

The Sun

Newsletter

January–March 2018

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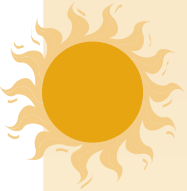
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Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



Transition to self-determination

If self-determination is the goal, then transition is the process. Transition refers to the time the change takes place as well as the process of change. And there are many transitions. For children affected by autism, ages 14–21 are the transition years to adulthood. During this time, many decisions are made about what life will look like when the student ages out of his or her education program.

As the parent, you are the best equipped to lead this process for your child. But how do you determine your child's progress? More importantly, how do you help your child learn how to determine his or her own progress? Do you have a guide for your child's self-determination?

The Tri-State Transition Slide Guide may be of help. "The slide guide is a guide for transition services," explains Dale Matusevich, education associate for the Delaware Department of Education's secondary

What is "self-determination"?

Generally, the term "self-determination" refers to the ability to decide for yourself what's best for you.

Certain features of self-determination apply to all school students, writes University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign researcher Karrie A. Shogren, PhD, and they "can become self-determining and work toward the adult outcomes that they personally value."

To this end, each student needs "individualized instruction that considers personal characteristics, culture, and preferences of students and their families" (Shogren, Karrie, PhD [2013]. *Self-Determination and Transition Planning*. Brookes Publishing: p. 2).

and transition services. "It gives educators, as well as students and their parents, the questions they should be thinking about. These questions should be generated during the IEP [individualized education

program] meeting and the meeting when parents are preparing for the IEP."

The questions have been turned into tasks in the slide guide (as you will see on page 4). And the tasks are geared toward post-secondary education and training, employment, and independent living as well as self-determination. For this newsletter, we are covering only self-determination.

The series of tasks begins at 10–12 years of age and continues to 18–21. Any child with a disability should be able to do the tasks within the designated age range.

What if my child's developmental age is different from his chronological age?

You do not need to define the difference between your child's developmental and chronological ages to use the slide guide. Instead, says Autism Delaware™ resource coordinator Heidi Mizell, "think of

Continued on p. 3

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Discovering a sense of balance

The central theme of this issue of *The Sun* is reaching independence through self-determination. As parents, we instill the values and teach the skills that our kids need to be successful and independent young adults in the world.

But the process can be a balancing act between the individual's strengths and challenges. The goals and skills that our kids need vary across the autism spectrum. Despite this variation, the principle of striving towards independence, whatever the level, is paramount.

I will never forget the lesson my son Liam taught me while I was teaching him to ride a bike sans training wheels. I thought the lesson was going to be a long drawn-out process that required a great deal of patience on my part. I was also feeling anxious and protective, because I did not want to see my son get hurt.

Silly me! The very first time I let go of the bike, Liam rode away! Because of his great sense of balance, he mastered the two-wheeler instantly. The "brake thing" took a little bit longer to master, but to my surprise, my son assumed the bike-riding skill in no time at all. All the

concern on my face gave way to a big, proud smile—while I was frantically running to catch up!

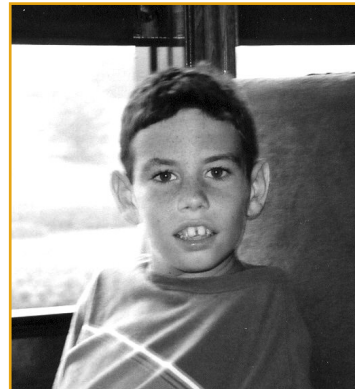
We all know that every child has the capacity to achieve more in the future than he or she is capable of doing today. My son had just taught me that an individual on the spectrum can do

more than many people think. Learning a new skill may require more repetition and practice for children with autism. Then again, as with Liam's bike riding, maybe not!

I think it's safe to say that progress may be uneven. Your concern for your child may get overwhelming. So, try thinking of your parental work as a marathon, and not a sprint, and celebrate every accomplishment, large or small. This process will not only improve your own mental state, but it will also provide your child with the sense of balance needed to be successful and independent in the world.



Pete Bradley
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A service of Autism Delaware



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Transition to self-determination Continued from p. 1

each task as possible to the extent that your child can do it. As we all know, even children who are nonverbal have ways of making their opinions known.”

Where did the slide guide come from?

