



# Family Engagement Newsletter

## April is Autism Awareness (Acceptance) Month

By Wendy Overturf

The first National Autism Awareness Month was declared by the Autism Society in April 1970. The aim of this month is to educate the public about autism. This year, the Autism Society, along with leading disability organizations across the country, is announcing that it is formally shifting references of "Autism Awareness Month" to "[Autism Acceptance Month](#)."

The shift in the use of terminology aims to foster acceptance to ignite change through improved support and opportunities in education, employment, accessible housing, affordable health care, and comprehensive long-term services.



### Prevalence of Autism

In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued its [autism prevalence report](#). The report concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 54 – [twice as great](#) as the 2004 rate of 1 in 125. At the present time, there is not a uniform agreement on [what causes autism](#).

### Common Characteristics of Autism

Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" (ASD) which affects people differently and to varying degrees. While no two people with autism will have the same set of symptoms, there are common characteristics found in those with this complex disability. Briefly, these characteristics include:

- Speaks later than typical or not at all (nonverbal)
- Repetition in language or movement such as repeating the same word or sounds, hand flapping, repeated movement
- Atypical nonverbal communication including avoiding eye contact, giving few facial expressions, or having a monotone voice
- Prefers solitary or parallel play rather than engaging in associative or cooperative play with other children
- Extremely distressed by changes including new foods or changes in schedule
- Preference for predictable, structured play over spontaneous or make-believe play
- Strong, persistent interest on a specific topic, a part of a toy, or an item

The symptoms of autism vary so widely. Therefore, these symptoms do not mean the child has autism. However, if a child is showing these behaviors, parents are encouraged to have him/her evaluated. If a child is younger than three, the first step might be to consult with the child's pediatrician. Another great resource for parents is the [Wisconsin Birth to 3 Program](#). The Wisconsin Birth to 3 Program is an early intervention special education program that supports the growth and development of children under the age of 3 who have delays or disabilities such as autism. "Early intervention" is the term used to describe services and supports available to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

Research shows that [early diagnosis](#) of autism can lead to improved quality of life. If a child is over the age of three, in addition to consulting with the child's pediatrician, parents should consider requesting an evaluation for special education through the child's school district. A request for evaluation is known as a referral. When the school district receives a referral, the district will appoint an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to determine if the child has a disability, and if the child needs special education services. Referrals must be in writing and include the reason why the person believes the child is a child with a disability. A referral may be made by contacting the Director of Special Education of your local school district. It should be noted that a diagnosis of autism from a physician or clinical specialist does not automatically qualify the child as having an impairment within the school setting as the school district has different [criteria](#) for the identification of autism.

If parents do learn that their child has a disability, the Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR) has a [great article](#) that may also offer ideas for support and assistance.

## Statewide Events

### [Promoting Early Childhood \(PEC\) Annual Conference](#)

PEC 2021 will celebrate the lessons learned and adaptations created and implemented to support our youngest learners and their families. Virtual Event.  
**Date:** April 14-15, 2021

### [Inform, Influence and Innovate Together: Virtual Autism Conference](#)

Virtual conference featuring dozens of livestream breakout sessions, virtual exhibit booths, an autism resources bookstore, and Temple Grandin as a keynote speaker.  
**Date:** April 21-24, 2021

### [Circles of Life](#)

Wisconsin's annual conference for families who have children with disabilities and the providers and other professionals who support them. Event to be held be held "virtually" via Zoom video-conferencing.  
**Date:** May 6-7, 2021

### [Wisconsin Summer Inclusion Institute](#)

The 28th Annual Statewide Institute on Best Practices in Inclusive Education 2021 Pre-Conference and Inclusion Institute will be held virtually. This Institute will offer opportunities to learn from other professionals, consultants, and presenters and collaborate with your school teams, administration, co-teachers, paraprofessionals, and families. Institute Staff and DPI Consultants will be available to assist you and your colleagues in planning and problem-solving.  
**Date:** July 26-28, 2021

### [Endless Possibilities 2021:](#)

#### [Successful Transitions](#)

#### **Save the Date: August 6, 2021**

This conference, coordinated by WI FACETS, and other family support/disability organizations allows parents and professionals affordable access to gain knowledge from experts to enhance their ability to better support students with disabilities.

