

# The Autism Connection

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**AUTISM SOCIETY**  
Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism  
Wisconsin

## In this Issue:

Personal Perspective: Improvement Comes Outside the Comfort	2
Upcoming Events	3
30th Annual Conference Information	4-6
Change for Autism	7
Annual Autism Essay Contest	8-9
Autism Treatment & Ableism	10-11



## Message from the President

*Happy New Year!*

With 2018 behind us, we look to the coming year and our opportunities to share our mission of improving the lives of all affected by autism. Thank you for all you have done, and will do, to further our mission.

The coming year brings some notable events and activities that we hope you will enjoy. For example, April 11-13 brings the 30th Annual Conference at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. Please check out pages 4, 5 and 6 for more information about pre-conferences and keynotes. I hope you will agree that all our sessions will be very interesting and enjoyable. There is also more conference information on our website at [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org).

While you're visiting the website, check out the Essay Contest information. I am looking forward to hosting the Talent Show at the conference where we will be showcasing talented individuals and honoring the first place winners of the Essay Contest.

Change for Autism is scheduled for April too! It's a campaign through the Autism Society of Wisconsin designed to encourage stakeholders to create meaningful change for people with autism in our schools and communities. Whether you are part of a group, business, school and/or a passionate individual hoping to ignite change, there is a place for you within the Change for Autism campaign!

Summertime activities will include our "Tee-Time for Autism" at SentryWorld in Stevens Point. The event is slated for Thursday, August 1st, with a great course, food and prizes. Last year's, inaugural event was a huge success that we are hoping to build on for years to come. 2019's event will again feature former Green Bay Packers wide receiver Bill Schroeder, a 5-year veteran of professional long-drive golf tour and a member of Tour Swing Golf Long-Drive Team. Informational brochure and registration are available on our website. Please consider joining us as a sponsor, player or volunteer.

In the meantime, please know that we would welcome your call with any questions or requests.

All the best,

Robert Johnston,  
President

# Personal Perspective

## *On the Spectrum*

### Improvement Comes Outside the Comfort Zone

By Evan Halpop

I am not going to tell you that being outside your comfort zone is easy, because it isn't. From childhood, sounds and light have been a major obstacle for me to work around, especially fluorescent lights which bothered my eyesight a lot when I was younger.

Being diagnosed with high functioning autism back in the 1990s had its upsides and downsides but being outside my comfort zone was one thing I was determined to conquer.

It takes time and practice to learn how to get used to being outside your comfort zone. For me, being in new scenarios, like going to a rock concert, took many times going before I could handle the noise.

Being in large crowds can still be overwhelming for me, but I have also learned that there is nothing I can realistically do about the crowds. I learned how to handle being in large crowds by going to noisy events like Badger hockey and football games. Just going to the games and focusing on the game instead of the noise and people helped me channel the stress so I could enjoy hanging out with some of the friends I made in college.

Nowadays, when I am at an event that is full of people and noise, I am generally on an assignment photographing or videotaping an event. This has made the events a lot easier for me to handle since I have an outlet to focus on, so I don't have to pay attention to the noise and people.

Another challenge for me was driving my car to and from UW-Whitewater for classes. I moved to Whitewater to see what life was like living in the dorms and to be closer to my classes and extracurricular activities. I can honestly say that the dorms weren't for me. However, driving from Madison to Whitewater a few times a week is a lot

easier on my mentality since I am not down there constantly. To pass the time I listen to my Linkin Park playlist or if I am feeling adventurous, I will put my playlist on random. Music helps me tune out the highway noise that can distract me from driving and I notice my stress levels are much lower because of that.

I won't lie and say I don't have moments of stress. Last year was a year of growth being at a university instead of a community college. The social rules weren't the same because the age groups were different. Community college students were generally in their mid 20s, and the students at the university are younger. This year hasn't been as much as a challenge for stress of being outside my comfort zone, mainly because I have had time to adjust to how I respond to certain students I don't get along with often. I do end up reminding myself that no one is perfect, neuro-typicals have flaws too, since they are also human.

Getting a full-time job in the communications or journalism field is what I am aiming for. I know if I am persistent, I will eventually make it happen in the next three or so years. Staying healthy, both physically and mentally, along with learning to manage my money, finishing my bachelor's degree in journalism, while working part time at the Madison Metropolitan School District can seem like a lot to take on. However, if I break them down into their own sub categories, it isn't as hard as you'd think and I know these will help me reach my goals. I am reminded that the knowledge that comes with a bachelor's degree will improve my skillsets and chances of landing the job that I can excel at.