The slide guide evolved out of a need to address the transitional issues faced by students with a variety of disabilities. “The main questions educators get asked,” continues Matusevich, “are *Can you show me a transition plan for a student with a learning disorder? Or Can you show me a plan for a student with an emotional disorder? Or for a specific disability?* And the answer is *No*, because no two students look the same. Each needs an individualized plan.”

The staffs of the Department of Education in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware had been expressing concerns around this issue over the years. Since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, educators looked at the individual student’s strengths and preferences, but more was obviously needed.

“In the process we were working with, we would, for example, take a student’s word about achieving a particular skill on his IEP,” notes Matusevich. “I don’t know anyone who won’t grade

themselves higher, whether it’s true or not. But when the student’s parents did not see the skill performed in the home, they questioned how their child was being prepared to make the jump into the community.

“We know we sometimes disconnect between the goal and the data,” adds Matusevich. “So, we felt that good age-appropriate assessment was needed for the individual student.”

For the transition overall, sums up Matusevich, there should be an academic piece, but the focus should not be only on one test. And communications from the parents and the student’s circle of support need to be considered. “We have to look at a student holistically, with input from stakeholders who are teaching this student. If the student’s transition plan is work-based learning, we need to talk to the people where the student works, too.”

[T]hink of each task as possible to the extent that your child can do it. As we all know, even children who are nonverbal have ways of making their opinions known.

—Heidi Mizell
Autism Delaware
Family Support Program
Resource Coordinator

Matusevich thinks the resources listed on the back of the slide guide need to be updated. “The information needs to be as generic as possible so it fits everyone,” says Matusevich, “and the same information that goes to educators should be going to parents and students. We all need to drive this process.”

**For a copy of the Tri-State Transition Slide Guide, call the Autism Delaware family support team:
In northern Delaware, call (302) 224-6020.
In southern Delaware, call (302) 644-3410.**

Autism Delaware’s suggested resources

- <https://gacec.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2016/10/exec-summary.pdf>
The Governor’s Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens provides an executive summary of the State Transition Task Force for Emerging Adults with Disabilities and Special Health Care Needs.
- <http://www.familyshade.org/agencies/educational-strategies-for-children-with-autism/>
Family SHADE (Support and Healthcare Alliance of Delaware) offers educational strategies for children with autism spectrum disorder.
- <https://researchautism.org/resources/a-guide-for-transition-to-adulthood>
The Organization for Autism Research offers information about the transition-to-adulthood process in *A Guide for Transition to Adulthood*.
- <https://iancommunity.org/ssc/autism-transition-to-adulthood>
A variety of articles are available in the Interactive

Autism Network’s *Coming of Age: Autism and the Transition to Adulthood*.

- http://dhss.delaware.gov/ddds/aar_temp_v2.html

Under *Autism and Aspergers Resources*, the Department of Health and Social Services addresses transition, adult services, housing, employment, and other issues of importance across the lifespan.

- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/transition-tool-kit>

The Autism Speaks Transition Tool Kit includes sections on self-advocacy, developing independent living skills, planning for transition, legal matters to consider, community living, employment, post-secondary educational opportunities, housing and residential supports, health, and technology.



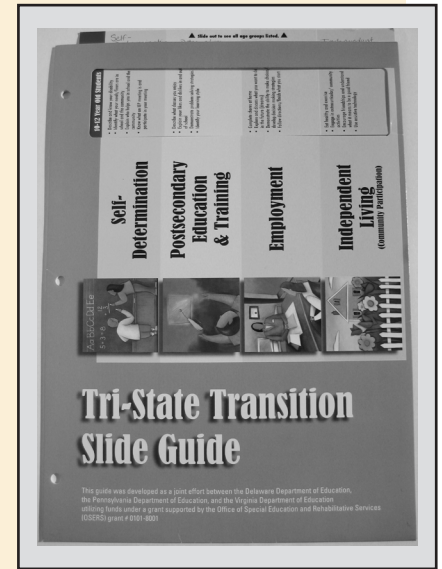
The slide guide

In special education, there are many transitions. Here, the word “transition” refers to the process of preparing a student for adult life after school. This process includes the move from grade to grade and the passage from one special-education program to another.

Defining this movement as more of an age-appropriate process, the Tri-State Transition Slide Guide divides a child’s progress into four areas of consideration: independent living, employment, post-secondary education and training, and self-determination.

Here, we are focusing on self-determination. Below are the tasks that a student with disabilities should be able to address and the age ranges that are appropriate for each set of tasks.

Remember: Think of each task as possible to the extent that your child can do it.



