

The Sun

Newsletter

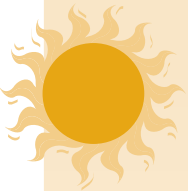
Winter 2021

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Our mission

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



Internet safety

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Consider these statistics:

- 40 percent of children in the fourth through eighth grades have “connected or chatted online with a stranger.” And 53 percent of these children “revealed their phone number to a stranger” (https://enough.org/stats_internet_safety).
- 46 percent of young people admit they are “addicted to their smartphone” (<https://www.cybersmile.org/news/cybersmile-publish-national-digital-wellbeing-2020-report-focusing-on-young-peoples-technology-related-wellbeing>).
- 60 percent say that the time spent online “negatively impacts other important areas of their life, including sleep, diet, exercise, and study” (<https://www.cybersmile.org/news/cybersmile-publish-national-digital-wellbeing-2020-report-focusing-on-young-peoples-technology-related-wellbeing>).

In other words, the internet can be dangerous to a child’s physical and mental well-being.

And did you know a child living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be especially prone to the dangers?

Whether you are an individual with ASD or the parent of a child on the spectrum, some help to make the internet a safer place to navigate begins on page 3.

Autism DelawareSM

New!

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One statewide fax number
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Autism and the new challenges

No doubt about it: Every one of us has faced new challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic hit last March. My family’s experience is probably not that different from yours. Like many of you, we’ve had more questions than answers: *How long is the threat of getting infected or infecting others going to last? How do we protect everyone while reaching for “a new normal”? What will this new normal look like? What can we do to make things better—in the short term—in the long run?*

In addition to the uncertainties raised by these questions, the challenges we’re all experiencing in our daily lives can be very stressful, especially for people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD). COVID-19 has thrown a monkey wrench into our already complicated lives. Many of us are now working from home while simultaneously trying

to help our neurotypical kids with their remote schooling and our kids on the spectrum with their confusion and anxiety. The work day gets even more complicated when our loved ones with ASD need special services. No matter how hard you try, there are too many needs and not enough time or sufficient resources to manage everything.

If you feel this way, please know that you are not alone. Autism Delaware

continues to be here to help. As soon as Delaware Governor John Carney declared a state of emergency, Autism Delaware’s staff and board began working not only at continuing services, but also at expanding services by creating new and safe means of access. With each passing month, staff has increased its level of service and the

As soon as safely possible, we hope to get back to the same level of service everyone enjoyed before the pandemic.

number of individuals and families we are able to serve. As soon as safely possible, we hope to get back to the same level of service everyone enjoyed before the pandemic. Despite all the challenges, Autism Delaware’s staff and leadership team have maintained their commitment and professionalism—because working with challenges is our strong suit!

Please know that the challenges caused by COVID-19 and the shutdown will not last forever. At some point, we’ll get past them and arrive at our new normal. Meanwhile, you can still reach out to Autism Delaware for help. We guarantee that you will be heard—No doubt about it!



Brendan O’Neill
President
Board of Directors

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.

Is your child being cyberbullied?

If you answered “Yes,” then you know firsthand the kind of dysfunction a bully can wreak. Where teasing may seem minor to everyone but the bullied, humiliation and threats are signs of major cyberbullying.

“If you fit in, life is easy,” writes Temple Grandin, Ph.D., in her often-quoted book, *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships*. “If you don’t, that’s when all the teasing and bullying starts. For kids on the spectrum, it can be pure hell” (Grandin, T., and S. Barron. (2017) *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism*. Future Horizons).

A quick read on how to manage cyberbullying is available on the Cyberbullying Research Center website. Based on university training with a clinical support specialist, this blog explains how to help your child with ASD:

“Stay calm.

“Explain immediate next steps.

“Ask questions, but keep them simple.

“Negotiation and bargaining goes a long way.

“Use scenarios to ensure strategies are learned.

“Be sensitive to their personal preferences” (<https://cyberbullying.org/helping-kids-autism-spectrum-disorder-bullied-cyberbullied/>).

For the full explanations, read *Helping Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder when Bullied or Cyberbullied* at <https://cyberbullying.org/helping-kids-autism-spectrum-disorder-bullied-cyberbullied/>.