If we never struggle to overcome an obstacle, that obstacle will always be there holding us back. I'll end with a quote from Batman Begins: "Why do we fall? So we can learn to pick ourselves up." ~Thomas Wayne

# Local Affiliates

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- 
- February 5**      **Papa John's Pizza! | Participating Franchise Locations**  
Looking for a simple way to support the Autism Society of Wisconsin? Order pizza! Receive 20% off your order at Papa John's by using the code: ASW20, Papa John's then donates 20% to ASW! Valid at the following locations: Appleton, Darboy, Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, De Pere, Green Bay, Stevens Point & Sheboygan.
- 
- February 6**  
9:30–11:30 am      **Morning Parent Support Group | Autism Society of Northeast Wisconsin**  
The morning support group meets the first and third Wednesday of each month. Join other parents at Jitter Bean Coffee House, 2670 Monroe Rd., De Pere. For more information email administrator@asnew.org
- 
- February 7**  
6:30–8:00 pm      **Parent Support Group | Autism Society of Central Wisconsin**  
The Autism Society of Central WI has a monthly support group on the first Thursday of each month during the school year. We meet at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 600 Stevens Drive, Wausau, starting at 6:30 PM. (Please, enter through the main doors go to the right and through the doors leading into the school portion of the building.)
- 
- February 12**  
8:30 am–12:30 pm      **Community of Practice on Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Developmental Disabilities (CoP ASD/DD) – Access to Mental Health Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Developmental Disabilities. A Multi-site Distance Event**  
Learn together; Collaborate locally. [https://www2.waisman.wisc.edu/cedd/connections/future\\_meetings.php](https://www2.waisman.wisc.edu/cedd/connections/future_meetings.php)
- 
- February 17**  
11:00 am–1:00 pm      **Sensory Superstars | Building for Kids–City Center, Appleton**  
Join us for a lower sensory experience and special programming created especially for children on the autism spectrum. Free admission for children on the spectrum and their families from 11 am–1 pm, but stay as late as you want! Representative from the Autism Society of the Fox Valley is present to answer any questions about local resources.
- 
- February 19**  
6:00–8:00 pm      **Evening Parent Support Group | Autism Society of Northeast Wisconsin**  
Join other parents at Jitter Bean Coffee House, 2670 Monroe Rd., De Pere. For more information email administrator@asnew.org
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- February 23**  
8:00 am–5:00 pm      **Embracing the Future with Possibilities! | Conference**  
Holiday Inn Conference Center, 750 S Central Ave., Marshfield  
Asperger Experts is a transformational media company based out of Seattle, WA that enlivens, empowers and educates people with Asperger's, their families, and the communities in which they live. <http://angermenotfoundation.wixsite.com/angermenotfoundation>
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# Autism Society of Wisconsin Annual Conference

Kalahari Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells  
April 11–13, 2019



The Autism Society of Wisconsin's Annual Conference is a three day event where professionals, parents, individuals on the spectrum, family members and advocates gather to learn, share and discuss various topics in the field of autism. Attendees will leave the conference with an understanding of strategies, resources and services that serve to improve the lives of individuals on the autism spectrum. With over 30 breakout sessions, 4 pre-conference sessions, 2 keynote addresses, and plenty of networking opportunities, this is a conference you don't want to miss!

## BREAKOUT SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Breakout sessions will take place on Friday and Saturday after the keynote addresses. Below are a few highlights from our program. Please visit our website to view the program in its entirety.

### **Sex on a Spectrum: ASD, Sex Education and Behavior**

Madeline Barger

### **Navigating Social Media for Those on the Autism Spectrum**

Kim Phillips, Debra Norton

### **Empower Students: Teaching Students About Their Brain**

Katie Berg

### **Periods: Period. (A Guide for Supporting Girls Through Menstruation)**

Laura Nagel, Sydnie Parish

### **Interoception, The Eighth Sense: Practical Strategies for Assessment and Intervention**

Kelly Mahler

### **Nurturing Ourselves: Taking Care of Ourselves in the Role of Caregiver**

Presented by Marcee Murray King, Wendy Schottle Brom



## THURSDAY, APRIL 11 | PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

### PRE-CONFERENCE A: 9:00 AM–12:00PM

Comprehensive Evaluation for Special Education Eligibility  
DPI and Discretionary Grant Staff

### PRE-CONFERENCE B: 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

I Think We're Ready for This... ASD and Preparing for Puberty  
Shana Nichols, Ph.D.