Together, we can help our children think about these overall questions, too:

- **How do I make decisions and use community resources?**
- **How do I talk about my disability and the support I need?**
- **What are my goals, and how do I plan to reach them?**

10–12 years old

- Describe and know your disability.
- Identify what your needs and fears are in school and the community.
- Explain who helps you in school and the community.
- Know what an individualized education program (IEP) meeting is, and participate in your IEP meeting.

12–14 years old

- Evaluate how your disability impacts your daily life.

- Describe what accommodations you use.
- Explain how your accommodations help you.
- Provide information at your IEP meeting regarding how you learn best, your likes, dislikes, dreams.

14–15 years old

- Participate in assessments, and understand how the results relate to your transition plan.
- Become an active member of your IEP.
- Identify and begin coordination of supports (create a circle of support).
- Appropriately express your wants and needs.

15–16 years old

- Continue your involvement in the assessment process. State how these results relate to your post-secondary goals.
- Describe issues related to self-disclosure (when, what, and how to disclose).
- Continue leading the IEP meeting. Include the issues related to assistive technology (AT), health care, and transportation.
- Define “self-success.”

16–17 years old

- Realize and understand barriers and solutions.
- Independently discuss with high school staff your needed accommodations and supports.
- Understand adult rights and responsibilities.
- Continue leading the IEP meeting. Provide direct input into the development of your IEP goals.

18–21 years old

- Direct personal assistance services.
- Understand cultural diversity.
- Understand and use cause-and-effect strategies.
- Consider others’ points of view.
- Further develop self-advocacy skills as they relate to your post-secondary goals.
- Assume adult rights and responsibilities.

For a PDF of the Tri-State Transition Slide Guide:
<http://web.richmond.k12.va.us/Portals/0/assets/ExceptionalEd/pdfs/TriStateTransitionGuide.pdf>

Identifying their own educational needs

During the 2015–16 school year, the State of Delaware Department of Education organized three youth leadership forums. Seventy students were given the opportunity to identify the educational needs of their fellow students with a variety of disabilities. Ranging in age from 15 to 21, these students were enrolled in 15 of Delaware’s 19 school districts and had individualized education programs (or IEPs, for short).

Among the issues noted by the 70 students were the power of great teachers, middle school, a high school diploma, and employer perceptions, as well as the students’ ideas about life, college, and career readiness, noted Dale Matusевич, education associate for the Delaware Department of Education secondary and transition services, in his September 2017 report entitled *What Delaware students with disabilities have to say*.

Here are some of the educational issues the students identified as well as some solutions:

The middle school students felt inadequately prepared for the high school environment and suggested visits to the high school plus input from current high schoolers on what to expect. The middle schoolers also thought they could be eased into the academic expectation of high school by taking higher level math and English courses and engaging in more in-class debate. Learning a foreign language should also begin in middle school.

The 70 students attending the youth leadership forums believe administrative involvement is crucial for academic success. They also believe they would have benefited from

career preparation starting in elementary school. They would have appreciated a review of the various career options and creative opportunities available to those students moving directly into the work force as well as the college-bound and pursuers of post-secondary training.

The students acknowledged the difficulty they will face as high school graduates trying to get jobs and keeping them. To address employers’ concerns, the students suggested educating employers to overcome their fears. The students also felt that more work experience, beginning in middle school, would support their employability. And they recommended more challenging course options with the understanding that they needed to be responsible for their own learning.

“Students with disabilities anticipate their future adult life, including their work life, with excitement and hope,” notes Matusевич. “When focus group participants were asked ‘What

are you excited about when you think of your future?’ they answered like any young person would answer—they want to make the world a better place, chase their dreams, use their talents, build new skills, live independently, make money, start a family, and be a part of a larger community. At the end of the day, everyone wants to be successful” (Matusевич, Dale. *What Delaware students with disabilities have to say*. Report dated September 26, 2017).

When focus group participants were asked “What are you excited about when you think of your future?” they answered like any young person would answer—they want to make the world a better place, chase their dreams, use their talents, build new skills, live independently, make money, start a family, and be a part of a larger community. At the end of the day, everyone wants to be successful.