Safety resources for families

- *Best Practices: Internet Safety for Every Family* on the CovenantEyes™ website—<https://www.covenanteyes.com/2014/08/07/best-practices-internet-safety/>
- *Internet Safety* (dated April 2018) on the KidsHealth from Nemours website—<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/net-safety.html?ref=search>
- Internet safety tips for kids on the Safe Search Kids website powered by Google SafeSearch—<https://www.safesearchkids.com/>
- *Internet Safety Rules You Need to Teach a Child With Autism*, by Sarah Kupferschmidt, BCBA, published in **Autism Parenting Magazine, Issue 60**—<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/internet-safety-rules-to-teach/>
- *Internet Security Best Practices: How to Avoid Viruses, Scams, Malware, and Hackers*, by Frank Moraes, on the Who Is Hosting This website—<https://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/internet-security/>

For an individual with ASD

Did you know that you can be more deeply affected by inappropriate internet material? Or that you’re prone to developing compulsive online habits? Get some help negotiating cyberspace from these websites:



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- *A Helpful Online Safety Guide for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders* on the wizcase.com website—<https://www.wizcase.com/blog/internet-safety-guide-for-people-with-autism-spectrum-disorders/>
- *Top 10 Internet Safety Rules & What Not to Do Online* on the Kaspersky (a global cybersecurity company) website—<https://usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center/preemptive-safety/top-10-internet-safety-rules-and-what-not-to-do-online>
- *Internet Safety for Teens with ASD*, an Autism at-a-Glance publication on the Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD (CSESA) website—<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED582443.pdf>
- *Online Safety* (dated April 2018) on the TeensHealth from Nemours website—<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/internet-safety.html>

Free screen time vs. behavior support tool



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Turn off the less desired behaviors associated with free screen time—in two steps!

by Clara Tiedemann, M.Ed., BCBA

When a child uses screen time during his or her free time, the intended outcomes are unclear, so the child doesn't know how he or she can gain or lose access. Less desired behaviors can also become associated with this screen time. Examples include aggression or tantrum behaviors when the activity is removed and a decrease in engaging in other activities because they're not as preferable to the child (McKee, L., D.J. Jones, R. Forehand, J. Cuellar. 2013. *Assessment of parenting style, parenting relationships, and other parent variables in child assessment*. [Clinical Psychology DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199796304.013.0035](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199796304.013.0035)).

On the other hand, when screen time is used as a behavior support, strategies, such as rule setting and monitoring, not only assist the child

in understanding when and how he or she can engage in screen time activities, but also support the parents in managing their child's screen time activities (Collier, K.M., S.M. Coyne, E. Rasmussen, A.J. Hawkins, L.M. Padilla-Walker, E. Sage, E. Memmott, K. Madison. 2016. *Does parental mediation of media influence child outcomes?* [Developmental Psychology DOI: 10.1037/dev0000108](https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000108)).

Recognizing when screen time is being used during free time—and not as a behavior support tool—can be beneficial for families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Why?

Because children with ASD spend about three hours a day engaged in screen time activities according to a national report published in 2015, and this amount exceeds

the recommended two hours a day set forth by the Academic Pediatric Association (Montes, G. 2015. *Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder and Screen Time*. [Academic Pediatric Association DOI: 10.1016/j.acap.2015.08.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2015.08.007)).

Other studies found that children with autism use screen time for nonsocial activities, such as watching television or videos on popular platforms or playing video games. And children with autism tend to engage in these forms of screen time in place of social or physical activities (Mazurek, M.O., P.T. Shattuck, B.P. Cooper. 2012. *Prevalence and Correlates of Screen-Based Media Use Among Youths with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. [Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder DOI: 10.1007/s10803-011-1413-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1413-8); Stiller, A., J. Weber, F. Strube, T. Mobile. 2019. *Caregiver Reports of Screen Time Use of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. [Behavioral Sciences DOI: 10.3390/bs9050056](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs9050056)).

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Two steps toward turning free screen time into a behavior support tool

Turning off your child’s free access to screen time may prove challenging. If your child engages in less desired behavior to gain access to screen time, consider using screen time to reinforce positive behaviors. Here are two steps toward creating screen time as a behavior support tool:

Step 1: Consider how much time your child is currently spending on any given screen time activity each day. By establishing this baseline, you can see when, how, and why your child is engaging in screen time behaviors.

Step 2: Use this information to develop a plan for introducing alternative activities and building healthy outcomes. For example, rather than allowing your child unlimited free time on a tablet, build in a task-driven activity that, when accomplished,

earns an increment of screen time. Implement larger tasks so your child can earn larger increments of screen time activity. And don’t forget to include your preferred screen activities as well as other fun activities that hone your child’s physical and social skills.