**Keynote:** Creating a Roadmap for Inclusive IEPs and Transition

**Keynote speaker:** [Dan Habib](#), is an award-winning filmmaker at the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability.

### [Training for Home Language Interpreters: Supporting Families Through the Special Education Process](#)

[CESA 7—April 15, 2021](#)

[CESA 9—April 20, 2021](#)



## At Home Learning Strategies



Have fun reading and singing together with [Rain on the Green Grass](#) nursery rhyme. Also check out the Reading Is Fundamental [Read-Aloud: Rain, Rain, Go Away](#). The song can be accessed [here](#).

### [Early Literacy Activity Calendar - April](#)

Help your child get ready to read! Each day features a fun activity that will help your child build pre-reading skills. Activities are color coded by skill.

### [Children's Activity Calendar - April](#)

Watch imaginations flourish with an April calendar full of ideas for engaging children's activities, craft projects, book suggestions, and more. April 10th is [Encourage a Young Writer Day](#): Inspire stories, journal entries, and more with [300 Creative Writing Prompts](#) for Kids from ThinkWritten.



**Autism Awareness (Acceptance) Month:** Help kids understand each other or themselves with these [Children's Books Featuring Characters with Autism](#) from Reading Rockets

### [The Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book](#)

Listen and read this book online. This is a fun read for parents and elementary age children. The illustrations help parents easily explain the concept of fractions. At the end of the book you can share the chocolate bar together!

### [Family Math Card Games](#)

Enjoy playing card games with your child. Checkout how to adapt these common card games to have a math twist: [Go Fish](#), [Rummy](#), and [Concentration](#).

## Virtual Road Trips



### [Visit National Parks Virtually](#)

Road trips might not be possible right now, but children can still discover national parks. Many parks are currently offering virtual visits. Get a bird's eye view of the Grand Canyon. Discover the fjords of Alaska. Or visit the active volcanoes of Hawaii. Nearly all 62 national parks of the United States offer some sort of [virtual tour](#).

### [Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History](#)

Click the link to [take a virtual field trip](#) through the halls to see this beautiful museum and some of its massive exhibits.

### [Empire State Building](#)

Climb this enormous New York skyscraper -- virtually. The [virtual tour](#) of the Empire State Building takes you right to the top for a spectacular panoramic view.



### [Cranberry Farming](#)

Did you know that Wisconsin produces more than half of the world's cranberries? Learn about how [Wisconsin farmers grow, harvest, and sell cranberries](#). Try making this delicious [Cranberry Pecan Pie](#) with your children. Or checkout other [kid-friendly cranberry recipes](#). Having your children help with following recipes lets them see the importance of reading and math (measuring) in everyday life.

### [Alphabet Hunt](#)



Now that the weather is hopefully getting warmer, it is time to go outside for some fun. You can mix fun learning with a sunny day. Using a roll of paper towels, roll out one length of 13 towels. Write the first half of the alphabet on it. Then write the second half of the alphabet on a second sheet of 13 towels and put it under the first. Secure each end of the paper with a bucket or rock. Now go on an Alphabet Hunt right in your backyard for things that begin with each letter.

For example, you could say to your child, "Look what I have here—a 'leaf'. What sound do you hear at the beginning of 'leaf'? Lllleaf? Right—/l/. What letter makes that sound? You got it! 'L'! So I'm going to put this leaf under 'L'. Do you think we can find something in our backyard for every letter?"

It might be difficult to find an object for every letter of the alphabet in your yard, but your children will have fun trying. Thinking of different ways to describe items may also expand their vocabulary.



**Please complete the Family Engagement Newsletter Survey on page 4.**

# Online Resources



## [Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

This site has an extensive list of links to information relating to autism.

## [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

Website includes eligibility criteria for autism, information about trainings, and links to archived webinars. Links to additional resources are also included on the site.