—Dale Matusевич
 Delaware Department of Education
 Secondary and Transition Services
 Education Associate

Suggestions from the principal’s office

Creating independence in early learners

Early learners benefit from increased opportunities for independence. For families, the area of self-help is a great place to start when working toward a child’s independence. Here are some examples to try:

- During mealtime, have your child help prepare a simple part of the meal or a snack. Use visuals or a model to demonstrate each step of the process.
- When getting dressed, have your child help pick out his or her outfit. Provide choices based on the temperature outside. Choices are a great

way for early learners to work on requesting their preferences, verbally or using gestures.

- When getting ready for school, have your child help pack his or her lunchbox and backpack. Use visuals to show how to pack appropriately.

To foster independence, we want to make sure we provide just enough support. So, allow your child to try and do the steps independently for each of these routines.

—Gail Humphreys-Mackenzie
 Richardson Park Learning Center
 Early Years Program, Child Find Office

PARENT 2 PARENT Written by parents for parents

Tracking your child's progress toward self-determination



Jen Nardo and her son, Jake

When our babies are first put into our arms, we feel a deep responsibility for their safety and for meeting their every need to thrive.

As they grow, we get excited with each milestone: They are picking up cereal—and they are getting it in their mouths! They are sitting up!

When our children are developmentally delayed, we parents have to help them with each emerging skill longer than we would help our neurotypical kids. Maybe a child needs physical therapy

to strengthen core muscles before he is able to sit up. Maybe the motor planning needed to crawl takes months of practice before we see any results. Or maybe hours of practice are needed for one new verbalization.

As my son who lives with autism, Jake grew and developed at his own pace, and I grew comfortable doing more for him than I did for my older neurotypical son, Frankie, when he was the same age. As soon as Frankie learned to tie his shoes, I let him take over that task. At a typical age, he also learned to cut his own food and make a meal for himself, and he understood the concept of money and purchases. I eagerly facilitated his independence in these areas as well.

At 19, Jake can tie his shoes, cut his own food, work the microwave, and make small purchases. But do I always let him?

Over the last few years, I have been trying to back off as

much as possible. I backed off when Jake learned to navigate the playground on his own. And I backed off when he could dress himself. On the other hand, I found that meal-making goes faster and easier if I do it without Jake. But how does Jake benefit from my doing it for him? I realize that I need to back off from this, too, so Jake will become more independent. So, what's the holdup?

Breaking my routine—and the assumption that faster, easier, cleaner is better—is an important step toward my son's success as an adult. Involving him in day-to-day household management gives him a lot of confidence and a huge smile of pride. If it takes longer for him to complete a new task or the kitchen gets messier than usual during meal preparation—so be it! I just won't let my child's skills regress because doing the task myself is faster, easier, and cleaner.

I've learned a few other things, too. For example, having a young child on the spectrum necessitates more time in our daily schedule for teaching him how to do things like work zippers and buttons.

As your child ages, let him or her walk ahead of you to the bus stop as long as it's safe. And find chores around the house that will build your child's confidence. The job may not be done well today, but one day it will.

In a restaurant, ordering a beverage or meal is a good first step toward self-determination—as long as you have your child's back, of course. And be sure to talk to your child's educational team about the skills he or she is showing at school. I was so surprised to learn what Jake was doing at school that he would not do at home!

When Jake was little, I used to say that my job, as mom, was to make sure that he is always living his life to the best of his ability. The best way to do this, I've learned, is to back off and let Jake learn to do for himself. But now that I think about it, don't we all learn better this way?

—Jen Nardo

“The ability to make decisions that affect one's life is vital for all individuals, including those individuals with intellectual disabilities. For adults, this equates to a greater degree of independence, regardless of one's support needs in other areas. One does not need to be totally self-sufficient to be considered self-determined, but must have some input in the supports that are received. The acquisition of skills related to self-determination is vital for increasing any person's independence.”



Vatland, Christopher, et al. *Promoting Self-Determination for Adults: A Practice Guide* (2011). A National Gateway to Self-Determination Project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Developmental Disabilities: p. 2.

Written by parents
for parents

PARENT 2 PARENT

The Montessori way to mental preparedness and independence

Parents of children with autism do such an incredible job of holding their children’s hands through tough therapy sessions, emotional outbursts, and visits to medical specialists that parents sometimes forget to let go.

To remind me to give my son the space he needs to develop independence, I think of a simple quote from Italian physician, philosopher, and educator Maria Montessori: “Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed.”

Montessori worked and conducted research in institutions for children with intellectual disabilities in the late 1800s and advocated on their behalf for specialized care and instruction. She developed the Montessori philosophy of education that empowers children to advance their development with teachers working as guides to assist the process.