### PRE-CONFERENCE C: 1:30 AM–4:30 PM

College and Career Ready IEPs Through the Lens of Autism  
DPI and Discretionary Grant Staff

### PRE-CONFERENCE D: 1:30 AM–4:30 PM

It's Different For Girls: Understanding and Supporting Females with ASD  
Shana Nichols, Ph.D.

## FRIDAY, APRIL 12 | KEYNOTE

**Interoception, The Eighth Sense: Influence on Self-Regulation, Health and Emotional Well-Being**  
By Kelly Mahler

Interoception is an important sensory system that helps us to 'feel' body signals like a full bladder, growling stomach, tense muscles or speeding heart. Research indicates that our ability to clearly feel these internal signals enables us to accurately identify and manage how we feel: Do we feel Anxious? Frustrated? Hungry? Full? In pain? Need the bathroom? Many autistic individuals can have differences in interoception, causing significant challenges in identifying and managing the way they feel. This presentation will provide participants with an overview of what research tells us about interoception as well as how this sense influences self-regulation, health and emotional well-being.



## SATURDAY, APRIL 13 | KEYNOTE

**Triumph: Overcoming the Odds**  
By Russell Lehmann

The story of how a 28-year-old man with autism overcame debilitating mental health issues to lead a fulfilling life in which he travels the country spreading hope, awareness, understanding and acceptance. Shared are lessons learned, insights gained and poetry that gives a deeply personal and transparent look inside the world of autism, OCD, anxiety and depression. Eye-opening, motivational, informative and inspirational.



## FAMILY RECEPTION | FRIDAY APRIL 12

Conference attendees and their families are welcome to join us for a reception on Friday evening of the conference. The reception will include a complimentary pizza buffet, essay contest awards ceremony, talent show, and dance.



## EXHIBIT HALL

Conference attendees have unlimited access to the conference exhibit hall, filled with over 50 community agencies, providers, and other wonderful resources to help you connect locally.



## REGISTER

[www.asw4autism.org/conferences/](http://www.asw4autism.org/conferences/)

Early registration is highly encouraged!

General registration rates are available to those who register by March 18th, 2019.

Onsite registration is available for an additional cost and conference materials are not guaranteed.

Don't forget to book your room at the Kalahari at the discounted room rate by March 11th.

Want to get your business involved? There are NEW opportunities to support the annual conference. Visit our conference webpage to view opportunities for sponsorship, exhibition and advertisement at the conference.

Questions? Contact Amber at [agollata@asw4autism.org](mailto:agollata@asw4autism.org)

-2019-

# Change for Autism

**Change for Autism** is a campaign through the Autism Society of Wisconsin designed to encourage stakeholders to create meaningful change for people with autism in our schools and communities. Whether you're part of a group, business and/or school or a passionate individual hoping to ignite change, there is a place for you within the Change for Autism campaign!

Together we can help our communities understand autism and create inclusive opportunities to make everyone feel welcome. Please join our Change for Autism campaign this April to create change in your local community.



## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

### *Schools*

Schools are a great place to raise awareness and help students gain a better understanding of what autism is and how it affects those who have it. Schools can join our Change for Autism coin drive and participate in our 2019 Autism Essay contest (more information on pages 8 & 9). Schools that participate in the Change for Autism coin drive will receive free awareness building and educational materials from the Autism Society of Wisconsin. All schools that participate will be entered to win 2 conference registrations and the school that raises the most money will win a party for the top 3 classrooms!

### *Organizations*

Contact the Autism Society of Wisconsin to learn about how you can create sensory friendly environments or make your business more welcoming to individuals and families affected by autism. Businesses can also support the Autism Society of Wisconsin this April by collecting spare change or hosting a jean day to raise money to support our programs and services.