## [Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin](#)

The Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin exists to provide a community for individuals affected by autism, their families, and professionals who serve them. Their goal is to increase the quality of life for those affected by autism and respond to the emerging needs of the autism community.

## [Autism Society of Southeastern WI \(ASSEW\)](#)

ASSEW works to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocate for appropriate services for individuals across the life span, and provide the latest information regarding treatment, education, research, and advocacy.

## [Autism Navigator](#)

This website features a unique collection of web-based tools and courses that integrate the most current research in autism with an interactive web platform and lots of video footage showing effective evidence-based practices. It is intended for professionals as well as families.

## [Autism Source](#)

The Autism Source™ Resource Database, a product of the Autism Society of America, is the most comprehensive database of its kind. Autism Source employs a nationwide network of affiliates and collaborates with other autism organizations and professionals throughout the U.S. to ensure that the database continues to grow and is kept current with reliable resources for information related to autism.

## [Autism Speaks](#)

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. They do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.

## [My Autism Team](#)

MyAutismTeam is the social network for parents of kids with autism. The site provides emotional support from other parents of children with autism. Parents may gain practical advice and insights on managing treatment or therapies for autism. Parents can also as share daily ups and downs in a judgment-free place.

## [IRIS Center Modules](#)

The first module provides information on the early signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as an overview of the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational determination of ASD. The second module highlights strategies that have been shown to be effective in teaching appropriate behaviors and skills and decreasing inappropriate behaviors with children and youth with ASD. [IRIS Center](#) is a national center dedicated to improving education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities birth through age twenty-one, through the use of effective evidence-based practices and interventions.



**Dr. Temple Grandin** is well known to many for her trail-blazing work as a spokesperson for people with autism. Dr. Grandin has been with Colorado State University

(CSU) for over 25 years. Her life's work has been to understand her own autistic mind, and to share that knowledge with the world, aiding in the treatment of individuals with the condition. Her understanding of the human mind has aided her in her work with animal behavior, and she is one of the most respected experts in both autism and animal behavior in the world.

### **Temple Grandin Quotes...**

*"I can remember the frustration of not being able to talk. I knew what I wanted to say, but I could not get the words out, so I would just scream."*

**"The most important thing people did for me was to expose me to new things."**

*"You need to stretch kids with autism slightly outside their comfort zones, but do this without any surprises, so they know what to expect."*

**"I cannot emphasize enough the importance of a good teacher."**

*"I tend to be much more in the present and my emotions are simpler. I can be happy, I can be sad, I can be depressed, but there's a complexity I don't have. I don't brood the same way. Fear is my main emotion."*

**"I'm a visual thinker, not a language-based thinker. My mind works like Google for images. You put in a key word; it brings up pictures."**

*"In a noisy place I can't understand speech, because I cannot screen out the background noise."*

**"I am different, not less."**

*"It is never too late to expand the mind of a person on the autism spectrum."*

**When I was younger I was looking for the magic meaning of life. It's very simple now. Making the lives of others better, doing something of lasting value. That's the meaning of life, it's that simple.**

~ Temple Grandin

## WI FACETS



Event title links to information & registration for WI FACETS free workshops & webinars:

### [WSEMS: Friendly and Productive IEPs](#)

**Presenter:** Nissan Bar-Lev, CESA 7 and Courtney Salzer, WI FACETS

**Date:** April 5, 2021. 12–1 pm

### [IEP 8: Writing the IEP \(Part 4\) Placement](#)

**Presenter:** Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

**Date:** April 6, 2021, 12pm-12:30pm

### [Co-Teaching and Specially Designed Instruction](#)

**Presenters:** Ceil Carse, Carroll University, Sharon Madsen, DPI, Tracy Elger, CESA 2

**Date:** April 7, 2021, 12-1 pm

### [Compassion Resilience – Self Care Snapshot Series: Our Locus of Control](#)

**Presenter:** Emily Jonesberg, Rogers InHealth

**Date:** April 12, 2021, 12-12:30 pm

### [Self-Advocacy Series: How DVR & Schools Work Together for Youth](#)

**Presenter:** Jolene Cooley, DVR

**Date:** April 13, 2021, 6pm-7 pm

### [Graduation for All: Tools to Improve the Graduation Rate for Students with Disabilities](#)

**Presenter:** Jen Hilgendorf, CESA 1

**Date:** April 14, 2021, 12-1 pm

### [Reevaluation and Independent Educational Evaluations \(Training in Spanish\)](#)

**Date:** April 15, 2021, 12-1 pm

To register: [nramos@wifacets.org](mailto:nramos@wifacets.org)

### [IEP 9: IEP Revisions & Extended School Year](#)

**Presenter:** Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

**Date:** April 20, 2021, 12pm-12:30pm

### [Career & Technical Education: What Families of Children with Disabilities Need to Know](#)

**Presenters:** Brian Kenney and Brenda Swoboda, Coordinators TIG

**Date:** April 21, 2021, 12-1 pm

### [IEP Checklist](#)

**Presenter:** Matthew Zellmer, WI FACETS

**Date:** April 27, 2021, 12-1 pm

### [Additional Services, Compensatory Services, Extended School Year, and Monitoring Progress of IEP Goals](#)

**Presenter:** Daniel Parker, DPI

**Date:** April 28, 2021, 12-1 pm

### [Self-Advocacy Series: Understanding Guardianship](#)

**Presenter:** Vicki Davis Davila, Attorney

**Date:** April 28, 2021, 6pm-7pm



## Education and Mental Health During COVID-19 How are Children and Caregivers Doing, Really?

Over the last year, the coronavirus dramatically transformed every aspect of family life as stay-at-home orders went into effect nationwide. Parents and caregivers have adapted to working virtually with their children at home, some lost their jobs, or in the case of essential workers, endured unprecedented stress as they continued to work for and with the public during this pandemic.

Children of all ages, have been forced to stay home missing milestone events, connections with extended family and peers and support from educators and other professionals. Many are spending hours on a computer or other device each day in virtual school programs.

The demands on parents' time have drastically increased. Those who are working are trying to balance job responsibilities, and those who are not, are trying to make ends meet all while managing their children's education. The media has been flooded with headlines about plummeting mental health – for adults, youth and children. The National Federation of Families commonly heard that this continued uncertainty is causing stress, fear, anxiety and even rising suicide rates and child endangerment. So, they went to the source and asked families directly, "How are you doing, really?"

The full [infographic](#) depicts the state of the nation as it relates to COVID-19 from the family perspective. While the data is compelling, the anecdotal responses shared in the "Family Voices" section highlights the circumstances of our nation's families.

Source: (Taken from [National Federation of Families](#))



## Research to Read

### Distance Education Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Complex Needs During COVID-19 and School Closures

Stenhoff DM, Pennington RC, Tapp MC. Distance Education Support for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder and Complex Needs During COVID-19 and School Closures. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*. 2020;39(4):211-219. doi:10.1177/8756870520959658

### [Article Link](#)

Schools serve an essential function for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and complex needs. However, school-based instruction may be interrupted due to pandemics, natural disasters, and school shootings, and as a result, schools are forced to stop traditional services and begin teaching students in their homes. Fortunately, distance education strategies are available to mitigate brick and mortar interruptions. When rural schools close, they face unique challenges, such as proximity to students, and technology limitations. In this article, strategies are given for teachers to develop instructional materials, communication supports, and behavioral supports. The article also describes how caregivers might provide support and how to teach caregivers the skills necessary for effective support implementation



*Is this newsletter a useful resource for you in your home and/or in your work?*

*Please complete this brief [survey](#) and let us know.*

*Thank you!*

This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org).*



## **Contributions to the Newsletter**

**Upcoming newsletter topics: May: Mental Health**

**June: ADD/ADHD**

**July: Speech & Language**

*To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org). If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.*

*Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.*

***The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter  
can be found online at:***

***<https://servingongroups.org/resources>***



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