Many parents of children with autism are already experts with common Montessori principles, such as emphasizing sensory play in education, focusing on one skill at a time, and demonstrating a skill step by step instead of merely explaining it.

Other ideas are harder to master, such as observing what a child does when he or she encounters a problem, waiting to

see if other children will help before jumping in, and knowing when to help and when to step back.

Independence does not develop magically overnight—for either the child or the parents; it requires a lot of practice as well as mental preparedness. If the first time a family experiences independence is when the young adult with autism is moving into his or her own apartment, the experience is sure to be unsettling for everyone. But if parents encourage small independent experiences while the child is growing up, then both the parents and the child will be better prepared when facing bigger life adjustments and taking steps toward independence.

Following some Montessori teachings while the child is still young may help. For more about the Montessori method, visit <http://www.montessori.edu/method.html>.

—Cory Gilden



Cory Gilden teaches her son Casey how to fold the laundry.



A self-determination learning model

In 2017, the Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities published a teacher’s guide that describes how teachers and other personnel can use *The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* (or SDLMI, for short) to support students in becoming more self-determined. The guide describes self-determination as follows:

“People who are self-determined self-initiate and self-regulate action to solve problems, make decisions, and set goals that impact their lives. Adolescents become more self-determined as they engage in problem-solving and decision-making actions, set and work toward goals, identify their interests and preferences, and advocate for themselves and their needs. These actions are critical for all students and are often part of the curriculum. However, students will need support to learn and practice these skills if they are to lead self-determined lives.”

Shogren, K.A., Wehmeyer, M.L., Burke, K.M., and Palmer, S.B. (2017). *The Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction: Teacher’s Guide*. Lawrence KS: Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities: p. 2.



The 2016 graduating class of the Partners in Policymaking™ program are (front row) Wendy Holmberg, Nancy Lemus, Aimee Massey, Cory Gilden, Verita Turner, and Laura Greene. In the back row are Dareon Prevoe, Lit'le McBride, Michael Harris, Kip Massey, Angela Mitchell, Jennifer Hall-Sparks, Brenda Mettle, and Christy Bazemore.

Leaders in training

In Delaware, an innovative program is successfully teaching people with developmental disabilities and their parents how to be community leaders. Called Partners in Policymaking™, the program provides up-to-date information, education, and skill-building activities around the legislative process and the local, state, and national issues that affect individuals with disabilities. The overall goal of the program is to foster a partnership between the people who need and use disabilities

services and those who make public policy concerning these services.

Created by the Minnesota Developmental Disabilities Council, Partners in Policymaking was undertaken by the Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council in 1993. Since then, more than 200 Delawareans have graduated from the program.

The next Partners in Policymaking program starts in February 2018. For more information, visit <http://ddc.delaware.gov/policymaking.shtml>.

Suggestions from an elementary school teacher

Teaching independence through homework

The homework load gets more difficult in the upper grades, so making sure that grade schoolers have a solid foundation in how to do their homework is essential. With the following tips, parents can help their children set goals and complete their homework confidently and, in time, independently.

Homework is an extension of the material that students are exposed to in the classroom. For some grades, reading additional material is required homework. Children should either read or have an adult read to them for at least 20 minutes every night.

Getting children to be responsible for their homework can be a challenge at times. Parents can lay a good foundation by modeling and rehearsing what a session of homework looks like in the home.

To ensure that children are being proactive and taking ownership of their homework, parents can provide visual schedules and timers. This aid can help children keep track of their work. Being organized with an agenda from school is a great communication tool for both parents and students.

Some children function best by completing homework as soon as they get home from school. Others require downtime before beginning. Either way, the child should have a weekly plan as to how he or she will complete the homework: Prioritize what needs to be done first, and then, plan accordingly. So that a

child is not overwhelmed, divide the assignment into chunks.

Parents should monitor and support their children. As the children get older, parents can pull back their support and only check in during homework sessions.

Teachers have silent strategies for children to signal that they need help. One example parents might consider is the laminated circle. Applied to the student's classroom desk with Velcro™, the circle has two sides. One side is green; the other side, yellow. When a student is working independently, the circle is turned to the green side. If the student needs help, he or she flips the circle to yellow. This way, the other students can continue to work as the teacher meets with the student to review directions.