### *Individuals*

Share your experiences to raise awareness and support others:

- What do you wish others knew about autism? Share your thoughts in our survey to be included in our social media awareness campaign. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/IwishOthersKnew>
- Become a support parent through Parent to Parent of Wisconsin to support another parent of a child with autism.
- Make a donation to the Autism Society of Wisconsin to support our ongoing programs and services

FIND MORE INFORMATION AT: [www.asw4autism.org/change-for-autism/](http://www.asw4autism.org/change-for-autism/)

# 14TH ANNUAL Essay Contest

## Everyone Belongs: Celebrating Differences

In collaboration with schools across Wisconsin, the Autism Society Affiliates in Wisconsin are hosting the 14th Annual Autism Essay Contest, a program designed to assist all students in gaining a deeper understanding of autism and how their peers with autism experience the world.

This essay contest is a wonderful opportunity to create an open dialogue about autism, how it affects students in your school and why celebrating differences is important. We hope that you will welcome this opportunity to promote understanding and acceptance of differences in your school.

Please encourage participation in this project by sharing this information with classroom teachers or students who may be interested in participating.

### Divisions:

Division 1: K-2nd grade  
Division 2: 3rd-5th grade  
Division 3: 6th-8th grade  
Division 4: 9th-12th grade

### Prizes:

- 1st Place Winners in each division will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card
- 2nd Place Winners in each division will receive a \$75 Amazon gift card
- 3rd Place Winners in each division will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card

All 1st place winners will be honored at & invited to the Family Reception at the Autism Society of Wisconsin's 30th Annual Conference in Wisconsin Dells on Friday, April 12, 2019.

### Essay Submission:

Complete the entry form at [www.asw4autism.org/essay-contest/](http://www.asw4autism.org/essay-contest/)

All essays should be mailed, and postmarked by March 1, 2019 to:

**Autism Society of Wisconsin  
RE: Annual Essay Contest  
1477 Kenwood Dr.  
Menasha, WI 54952**



## Students and/or classrooms K-5:

We highly encourage teachers to go to <http://researchautism.org/education/students-corner/kit-for-kids/> and watch the Kits for Kids Program video from the Organization for Autism Research as a class and consider doing all or parts of the Kit for Kids Activity sheets as part of a lesson.

Essay Entries should include:

- 1 – 2 things you learned about autism and how autism might affect your classmate(s)
- To be successful, students need different support at different times. Think about a time you needed extra help in an assignment or activity to be successful. Who helped you and how did it make you feel? How can you help your peers with autism be successful when they need help?
- Written or illustrated examples, using captions for all illustrations

OR

- As a student with autism, what do you wish other students knew about you? What makes you unique?

## Students grades 6 – 12:

Read more about autism here: <http://researchautism.org/education/students-corner/hs-get-informed/>

Essay Entries should include:

- Write about 3 things you learned about autism and describe how autism might affect your classmate(s), using examples
- To be successful, students need different support at different times. Write an essay about what steps you could take to make your classroom or school a more supportive environment for students with autism. Use examples. Consider how you can extend support to community settings.

OR

- Interview a person with autism and find out what makes them unique. What are their strengths and what do they need extra help with? How could others best support them to be successful? What do they wish others knew about them? Write a summary of what you learned.
- Include your own reflections about the interview and how you can take steps to make sure your school is a supportive environment for students with autism.

OR

- As a student with autism, how does autism affect you and what do you wish other students knew about you?
- What makes you unique? What are your strengths and what do you need extra help with? How could others provide better support for you?

# Autism Treatment and Ableism

By Robert Peyton, Ph.D., BCBA–D

I am a psychologist and behavior analyst that has been working with clients with autism for over 20 years. Over the years, our fields have learned an enormous amount that has helped us improve treatment services for people with autism. We learn best when we keep up with research, remember our role is to help other people achieve their goals following their values, and always stay honest about whether a treatment is actually working or if we need to make a change. One important way to learn and grow as providers is to engage in discussions with other colleagues and listen to what people with autism tell us about their experiences. After presenting at the Annual Conference last year, I had an important discussion that pushed me to grow with two colleagues, one of whom also had autism. I'd like to share this because it may show a way treatments are not working in the way we would like, and the need to make a change.

The colleagues contacted me after the presentation to share that they felt the treatment and behavioral language I used implied that people with autism were flawed and "less-than" neurotypical people. They pointed to the language of deficits that is used in the medical and behavioral community when describing a diagnosis, and often when describing a challenging situation as well.

Further, this language appears to assume that typically-developing is "normal," and that anything which varies from that is a "deficit," when really it is just a difference. This bias, called ableism, can lead to a view of the person as somehow flawed when they have a disorder – even the term "disorder" implies this. This language and the way of thinking it represents could lead to discrimination, assumptions of incompetence, and a loss of opportunity and equality for a person with autism, especially if it shapes how the public thinks of autism.