Sun contributor
Clara Tiedemann, M.Ed., BCBA, is a behavior analyst at the [Brandywine Center for Autism’s Educational and Behavioral Health Services](#).

Clara Tiedemann’s recommended resources

One-Year ABA Parent Training Curriculum

Includes background information for 27 lessons plus worksheets, handouts, and homework assignments for parents in English and Spanish—

<https://www.abaparenttraining.com/abaptstore/aba-parent-training-curriculum>

Autism DelawareSM resource directory

Includes information ranging from ABA (applied behavior analysis) to therapeutic riding & hippotherapy—<https://www.delautism.org/Services/Resource Directory/>

Autism Speaks resource guide

Includes information ranging from advocacy to treatment & therapies—<https://www.autismspeaks.org/resource-guide>

Brandywine Center for Autism’s Educational and Behavioral Health Services

Recommended background resources

The Verbal Behavior Approach: How to Teach Children with Autism and Related Disorders, by Mary Lynch Barbera, Ph.D., R.N., BCBA-D, with Tracy Rasmussen (2007). London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder (rev. ed.), by Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A. (2005). New York: Skylight Press.

Teaching Language to Children with Autism or Other Developmental Disabilities, by Mark L. Sundberg, Ph.D., BCBA-D, and James W. Partington, Ph.D., BCBA-D (1998). Danville, Calif.: Behavior Analysts, Inc.

Indiana Resource Center for Autism, an Indiana University disability-focused library at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community—<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/resources/index.html>. Search for *Teaching Tips for Children and Adults with Autism*, by Temple Grandin, Ph.D. (2002).

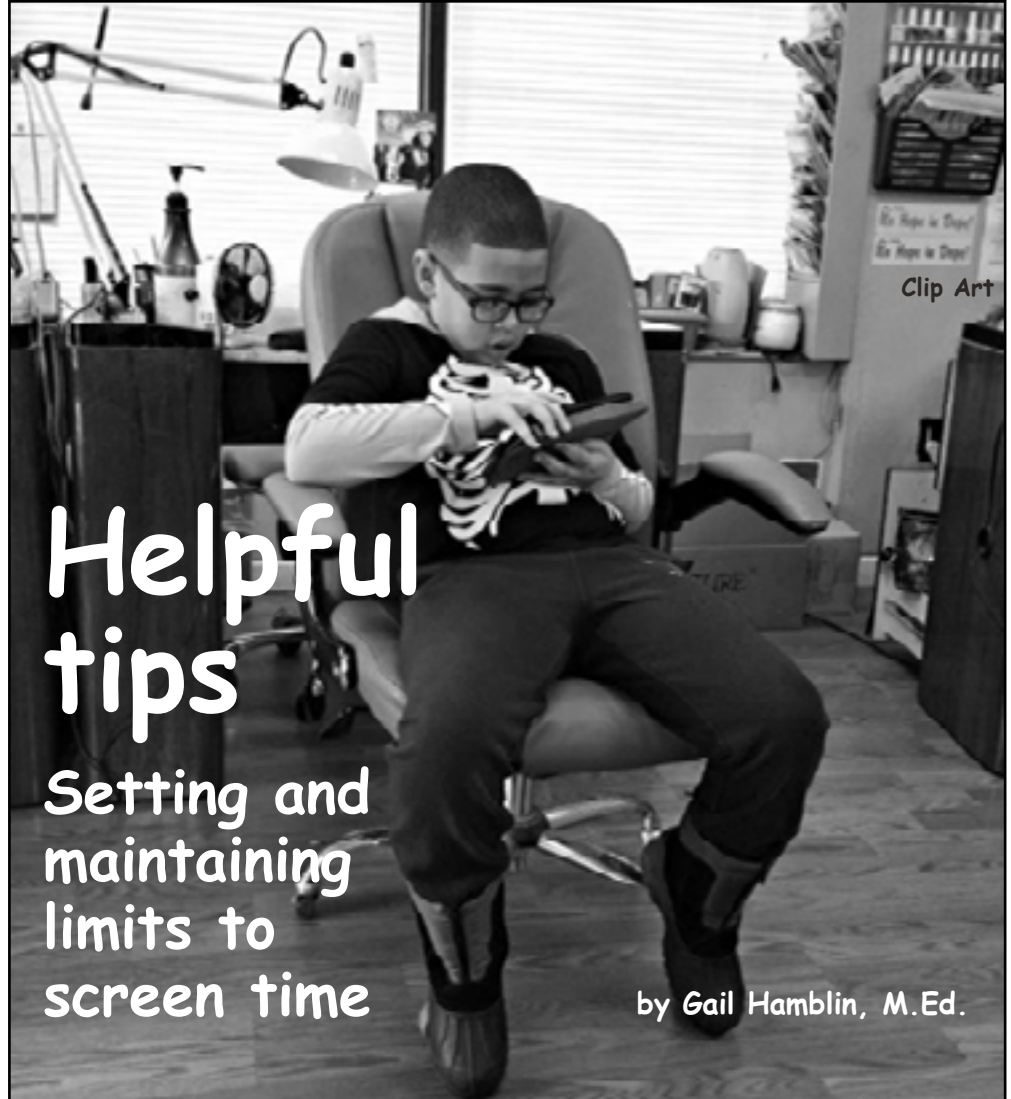
Increased screen time can lead to changes in behavior and sleep patterns in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), but staying safe during COVID-19 has resulted in a significant increase in the use of screen time.