Teachers are more than willing to review the directions with a child who is making an effort to learn the material. So, parents should stress self-advocacy: Tell children to always speak up if they don't understand class work or a homework assignment.

—**Brooke Copher**
Appoquinimink School District

Groups for socialization skills

Among the many programs offered by Autism Delaware, several stand out for teaching socialization skills in a group setting. These groups include PEERS, a new Lego program, BRAVE Girl, and a boys social group. For details, contact the family support team as listed in the box below.

PEERS

An acronym for Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills, PEERS is an evidence-based intervention for adolescents who are socially motivated to make and keep friends. The following social skills are taught:

- using appropriate conversational skills
- choosing appropriate friends
- using electronic forms of communication
- using appropriate humor, and assessing the feedback
- starting, entering, and exiting conversations between peers
- organizing successful get-togethers with friends
- exhibiting good sportsmanship when playing with friends
- handling arguments and disagreements with friends and in other relationships
- handling rejection, teasing, bullying, rumors or gossip, and cyberbullying
- changing a bad reputation

Groups are made up of those with similar needs. During each group session, the participants not only are taught social skills but also are given the opportunity to practice the skills in socialization activities, such as playing sports and board games.

Presently, Autism Delaware has grant money to subsidize the cost of participating in the PEERS program. Instead of the usual \$50 per week, the program costs \$30 a week for both the parents' and children's groups. For more information, call (302) 224-6020.

Parents also participate in PEERS by learning how to coach their teens. Giving appropriate feedback is reinforced through weekly homework assignments.

The program runs for 14 weeks, meeting on Thursdays from 6:00 to 7:30PM. Regular attendance is essential for both parents and their adolescents with autism.

Enrollment is limited. For more information, contact the Autism Delaware family support team as listed in the box below.

INSIDE Autism Delaware

Do you look forward to The Sun?

If so, please join the captain of Team Autism Delaware, Wilmington, for the 2018 Walk for Autism on April 21. And help raise the financial support for another year's worth of in-depth coverage that focuses specifically on the needs of our autism community.

For more information
Contact the team captain at carla.koss@delautism.org.

To join the team or donate
Visit <https://autismdelaware.akaraisin.com/walkforautism/ForTheSun>.



New Lego program

In addition to teaching social skills, the Lego program is now boosting a child's learning curve by addressing his or her abstract thinking. The program accepts children aged 7–12. For details, see the article on page 11.

Space is limited. To register, contact the family support team.

BRAVE Girl

A new Autism Delaware social group, BRAVE Girl got its name from a list of positive adjectives: bold, resilient, awesome, valued, every girl.

Designed for 9 to 19 year olds, this girls-only social outlet begins by discussing what activities the group would like to do together. In-house activities include parties and craft nights. Activities in the community feature a day trip to Longwood Gardens and a Jingle Bells hayride.

Joining the group is free, but there will be a cost for each of the activities.

Look for the winter–spring schedule at AutismDelaware.org.

Boys social group

A social group designed specifically for boys, this group first met in December 2017. Look for more information about this group in a future issue of *The Sun*.

Program listing

Grandparent support groups and parent coffee hours are offered throughout the state and usually meet twice a month. An up-to-date list of all programs is maintained at AutismDelaware.org.

Also look for the new Hora del Café para Padres de Familia!

Autism Delaware Family support team

Southern DE
(302) 644-3410

Northern DE
(302) 224-6020

INSIDE Autism[™] Delaware

Celebrating volunteers

Autism Delaware celebrated its loyal and hard-working volunteers at an invitation-only event on October 13 at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino.

“We take this opportunity every year,” says Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery, “to acknowledge our consistently fabulous volunteers. They deserve recognition for their never-ending hard work to improve our community.”

Deep appreciation is extended to the following award recipients:

Sabrina Metz and Marcia Willey

Autism Delaware Volunteer of the Year Award

Brad Mouly, owner of Jersey Mike’s Subs

Autism Delaware Outstanding Community Partner

Tina Orzo, of Christiana Care

Jason Anderson Outstanding Employee Award

SoDel Concepts

Noel Perry Smith Award for Outstanding Employer



April is National

Autism Awareness Month

Help raise awareness about autism and its effect on our families. For more information, send an email of interest to teresa.avery@delautism.org.

