

2023 Wisconsin Autism Conference

Breakout Sessions



Breakout Session 1 | Friday, April 21 | 10:20 AM – 11:20 AM

Self-Advocating: Being Aware of Your Choices

Vicky Gunderson, Tricia Lazare, Chrissy Shields, John Jahnke

Wisconsin long-term supports and services can be confusing. Many people prefer to choose an independent lifestyle, to be able to choose where they live, who they live with, and in the community they want to live in. This session is an avenue to learning what it means to self-direct one's services, and how to include self-direction in your person-centered planning. This will be an interactive session, so please bring your questions and/or share your story of success.

Self- Management Through Visuals

Katie Berg

Participants will see and interact with a variety of different visual supports addressing the Social and Emotional Learning Competency of self-management. Participants will be shown how to use visual systems with the whole group down to an individual to strengthen student awareness and self-regulation.

Respite in the Latino Community

Araceli Nord, Hector Portillo

Definition of Respite and why is important that caregivers access respite services. Discuss the respite provider training offered by the RCAW (virtually) and how Padres e Hijos en Accion has made the training available for Latino families. We will speak about the goals that have been met through this basic training with our families and other community members that have joined and taken the training.

Why Won't My Brain Shut Up?

Hunter Markle & Timothy Markle

Do you ever stop and listen to how you talk to yourself? How kind are you . . . to you? The way we talk about ourselves, to ourselves, affects our mental health and our emotions. We would like to share with you our struggles with negative self-talk at different times in our lives. We will also share how we became aware of our negative self-talk and how we work to shut our brains up.

Finding Your Community: Building Your Own Support Group

Kristine Brandner, Diane Messman

As a parent or family member of an Autistic, have you ever felt alone? Do you feel like the local supports are hard to find? Join our session as we share our experience as two parents who wanted more for our kids and our community. We will explain our journey to starting our own local support group. We will also share ideas and lists of existing groups from around the state that parents can contact for more information.

Breakout Session 2 | Friday, April 21 | 12:40 PM - 1:40 PM

Employment Panel

This breakout session will include a panel of autistic adults sharing their experiences with employment from triumphs to challenges. The panel will cover topics related to the interview process, disclosure, accommodations, and more.

The Key to Successfully Supporting Autism in our Schools – Acknowledgement, Acceptance, Celebration & Expansion

Gail Wilke

Schools have been working for years to improve practices surrounding the support of students with autism. How are schools changing their programming to embrace the wealth of knowledge that autistic individuals have now shared with us? The focus of this session will be on how districts can create schools and classrooms that are not only welcoming of neurodiverse students, but also truly effective in meeting

their needs. To do this a systematic approach & commitment is needed. This session will examine how reallocating resources to designated resource teams, re-focusing on evidence-based practices, developing school spaces where students with autism feel accepted, partnering with families during student-led IEPs, and expanding staff development are key components to success with autism in our schools. This session will address these ideas from educator, parent and student perspectives with real life examples which the presenter has seen work and not work over her years in the field and as a parent of an autistic child.

Toileting Trouble

Amanda McCollum, Emily Jollota

Does your child have trouble with regulating their bowel and/or bladder? Are you considering potty training but don't know where to start? Come by to learn some tips and tricks from a pediatric pelvic floor physical therapist and pediatric occupational therapist. We will be discussing toileting posture, potty training readiness, and diet changes that may help your child go.

Researching and Advancing Occupational Skills through Creativity with the Autism Brilliance Lab for Entrepreneurship

Nathaniel Stern, Celeste Campos-Castillo, Mich Dillon, Margaret Fairbanks, Aaron Greve

The Autism Brilliance Lab for Entrepreneurship (ABLE) is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts to identify and disseminate student-driven learning methods for neurodiverse individuals and communities. How does non-compliant education increase confidence and benefit relationship-building? Where are occupational skills better acquired through creative processes using graphic arts? What kind of language supports autistic students in exploring new skills and creative outlets? This panel will consist of the two professors, Islands of Brilliance (IOB, ABLE's partner) mentor Mich Dillon, and IOB student Aaron Greve. They'll discuss their research, how it's conducted, and what they are learning.

Intersections of Self: Autistic and LGBTQIA+

Lydia Rhoads

Autistic individuals are more likely to also be members of the LGBTQIA+ community than those who are not autistic. This is especially true for those who fall under the T (transgender, GNC, non-binary, gender

expansive, etc.)” umbrella. How can parents and caregivers best advocate for their children in spaces that are cisgender, heterosexual, and neurotypically coded, such as school and medical settings? In this breakout session we will cover strategies to ensure your child is embraced for and supported in their whole self.