So, how can families limit the screen time used by their children with ASD?

University of Delaware assistant professor Sean Healy, Ph.D., has conducted research on the relationship between levels of physical activity and the amount of daily screen time, specifically for individuals with ASD.

“Screen time is unavoidable during COVID-19,” notes Healy, so he suggests that families consider the following recommendations to help reduce high levels of screen time:

- Increase physical activity or exercise.
 - Add walks: Take short walks outside.
 - Play active video games: Some video games encourage dancing, stretching, and other body movements that decrease sedentary screen time.
 - Do yoga for adults or kids: Moving the body increases awareness in space.
- Add routine-based activity.
 - Use visual schedules: Adding visuals to indicate physical activity can help develop more physically active habits in the daily routine.
 - Use timers: Visual timers, such as sand timers or digital apps, can help provide structure to the daily routine.
 - Break from the screen every hour, and engage in 5–10 minutes of activity: A simple break from the screen can give the individual time to rest and regroup.



Helpful tips

Setting and maintaining limits to screen time

by Gail Hamblin, M.Ed.

- Avoid screen time before bedtime.
 - Eliminate screen time 1–2 hours before bed: When possible, avoid screen time for two hours before bedtime.
 - Remove televisions from the bedroom: Those individuals with TVs in their bedrooms, suggests Healy’s research, have significantly higher levels of daily screen time.

Sun contributor Gail Hamblin, M.Ed., is the senior assistive technology manager for the [Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative \(DATI\)](#) at the [Center for Disabilities Studies](#).

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In addition to Healy's recommendations, assistive technology (AT) devices and services can also help families reduce the effects of increased screen time. Personal preference and many other factors play a role in finding the best AT device or service for an individual. The following AT resources are suggestions to explore:

Visual schedules

Choiceworks app or **Choiceworks Calendar**—<http://beevisual.com/>

First-then visual schedule—<https://www.goodkarmaapplications.com/first-then-visual-schedule.html>

Trello—<https://trello.com/>

myHomework app—<https://myhomeworkapp.com/>

24Me—<https://www.twentyfour.me/>

Microsoft To Do—<https://todo.microsoft.com/tasks/>

iStudiezPro—<https://istudentpro.com/>

Timers and organization

Time Timer—<https://www.timetimer.com/>

Time Tracker—<https://www.learningresources.com/time-trackerr-2-0-classroom-timer>

Time Tracker Mini—<https://www.learningresources.com/time-trackerr-mini>

Visual Timer—<http://fehnerssoftware.com/>

Toodledo—<https://www.toodledo.com/>

CanPlan—<https://www.canassist.ca/EN/main/programs/technologies-and-devices/at-home/canplan.html>