Turning our fundraising into fun for our kids

Have you ever wondered: *Where do the funds go that Autism Delaware raises at annual events, such as the Blue Jean Ball and fall auction?* This year’s Blue Jean Ball in Lewes brought in more than \$72,000, and the fall auction in Wilmington raised more than \$57,000. These funds come from the sale of tickets and auction items, sponsorships, and direct donations. And because the auction items are donated and volunteers help make a success of these events, more of the fundraising dollars can go to much-needed programs and services across the state. Examples of these programs and services include expanded family support—and fun for our kids, such as junior golf, the fall festival, and train rides.

Autism Delaware expanded its family support program this year. Families who now call for help and resources are connected to a support team that includes two new family navigators. Both are bilingual, and their goal is to provide more outreach to the Spanish-speaking community in addition to greater access to support for all families affected by autism.

One Autism Delaware program is junior golf. This program teaches participants how to keep an eye on the ball while teeing off at The Rookery South Golf Course in Milton. In addition to learning golf techniques, the students learn personal skills, such as good sportsmanship and perseverance. The program is designed for youth aged 8–21. This year, the program ran for eight weeks from August to September.

Also supported by fundraising, the Autism Delaware Fall Fest took place at Killens Pond State Park on October 14 this year. Families were asked to bring a dish to share while Autism Delaware supplied hot dogs and beverages as well as free pumpkins for the children to decorate.

On October 20, the haunted-but-not-scary train ride left the Wilmington & Western Railroad station with an open hay-car to enhance the Halloween experience for our families. A family favorite, this program turns into the spring bunny train ride in April—complete with a visit from the spring bunny himself!



Addressing abstract thinking

Autism Delaware recently collaborated with Dover Air Force Base to provide a social-and-recreational opportunity through the Air Force Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). Designed for military families with special-needs family members, EFMP provided the outlet for a Lego camp for children with autism, which was held on the base in spring 2017.

In addition to giving the children the opportunity to socialize, Autism Delaware's family support team decided to boost the children's learning curve by addressing any issues with their abstract thinking.



"We chose to take a different route," notes Heidi Mizell, Autism Delaware resource coordinator, "and challenge our children to express themselves through their builds [or Lego creations]. The task was difficult for our kids who struggle with abstract and conceptual thinking."

All the workshop's participants used identical 200-piece Lego sets, and the group was given a different topic every week.

"We challenged them to put together builds interpretively," continues Mizell. "For example, since we were working with children of soldiers, we chose topics they were used to talking about, like patriotism, and timely topics, like school issues when school began. The children would then have to build a memory!"

"They finished the day by building a representation of something they heard that day, something that made an impression on them. They also had to tell their peers why they chose to do that build," adds Mizell.

"The builds and discussions really challenged them—and they did a great job!"

For information about the 2018 Lego program, contact Autism Delaware's family support team at (302) 224-6020. Or visit AutismDelaware.org.

Get reimbursed!

Autism Delaware reimburses parents as much as \$250 to attend an autism conference or workshop. This year-round stipend can be applied to travel expenses, registration for the workshop, hotel, childcare, and any other related cost.

How to apply for the stipend:

- Submit a request to delautism@delautism.org. Or mail it to the following:
Autism Delaware
ATTN: Stipend Request
924 Old Harmony Rd., Suite 201
Newark DE 19713
- Once you've received confirmation, be prepared to write a summary of your experience at the conference or workshop, and submit it with your receipts to the above-mentioned email or street address.



The 2018 Walk for Autism is right around the corner. Form a team, and join the fun. For information or help, visit AutismDelaware.org.

All information provided or published by Autism Delaware™ is for informational purposes only. Reference to any treatment or therapy option or to any program, service, or treatment provider is not an endorsement by Autism Delaware. You should investigate alternatives that may be more appropriate for a specific individual. Autism Delaware assumes no responsibility for the use made of any information published or provided by Autism Delaware.



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Helping People and Families Affected by Autism

20 years and counting!

This year, Autism Delaware celebrates its 20th anniversary. Since 1998, we have evolved from a small group of families sharing a common experience to become the premier autism agency in the First State.



How does Autism Delaware help people and families affected by autism?

- By offering more than 200 family support programs across the state every year!
- By raising awareness and advocating on behalf of individuals and families affected by autism!
- By providing employment opportunities for adults on the autism spectrum!

How can I help Autism Delaware?

By volunteering! Send an email to volunteers@delautism.org.

By making a donation and fundraising for the Walk for Autism in April.

For more info, visit AutismDelaware.org.



AutismDelaware.org