Breakout Session 3 | Friday, April 21 | 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Supported Decision Making from the Youth Perspective

Jennifer Neugart, Ashley Mathy, Jennie Rojas

More and more families are becoming familiar with Supported Decision Making and other alternatives to guardianship. This session will provide an overview of Supported Decision Making but will also provide professionals and family members with insight into how a youth feels about making their own decisions and will share plenty of examples of how they’ve put SDM into practice.

Creating a Sense of Belonging in a Neurodiverse Classroom through Peer Education

Chelsea Budde, Denise Schamens

While the interventions for students on the autism spectrum are numerous, how can interventions with neuromajority peers help prevent bullying? Children with disabilities including autism are far more likely than their typically-developing peers to be subjected to bullying. By using peer education to create a culture of acceptance, schools can prevent disability harassment, which is a violation of three federal laws. Teaching neuromajority classmates about autism and fostering connection can lead to healthy social-emotional environments that provide a sense of belonging for all learners.

Life Tools: Practical Skills to Help Kids Manage Their Day

Kelsie-Marie Offenwanger

In this session, all are welcome to learn practical regulation skills for their day-to-day lives, called Tools. Each tool promotes engagement and ownership of their feelings and behaviors. The tools are centered on self-awareness (learning about their thoughts, feelings and behaviors), self-management (learning how to be mindful and present in the moment), relationship skills (identifying what kids or others are feeling, stating their feelings appropriately), and emotional expression (i.e., handling mistakes and

compromising effectively). The goal is to help youth and parents develop more tools for their toolkits to help them be successful.

Bereavement As A Spectrum: Supporting Autistics Through Grief & Loss

Colleen E McCluskey

Dealing with the complex emotions of loss can be tricky, even more so when one's grieving process runs counter to the neurotypical response. The autistic experience of bereavement often fundamentally differs from that of people without autism. This presentation offers an inside look at what loss is like for people on the autism spectrum and how those who care about them can help them through times of grief. In addition to drawing from the personal experiences of autistic individuals, this lecture will also provide a survey of contemporary literature on the topics of grief support and neurodiversity.

Empowered Parents: Creating Strong Resilience and Growth for Children with Autism

Jennifer Bluske, Meredith Wodrich

Parents are children's first teachers, first regulators and their constant. The parent's impact on their autistic child's development and sense of self is profound. In this presentation we will explore how to parent from YOUR values. We explore the use of the parent-child relationship to support regulation and learning in the context of raising a neurodiverse child. We break down the "wins" and "challenges" within the relationship and support you to understand and respond differently to your child. You will leave with a renewed understanding of your impact with your neurodiverse child, plus tips for how to navigate your daily life as a parent!

Breakout Session 4 | Friday, April 21 | 3:20 – 4:20 PM

Sibling Panel

Siblings will share what life is like growing up with a brother or sister with autism. Hear firsthand from a group of siblings as they candidly share experiences, perspectives, and advice. Moderated by: Harriet Redman, WisconSibs.

Using Picture Books to Promote Acceptance and Belonging

Connie Persike

Representation matters! Picture books can be utilized to teach many different concepts, themes, and skills. This session will explore the benefits of increasing books that represent neurodivergent learners into all settings. Participants will be provided with time to explore books written by neurodivergent authors as well as books that include neurodivergent characters.

Listen and LEARN: Incorporating Feedback from Autistics Into Clinical Practice

Rebecca Thompson, Reux Lennon

In recent years, there has been growing concern about ABA therapy from autistic adults, the LGBTQIA+ community and others. To demonstrate our commitment to ethical clinical practice, LEARN Behavioral formed an internal workgroup, including neurodivergent staff members, to develop a company-wide values statement, clinical trainings, and resources for staff to provide services that are neurodivergent-affirming. This presentation will share our process (forming the workgroup, developing content, and dissemination) as a model that other providers could replicate, as our field evolves and listens to the voices of autistic self-advocates.

I Should Say That Out Loud

Donna Brendel

No matter your age, you probably have thoughts running through your mind at any given time. Your thoughts are important and should be heard. Donna will share three methods to help you grow in self-awareness and self-confidence: mentoring relationships, trying many different jobs and activities, and paying attention to your thoughts as well as how your body reacts in certain situations. Slowly you can begin to speak the thoughts floating around in your mind out loud, as she did, and the responses you hear from other people will encourage you to keep speaking out loud.

Creating and Embracing an AAC-Friendly Home Environment: A Parent's Perspective

Megan Hufton

Creating a home environment to adequately support the needs of non-speaking children on the autism spectrum can be a very overwhelming task for many parents and caregivers. While these children may be having success using AAC and visual models at school and in therapy sessions, parents and caregivers often struggle to find ways to transfer these skills into a meaningful practice in the home environment. This presentation will focus on how visual supports and AAC can be used in the home environment to support parents/caregivers and children on the autism spectrum, all from a parent's perspective.