Google Keep—<https://www.google.com/keep/>

MotivAider—<https://habitchange.com/>

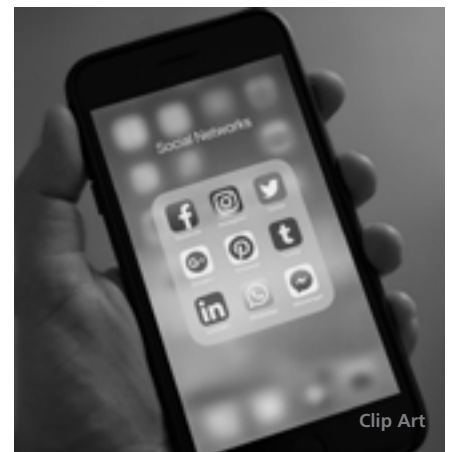
Revibe—<https://revibetech.com/>

Screen time-monitoring apps

TimeFlip—<https://timeflip.io/>

Bark—<https://www.bark.us/>

Circle—<https://meetcircle.com/>



Admittedly, during the current COVID-19 shutdown, the total elimination of screen time is not a likely option for most families affected by ASD; however, some of the above-mentioned ideas and assistive technology options might positively impact the management of your child's screen time.

For more information, visit <https://www.cds.udel.edu/at/dati>.

More resources

Everything Parents Need to Know About Screen Time—<https://meetcircle.com/screen-time>

My Kids Are on Screens All Day: Is That Okay?—<https://www.additudemag.com/screen-time-limits-during-pandemic>

Keep the kids from jumping over your firewall, by Andy O'Donnell—<https://www.lifewire.com/ways-to-kid-proof-your-internet-parental-controls-2487714>

A Parent's Guide to Setting Screen Time Limits, by Lauren Miles Brunelli—<https://www.verywellfamily.com/parents-guide-setting-screen-time-limits-4052472>

Managing Your Child's Screen Time (Instead of screen time managing your household), by Mina Yadegar—<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/belief-and-the-brain/201912/managing-your-child-s-screen-time>

The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Your Kids Safe Online With Parental Controls—<https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/online-safety-parental-controls>



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The ironic connection between social media and loneliness

// It is a little ironic that reducing your use of social media actually makes you feel less lonely,” notes University of Pennsylvania researcher Melissa G. Hunt, Ph.D., in *Penn Today* (<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/social-media-use-increases-depression-and-loneliness>).

As the associate director of clinical training in UPenn’s psychology department, Hunt directed her research team in looking at the use of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, and discovered that more usage increases an individual’s sense of loneliness. In turn, less usage decreases not only loneliness but also depression. The team’s findings were published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* (<https://guilfordjournals.com/doi/pdf/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751>).

“Some of the existing literature on social media suggests there’s an enormous amount of social comparison

that happens,” continues Hunt in the article. “When you look at other people’s lives, particularly on Instagram, it’s easy to conclude that everyone else’s life is cooler or better than yours” (<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/social-media-use-increases-depression-and-loneliness>).

To avoid this distortion, Hunt suggests cutting back on social media that gives rise to social comparison. “When you’re not

busy getting sucked into clickbait social media,” adds Hunt in the article, “you’re actually spending more time on things that are more likely to make you feel better about your life” (<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/social-media-use-increases-depression-and-loneliness>).

To read the complete findings published by Hunt and her team, visit <https://guilfordjournals.com/doi/pdf/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751>.

More resources

Healthy Lifestyle, articles by the Mayo Clinic staff—
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/>:

- **For children, click on Health Information, Healthy Lifestyle, Children’s health.**
- **For tweens and teens, click on Health Information, Healthy Lifestyle, Tween and teen health.**

***Social Media and Mental Health*, on the HelpGuide website—**<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm>.

// Many adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum want to be in romantic relationships," notes the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts website. "They want to date, experience intimacy, and some may want to get married" (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/parent-buzz-newsletter/parent-buzz-e-newsletters/sexuality-education-youth-autism-spectrum>).

Unfortunately, the internet can show children how to relate inappropriately to each other. "Each year, about 40 percent of teens and preteens visit sexually explicit sites either deliberately or accidentally," writes American Psychological Association (APA) staff member Tori DeAngelis in her article entitled *Web pornography's effect on children*.

"That said," continues DeAngelis's article, "a few studies are beginning to show relationships between Web porn use among young people and sexual attitudes. For example, those who frequent porn sites more often are more likely to view sex as a purely physical function and to view women as sex objects" (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov07/webporn>).

Kids turn to free pornography on the internet because many states have no sex education in the schools, states social scientist Emily Rothman, Sc.D., in her TEDMED Talk entitled *How porn changes the way teens think about sex*. A professor, lab director, and principal investigator at Boston University School of Public Health, Rothman is also a leading public health scholar on sexually explicit media and its impact on adolescent dating relationships.

