him and Gwen felt his Pokemon obsession would leave time for little else.

cont.



So, instead she and Rylan decided to draw pictures about what it was like for him each day. About 2 years later this art exhibit turned into a book called [“If I Squeeze Your Head: I’m Sorry”](#). The book was transcribed by Gwen and illustrated by Rylan who confesses that he can’t draw hands. One of their favorite chapters is “The Sponge of Squeezing” in this chapter Rylan says “I love to squeeze things that are alive.”

Gwen said, “when I started letting him dictate the course of his life things became easier.” She also confessed that they do not attend as many therapies as they once did. To make sure they both stay in tune with building community (of at least 3) and plotting their own course, Gwen is opening a bookstore--and believe it or not, after a lot of hard work and dedication, the store is opening on Mother's Day weekend.

While being a mother is challenging, creatively different, and awe inspiring, it is in these moments that we begin to look at the many blessings of parenting and realize that our children define the people we are. The bookstore will be a place for families to come and feel the community embrace them for who they are.

Thank you Gwen and Rylan for allowing the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) share your story.

If you would like to purchase [“If I Squeeze Your Head: I’m Sorry”](#) you can order it directly from the bookstore at: <https://bookshop.org/shop/marvelousmebooks>

To talk with Rylan and Gwen and to hear more about the book AAOM will be hosting a book club night in June. Date TBD

The bookstore is located at 1035 Wealthy St Grand Rapids MI.



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Date	Event
June 18	The Great Lakes Special Needs Planning Symposium
June 19	Watch Me Grow
June 20	IEP: A Closer Look with Clare Brick
June 21 - July 2	OUCARES Pee Wee Camp (Ages 3-6 years) , Rochester
June 21- June 25	Team GUTS Fun & Fitness Camp
June 21 - July 2	O.U.R Virtual Summer Camp!
June 22	Financial Literacy Series
June 23	CMHLS – Autism Spectrum Disorder Learning Series
June 23	Watch Me Grow
June 23	Summer Fun Kayaking & Paddle Boarding
June 28 - July 2	Team GUTS Fun & Fitness Camp
June 29	12 Person Small Group Peer Support with Tracey
July 5 - August 19	Hired in Michigan- Youth Social Media Business Marketing Program- Summer Career Camp
July 5 - July 9	Total Spectrum Summer Skills Program
July 6 - July 8	Summer Camp at Frederik Meijer Gardens
July 6 - July 17	OUCARES Pee Wee Camp (Ages 3-6 years)
July 6 - August 19	The Speech Language Learning Center Summer Say & Play 2021
July 6 - July 15	Free Virtual Caregiver Bootcamp Morning Series
July 7	“Virtual” Music Therapy Event – Together Let’s Sing, Dance and Jam!!
July 9	Watch Me Grow
July 12 - July 16	Team GUTS Fun & Fitness Camp
July 12 - July 16	Summer Fun Day Camp
July 13	CMHLS – Autism Spectrum Disorder Learning Series
July 13	Watch Me Grow
July 14	Virtual Sensory-Friendly “Makers” Program
July 15	Watch Me Grow
July 15	Zoom Summer Dance Party!
July 15	Clinton Township Inclusive Playground Drive-In Movie Fundraiser



AutismAlliance of Michigan

AUTISM HERO WALK

SUNDAY JULY 25, 2021

900 WALKERS WILL GAIN ACCESS TO THE DETROIT ZOO

REMAINING FUNDRAISERS WILL RECEIVE A ZOO TICKET VOUCHER

PRESENTED BY
DTE
Foundation

REGISTER AT
AAOMWALK.COM



MiPAAC

MICHIGAN PARENT, ADVOCATE
& ATTORNEY COALITION

Powered by  AutismAlliance of Michigan

Michigan Parent, Advocate & Attorney Coalition (MiPAAC) is a newly formed statewide group focused on student-centered advocacy.

MiPAAC aims to educate families of children with special education needs on topics relevant to their advocacy efforts.

To join – complete the [MiPAAC membership form!](#)

<https://mipaac.org/>