Dads' Session

This informal session is exclusively for Dads (and other male caregivers) to meet, network, and discuss the joys and challenges of parenting autistic children.

Breakout Session 5 | Saturday, April 22 | 10:25 AM – 11:25 AM

Panel of Parents

Parenting a child on the spectrum comes with its own set of triumphs and tribulations – whatever the child's age, abilities, or co-occurring conditions. Hear firsthand from a group of parents as they candidly share their experiences related to the diagnosis process and challenges along their family's journey. These parents will also give their best advice and discuss how they celebrate their children's gifts and strengths.

It's all about Independence!

Mandy Reinke

Are you interested in learning strategies and supports to help increase your students independent functioning in the school setting? Do you support a student you'd like to see function more independently in some capacity? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then this breakout session is for you! You will learn how to implement strategies from early school experience through postsecondary in order to promote independent functioning in the students you support!

Relationship Between Communication, Internal State, & Exhibited Behaviors

Katie Prybylski, Kim Bruessel

Individuals with Autism can be characterized by difficulty with communication, self regulation and effective coping strategies when compared with their neurotypical peers. A person experiencing these difficulties in the school or community settings may appear as having chronic behavioral issues. Often, it is misperceived as an intentional act and the root cause is rarely addressed. This session will look at how to identify if a person is in need of emotional regulation support and how to implement strategies to identify and support the root cause of the exhibited behavior.

Inclusion: The Common Thread to Success in Education, Employment and Life

Matthew & Mitchell LaBerge, Julie Harris

Matthew and Mitchell, both diagnosed with Autistic Disorder at 3 years-old, will discuss their experiences as they have navigated K-12 education, post-secondary education, independent living, employment, and volunteer work. These experiences have all led to the development of social skills and have allowed for success in employment and life. They will share examples of what has worked for them such as the development of self-advocacy skills and discuss how they connect with others as young adults. Their mother will discuss the benefits of inclusion and share examples of inclusive practices used to assist Matthew and Mitchell over her 26 years of supporting her sons as well as others in her work serving as a special education director.

Up Your Game: 5 ways to use multimedia Technology to create enriching learning opportunities for Neurodivergent individuals

Bryan Mischler, Dr. Jeremy Chapman

“Over the past few decades, a considerable body of research has developed and used clinical games to achieve clinical goals; however, there is significantly less information about how popular commercial video games can be used in psychotherapy.” (Steadman, et al, 2014) Come learn several fun and effective ways to use digital media and technology to create a learning environment that makes achieving your child or student’s goals more meaningful way, there-by increasing success. Using these strategies to teach executive function, social communication, self-regulation and vocational skills creates authentic learning opportunities that keeps your children or those you serve coming back for more.

Breakout Session 6 | Saturday, April 22 | 11:45 AM – 12:45 PM

Panel of Experts

This session will be a panel of autistic individuals sharing their experiences of life with autism.

A Smooth, Informed Transition from CLTS to Adult Long-Term Care

Samuel Fuller, John Jahnke, Tara Ditter

The transition process from Children's Long-Term Supports to Adult Long-Term care can be intimidating, confusing, and frustrating. Hear from professionals in the Children's Long-Term Supports program and the IRIS program on the similarities and differences between the two programs, what to expect during the transition process, and what resources are available to assist you and your family throughout the process.

Empowering Children Through Assent Based Learning

Kerry Hoops, Karen Konop

Compassionate care is an essential component of a child's education. Assent from our children allows them to have a voice in their learning experiences. When children are happy, relaxed, and engaged, this creates an optimal environment for success. This presentation will explore Assent Based Learning for children with autism and the benefits of empowering our children.

Building the Foundation: The Role of Regulation in Managing Mental Health and Independence

Michaela Faretta, Trish Layde

Many families come to Common Threads seeking therapeutic support around ways to increase their child's independence and success. The foundation for building independence skills and mental health is regulation. This presentation will underline the importance of establishing baseline regulatory supports, in home and community environments, that allow individuals the opportunity to be successful and confident in their everyday activities.

Core-word Focused Literacy Tools to Support Autistic Students and Gestalt Language Processors

Jessica Schumacher, Mary Houser, Andrea Karras

Within the educational setting there is an increased need for tools and materials that are accommodated, modified and accessible, particularly within the area of literacy. This session will discuss literacy-based tools that are created to build student's early literacy knowledge, including vocabulary, phonemic awareness, language expansion, language comprehension and written language. Each book kit has a core word focus and includes 5 reading lessons as well as 5 writing lessons. The writing lessons include multimodality tasks. The kits are beneficial tools for all educational staff to use as well as beneficial for carryover within the home environment.