The free pornography that kids see is "completely bad for sex education," adds Rothman. As a result, one in five teens experiences dating violence in high school (<https://www.tedmed.com/talks/show?id=730488>).

Rothman's solution is an after-school program that starts by talking about pornography to get the students' attention and then turns toward sex education based on science plus education on healthy relationships. To view



her entire TEDMED Talk, visit <https://www.tedmed.com/talks/show?id=730488>.

What can parents with children on the autism spectrum do?

Adapt an education in sexuality and healthy relationships to meet the individual needs of your child, suggests the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, and use the same tools you relied on to teach life skills to your child. To guide you, follow the tips below:

- // Be proactive. It is important to teach your preteen about puberty before their body starts developing so they are not caught unaware and frightened by the changes that occur.
- // Teach about bodies, reproduction, reproductive anatomy and risk reduction.

- // Teach children how to close and lock the bathroom door, use public restrooms and clean and shower themselves.
- // Teach your child about appropriate and inappropriate touching, as well as behaviors that can be done in public and those that are only done in private.
- // Sexuality talks with adolescents who have problems with eye contact may work better if you talk while you are walking side-by-side, preparing a meal together or driving in the car.
- // Enlist the support of a sympathetic young person who is the same age as your child and can help them with language, behavior, and fashion styles and what to do and not do in their peer environment.
- // Do 'What if?' scenarios with your child. For example, "What if your period starts at school?" or "What if you get an erection in front of the class?" Together, work out possible solutions to these scenarios.
- // Be aware of any infatuation your child may have with another person. Help them to understand that crushes are normal and okay, just as long as they are not pursued to the point of harassment of another person. Teach your child that healthy, mature relationships are reciprocal and respectful" (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/parent-buzz-newsletter/parent-buzz-e-newsletters/sexuality-education-youth-autism-spectrum>).

Educators with cross training in sex education and special ed are available at Planned Parenthood of Delaware—<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-delaware>. Click on Education & Training, Sexuality and Disability Programs.

INSIDE AutismSM Delaware

Autism Delaware's adult services staff secures new community partnership

In the days before COVID-19, Autism Delaware's adult services staff began working toward a new partnership with Grain on the Rocks. The owners of the Lewes, Del.-based grain craft bar and kitchen—the O'Donoghues and the Mikles families—pride themselves on taking an active role in the community by helping organizations raise awareness and funds. In August, Autism Delaware staff sealed the deal, and a work trial was set up for three participants in the autism agency's adult program. Known as Productive Opportunities for Work and RecreationSM (or POW&RSM, for short), the program provides a range of support to adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including advocacy and hands-on backing in the workplace. Thanks to POW&R's dedicated staff, the trial proved successful, and all three participants were offered a position with Grain on the Rocks. One POW&R participant works primarily in the kitchen, preparing, portioning, and weighing appetizers and doing dishes as needed throughout his shift. The other two participants are employed in front-of-house (FOH) positions and are responsible for watering plants, sweeping, cleaning and sanitizing tables and chairs, rolling silverware, folding napkins, and cleaning restrooms as well as any additional tasks that may need to be done.

"Right now, we are at Grain five days a week," says Theresa Klinger, Autism Delaware's employment services manager for the POW&R program in Sussex County. "Our participants' work hours vary within the 9:00 A.M.–1:30 P.M. range.

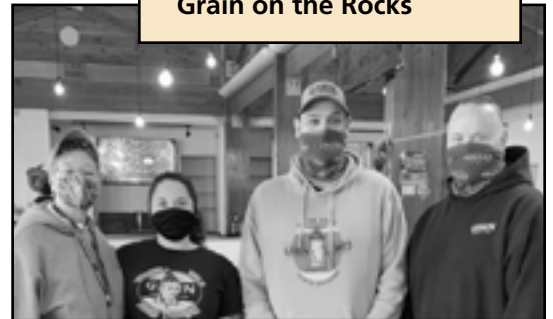
"Grain on the Rocks is a great environment that offers our participants the opportunity to shine and show off their hard-earned

skills," adds Theresa. "The team at Grain is amazing. They have welcomed our program and our participants without hesitation."

"This is truly an example of a great partnership with a group of people who recognizes the abilities of our participants and challenges them to be the best they can be," notes POW&R director Katina Demetriou. "We are grateful for the partnership we have established with Grain. And many thanks to Autism Delaware employment support professional Brett Gershman for making this wonderful connection happen!"