As a behavior analyst and a psychologist, I am a treatment provider within the autism community. Treatment providers would say our language has value – it helps us understand behavior, be technically precise, and fit within the requirements of the medical system to access treatment. The language of behavior is not meant to be judgmental, it is meant to help practitioners focus in ways that directly lead to help.

By using a behavior-analyst's focus on function, we see people cannot simply stop behavior others view as "inappropriate." Even if a behavior is dangerous, it may still meet a person's very real needs, so any change must still meet those needs somehow, or people will lose value in their lives.

By using the psychologist's focus on cognitions, we can help people see how their own thinking causes them to feel more anxious and depressed – and how to change that. It is also not meant to only apply to people with autism, the same language is used to help understand any person's problems.

Most behavior analysts and psychologists use the same tools to help themselves and their own loved ones. However, just because something is used for one goal does not mean it can't have another effect as well, and despite good intentions, my colleagues who were concerned about ableism had a good point.

Treatment language is focused on solving a problem, but I can see why someone might find it so focused on problems that it implies a problem with the person. After all, providers are required by the rules of diagnosis to say there is a "significant problem" in a person's life in order to even start helping them. If the person starts to think of this "problem" as indicating a flawed part of who they are, providers may be helping the treatment problem while simultaneously creating a belief that somehow part of the person is a problem.

The cause of this belief is easy to see once we start looking for it. It comes from the fact that developmental and behavioral treatments are forced into the model originally designed for general medicine. This medical view of the world is based on treating diseases like the flu or a cold and is reasonable for that, but it becomes problematic when we apply the same view to autism and mental health. A flu is never helpful and really is a temporary deficit in life.

However, in mental and developmental "disorders," people are often simply different, and might do just fine if the situation were also different. They may also benefit from these differences, such as how Elon Musk credits his ADHD-driven creativity in helping make Space X, and all the ways that Temple Grandin has found her autism helped her work with animal science. By forcing mental and developmental health to fit into the general medical language of "disorders and deficits," we can unintentionally support the ableist belief that typical-development is "good" and variations are "bad."

While my understanding of this is evolving, this discussion has led me to be more aware of what negative impacts treatment language may have. For example, a step in overcoming most challenges is to recognize we have to play a major role in helping ourselves. Is there anyone who would prefer to have a part of themselves described only in terms of flaws or problems? The natural reaction then is to deny it instead of working on it. The improved language of differences rather than deficits can help people be more open to addressing their challenges because they also see the strengths inherently within them too. It is also less judgmental, and fits better with our role as treatment providers to help others reach their goals by their values.

This conversation has also reinforced the need to stay person-focused and limit treatment language to the times when it provides a useful insight to improve someone's quality of life, as determined by the clients' definition of what "quality of life" means. Behavior analysts have always focused on the environment, but we must be especially careful to point out that all "disorders" are context specific – it is the match with the situation that is flawed, not the person.

When speaking to someone just diagnosed, we must be sure that they understand they are the same person walking out of the door they were walking in the door – they may have a new medical description, but who they are as a person is so much more, and that has not changed. I think this is another level of the ideal of treating the whole person that many of us strive for. Not only can we try to think about the environment, the behavior, and the biology that all interact, but also the societal impact of our treatments and language on the people we are seeing. This is another way to let the client's strengths inform treatment and another factor we can help clients consider when they choose their goals. We may not always reach this ideal, but we should try.

We are all equal. People with autism think differently from neurotypical people. A person should have just as many rights and as much respect as another person, even if they think differently. And all of us need help at times. When we get help we want the people helping us to really look deeply into *why* there is a challenge, and respect our needs and dignity as they are helping us. I do believe that we are all in this together, all of our intentions are good, we each have an equal voice, and we can all learn a lot from each other if we are open to discussing how we talk and what it means to us. Hopefully all of us can find our way to that place where we truly understand that whatever language we use, autism itself is not really a deficit or a benefit – it is simply a Difference.

Autism Society of Wisconsin  
1-888-4-AUTISM (WI only)  
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Donations may be sent to:  
Autism Society of Wisconsin  
1477 Kenwood Drive  
Menasha, WI 54952

We also accept donations online. Click the Donate Now button on our  
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Thank you for your support!

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April 11, 2019