

CASD CHAT E-Newsletter

Celebrating Neurodiversity

Dear CASD families and friends,

April is Autism Acceptance month, and this month's CASD Chat (by Angela Bollich, PhD and Serene Habayeb, PhD, with the support of research assistant Jessica Smith, BS) focuses on celebrating neurodiversity. In the spirit of acceptance, we want to acknowledge that some individuals prefer identity-first language and other individuals prefer person-first language. We want to recognize the diverse preferences of the community and use both person-first and identity-first language in the CHAT. Acceptance means welcoming and as we usually do, the CHAT ends with a list of programs that are welcoming to all. These programs work to promote a supportive atmosphere for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and/or help caregivers and treatment providers learn strategies to best support individuals with ASD.

In the 2021 Autism Acceptance Month, we wanted to highlight a few organizations that celebrate neurodiversity and advocate for autistic rights every day. Check out their websites for a variety of resources related to neurodiversity and autism acceptance.

- **Autistic Self Advocacy Network**'s website provides a brief review of the origin of Autism Acceptance month as compared to Autism Awareness. Autism Acceptance Month was created by and for the autistic community to change the conversation around autism to follow their motto "Nothing about us, without us!" ASAN highlights strides in ensuring a welcoming community for individuals with autism but points out that "*acceptance is an action*" and we all have a role to play, starting with listening to and looking to individuals with autism for information to guide decision-making. The website provides a variety of resources including self-advocacy tool-kits on a variety of topics. ASAN notes that some groups of individuals may find it more difficult to be recognized and diagnosed with autism, including females and people of color, which brings us to another important resource: Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network.
- **Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network** has "a mission to provide community, support and resources for Autistic women, girls, transfeminine and transmasculine nonbinary and genderqueer people, trans people of all genders, Two Spirit people, and all others of marginalized genders." As the mission statement implies, AWN Network provides information and resources for various groups, with options to download an AWN Network Welcome Packet

and Parent Welcome packet through the Resource Library Link.

- **The Ed Wiley Autism Acceptance Lending Library** was developed “to promote understanding, acceptance and inclusion for Autistic people. [Their] organization is dedicated to the ideas of neurodiversity, social justice, Autistic/Disabled Pride and disability rights.” In addition to their lending library for the communities of Stanwood and Camano Island, WA, they also provide links for helpful handouts, featuring the *Neurodivergent Narwhal!* which expands their outreach. Be sure to check out the Blog where the author provides great insight into how to support autistic individuals.

Finally, we thought this would be a great time to launch a new feature of the CASD CHAT devoted to highlighting the lives of autistic individuals who reflect the diversity of the spectrum. We will title the feature “Profiles Celebrating Neurodiversity” and highlight the life of a public persona with autism.

Profiles Celebrating Neurodiversity

Owen Suskind is a young adult with autism. Owen lost his ability to communicate as a preschooler. His parents recognized that Owen’s interest in Disney movies reflected a way for him to learn about the world (including relationships and emotions) and offered a way for them to communicate with him. His father tells the story of how Owen and his family learned to communicate through Owen’s interest in Disney movies in the book, and subsequent documentary, “Life Animated.” Owen is a remarkable young man for many reasons, but we wanted to highlight his strength in addressing a fear – the fear of growing up which is explored in the “Life, Animated” documentary filmed when he was 23 years old. In a “Life Animated” interview, Owen explains, “I’ve been scared my whole life of growing up. Peter Pan doesn’t want to grow up because when you grow up, you lose all your magical childhood times.” (<https://youtube.be/9mf0kxbxg6M>). Owen faced his fear in a very public manner in the documentary. Owen and his parents shared that the decision to go public about Owen’s life with the book and later with the documentary came from Owen. He explained to his mother, “I wish people understood who I was. They don’t understand who I am. They don’t understand people like me...I want people to know people like me. I am more than I appear.”

2021 Calendar of Events

3-day Parent Café Facilitator Training Workshop

Where: Virtual through Department of Behavioral Health's Healthy Futures Program

When: April 21, 22, 23 from 10am to 5pm

The Department of Behavioral Health’s Healthy Futures program is hosting a 3-day Parent Café facilitator training workshop on April 21st, 22nd, and 23rd. The workshop will run from 10:00am to 5:00pm each day. The participants will be a mix of professionals from different programs that work with children and families, a majority of whom have children with ASD. Please contact Stephen O’Connor at Stephen.oconnor2@dc.gov if you are interested. Space is somewhat limited.

Pathfinders for Autism

Where: Variety of locations through Pathfinders for Autism

When: The month of April

Pathfinders for Autism offers a list of programs available through the month on their calendar. These events are for a range of audiences and topics, such as training/workshops for medical professionals, fundraising events, fun/recreational events, and more.

Summer Safety Lessons

Where: Virtually through SNUGS (Special Needs Undergraduate Swim Lessons)

When: Register now for first session on Sunday, April 18

SNUGS is a nonprofit organization that works to provide free swim lessons to children (ages 3–18) with disabilities by engaging university students with their greater communities. This semester, the Georgetown University SNUGS will start community building with virtual programming. They already have a team of wonderful and passionate students who are so excited to meet children and families over Zoom, and to continue building on these relationships when we're hopefully in the pool come fall 2021. They are in the process of connecting with families that may be interested in programming; interested families can ask for more information by emailing georgetown@snugsnational.org. Registration will be on a first-come, first-serve basis, and our first virtual event is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, April 18.

Free Parent Support Group

Where: Virtual

When: every Monday at 1 PM EST

Dr. Dan Shapiro, friend of CASD, will be offering a free parent support group, every Monday at 1 PM EST. To register, [click here](#).

Padres bilingües: ¡Les invitamos a participar!

Drs. Lauren Kenworthy and Laura Anthony are recruiting for a project to help parents during the time of distance learning, as imposed by COVID-19. We are actively recruiting Spanish-English bilingual parents in Maryland, Virginia, and DC! [Please see the flyer for full details and contact information.](#)

Community Resources & Events

New Study at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Given how important the driving issue is to many teens, CASD wanted to alert families about a web-based (no in-person appointments) longitudinal study Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute designed to learn more about the experience of teens and young adults on the autism spectrum and their parents as they make decisions about transportation, including driving. More information is provided for interested families in the flyer. If you are interested in participating in the study or want to learn more, please contact our study team at autismetastudy@email.chop.edu or 267-586-5199.

Advocacy Resources

[Autistic Self Advocacy Network-Navigating College: A Handbook on Self Advocacy](#)

Resources on Racism/Supporting Black People

[Spectrum Support's Social Stories on Racism](#)
[ASAN's What is Police Violence?: A Plain Language Booklet](#)

[@TheMorganCruise Worksheets for Black Children](#)

COVID-19 Safety Resources

[Behavioral Directions LLC's Safety Teaching Protocol](#)

COVID-19 National and Local Government Resources

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
[World Health Organization](#)
[DC Department of Health](#)

Visit Children's National Hospital's
COVID-19 Resources

Maryland Department of Health

Virginia Department of Health

U.S Department of Education's Individuals with
Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C Dispute
Resolution Procedures

U.S Department of Education's Individuals with
Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B Dispute
Resolution Procedures