POW&R participant Reed Bellinger at work at Grain on the Rocks



Grain on the Rocks front-of-house (FOH) manager Lori McCready, chef Jess Wallen, general manager Jason Meisner, and chef Bill Wallen

POW&R direct support professional Linda Dailey, POW&R employment support professional Jess Hart, Grain on the Rocks chef Jess Wallen, Grain FOH manager Lori McCready, POW&R participant Reed Bellinger, Grain general manager Jason Meisner, and POW&R employment services manager Theresa Klinger



Parent to ParentSM is back!

Autism Delaware is now offering Parent to Parent's five-week workshop series as a virtual training:

Week 1: Understanding ASD

Week 2: Communication

Week 3: Visual supports

Week 4: Visual supports
in practice

Week 5: Positive advocacy

To register:

AutismDelaware.org/Services/Support & Activities

For answers to your questions, contact Autism Delaware policy and family services director Annalisa Ekbladh, CPSP, CFPS, at Annalisa.Ekbladh@delautism.org.

Training is free to parents and caregivers through a generous grant from The Chichester duPont Foundation.

Autism Delaware family support provider (FSP) Jenn Aaron is one of many parent-coaches in the Parent to Parent program.



Parent-coaches share their experience and education so that families can gain a deeper understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and learn how to create a supportive environment in which their children can be successful.

Please be generous with your support

Because of COVID-closed schools, businesses, and support services, Autism Delaware witnessed a dramatic increase in statewide requests for support and services—and staff worked longer and harder to reconfigure our much-needed programs and major fundraisers in virtual formats while experiencing a major loss of revenue.

That's why we are asking our community: *Please help us reach our fundraising goal for the Blue Jean Ball presented by Hertrich Toyota of Milford.*

This final fundraising stretch for 2020 may be virtual, but the benefits for our community are as real as ever.

If you enjoyed 2019's Blue Jean Ball, please duplicate that year's support.

Not sure what your contribution was?

Contact Autism Delaware's fund development and engagement event manager Deanna Principe at Deanna.Principe@delautism.org.



Where does the money go?

If you donate to or fund-raise for Autism Delaware, the money supports the range of programs and services needed by individuals with autism across their lifespans.

Autism Delaware offers family support services as well as vocational services, advocacy, and awareness, which includes the online resource guide, quarterly newsletter, group updates, and social media.

For details, visit AutismDelaware.org.



Nearly one-third of U.S. adults report having used a dating website or app. Internet dating is so common today that the question is no longer “Should I or shouldn’t I?” but “How do I date safely online?”

For people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), online dating offers an opportunity to meet others and practice social skills without the social challenges of a face-to-face meeting. Online dating is a great way to meet people remotely and, if both people agree, work up to an in-person meeting.

Here are some tips for dating safely online:

- Be careful about what you share on the internet. It can be hard to remove comments and pictures or control who sees them.
- Do not give out personal information, such as addresses, financial information, and phone numbers.
- Make sure your passwords are private and secure so that only you can use your account.

- If something online feels unsafe, it probably is! Tell someone you trust.
- If you decide to meet up in person with someone you met on the internet, follow these tips:
 - Meet in a public place, like a restaurant, coffee shop, or busy public park.
 - Be sure to discuss—and agree with your date—on what COVID-19 precautions you will take, such as wearing masks and social distancing.
 - Tell a trusted person where you are going and when you will be home.
 - Ask your trusted person to check on you by calling or texting you at least once during the date.
 - Make a plan for how you will leave the date early if you want to. For example, what will you tell your date, and how will you get home?

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Isabella Weber’s recommended resources

- Individualized and group classes on healthy relationships at Planned Parenthood of Delaware. Virtual education also available. For more information, call (302) 224-8099.
- Planned Parenthood’s support group for LGBTQ+ people with IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities)—<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-delaware/local-training-education/lgbtq-support-group-for-people-with-idd>.
- *Friendship and Love for the Autistic Community*, app on Hiki website—<https://www.hikiapp.com>.
- *Boyfriends & Girlfriends: A Guide to Dating for People with Disabilities*, by Terri Couwenhoven (2015)—Book available on Amazon website at <https://www.amazon.com/Boyfriends-Girlfriends-Dating-People-Disabilities/dp/1606132555>.