

2024 Annual Conference

Breakout Sessions



Breakout Session 1 | Friday, April 26 | 10:20 AM – 11:20 AM

Functional Executives: Working with Autistic Executive Dysfunction Using Communication & Mindfulness

Colleen McCluskey

This presentation will delve into the intricacies of autistic executive dysfunction, drawing from contemporary research and personal narratives. It will shed light on the subjective experience of executive dysfunction, exploring behavioral indicators such as avoidance and dysregulation. Practical insights will be offered for both those on the spectrum and those supporting individuals on the spectrum. Emphasis will be on recognizing executive dysfunction episodes and proactive strategies such as interoceptive mindfulness exercises, prioritization, and task breakdown. Communication using collaboration and compromise will be highlighted as effective solutions. Communication methods available to autistics enabling them to articulate needs related to sensory or mental overload will be explored.

Red Flags and Green Lights: Indicators of Neurodivergent Affirming Treatment Programs

Rebecca L. Thompson, PhD, BCBA-D

In recent years, service providers have become increasingly aware of the importance of not only accepting neurodiversity but celebrating neurodiversity. Although many professionals are updating their approaches and incorporating neurodivergent affirming practices into their service models, some professionals continue to use outdated practices and ableist language. This presentation aims to support self-advocates and caregivers in identifying aspects of treatment services that are neurodivergent affirming (such as assent-based practices, teaching self-advocacy skills, offering choices, honoring all forms of communication, and individualizing services to best support the person being served) when seeking out a service provider.

Get Ready: An Introduction to Children's Long Term Supports (CLTS)

Danielle Tolzmann

Get Ready is best suited for families just getting started or considering participation in the Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) program. Covered areas include program eligibility, the role of Support & Services Coordinators (and how families can create a positive, partnering relationship with them), examples of what the program might offer, the role of families, what to do when things don't go well, and how to apply. Topics are based on input from over 100 Wisconsin families, based on their experiences. Introduce concepts of self-determination including the importance of early decision making.

Supported Decision-Making: The Youth and Parent Perspective

Jennifer Neugart, Jordan Anderson, Will Becker, Patti Becker

Are you wondering how Supported Decision-Making works in real life? Join our Center for Youth Voice, Youth Choice ambassadors for specific examples of how they use Supported Decision-Making in their everyday lives. The panel will include the parent perspective as well. Come get your questions answered and open up the possibilities for your youth.

Communication in Adult Relationships

Stacy Luther, PsyD LP, Mattea Kowalski

Relationships during adulthood can be complicated and difficult. The goal of this session is to address communication strategies in a variety of relationships that are common in adulthood- friendships, acquaintances, work relationships, romantic relationships, and beyond. Emphasis on self advocacy, consent, and other language/communication skills for socializing with peers, dating/marriage, and interacting with coworkers is provided.

Breakout Session 2 | Friday, April 26 | 12:20 PM - 1:20 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.

Access, Engagement, Progress: Supporting the Learning Brain

Katie Berg, MA Ed.

Creating a plan to support a student to be able to access, engage and progress in their education can be a complicated one. The legal requirements and logistical barriers often are a focus in our IEP process. This learning event strives to put the child's experience into focus and provides supports to show up implementing the IEP we create. The College and Career Ready IEP process helps in keeping the "I" in IEP. In this training we will focus on the implementation of the CCR-IEP process for the areas of significantly divergent social and emotional learning skill needs. Helping teams take a deep look at the supports, learning, and access points for their students that are planned for in their IEP.

A Tale of Two Spectrums: Understanding Gender and Autism

Lindsay McCary, PhD

Research supports gender differences in autism prevalence between males and females may be closer to 2:1 rather than the reported 4:1. This presentation will explore disparities in diagnosis, prevalence, and manifestations of autism across genders, including the unique needs and experiences of autistic females, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals. We will also explore the influence of gender identity on access to support, highlighting the importance of tailored, inclusive interventions. We welcome autistic individuals as well as those who support and work with autistic individuals to learn about the gender spectrum and its relationship with the autism spectrum.

The Family's Role in the IEP

Caroline M Rossing, Cheri Sylla

This presentation will include information to empower parents and other family members to become more confident participants in the IEP process. We will focus on strategies for strengthening relationships with school staff, options for dispute resolution, and state/local resources available to assist you on your child's educational journey. Learn about: College & Career Ready IEPs (CCR IEPs) and the CCR IEP 5-Step Process and Tools, strategies, and resources that support participation throughout the IEP process.

Bringing Respite to Your Community – Creating New Respite Programs

Val Madsen, MS, CTRS

Respite is one of the most needed services throughout the state, but there are not providers, organizations, programs, or agencies to meet this need. Respite Care Association of WI (RCAW) has created free resources to help individuals or groups who are interested in creating new respite programs in their communities. Come learn about different respite program models, the Bringing Respite to Your Community (BRYC) Workshop, and the RCAW StartUP Grant to help you start a respite program in your area.

Breakout Session 3 | Friday, April 26 | 1:40 PM – 2:40 PM

Connected Parenting as a way to set your Autistic Child up for success!

Jennifer Bluske, Meredith Wodrich

Do you long for a day when your relationship with your child is one of ease and understanding? Are you looking to gain more skills in order to support your child's regulation and engagement? Come learn how you, as the parent, can use your relationship with your child to grow their engagement and adaptability, improve regulation and build skills. We will explore self and co-regulation, communication, emotional development, boundaries and agency as we build on connected parenting skills to help your autistic child thrive!

Fostering SpIn: The Key to Connection and Lifelong Learning

Dr. Kate Siekman, Dr. Kate Siekman, Shayne Mack, Sylvia Staus, Harry Fairbanks, Cole Kirkendall

SpIn (Special + Interest) is the term that the autistic community has developed to describe the areas of high interest that many autistics identify with throughout their lives. While some models of autism therapy and education view autistic areas of perseveration as hindrances to development, we have shifted the dialogue to use autistic SpIn as entry-points for connection and continual learning. Join us as we explore methods for fostering connection with autistic children and young adults by celebrating their special interest areas, and hear first-hand from autistic young adults who have experienced both the extinction and celebration of their SpIns.

College Readiness and Transition: Emerging Practices and Supports for Autistic College Students

Anthony Goettl, Randi Goettl

In this session, we delve into the dynamic realm of neurodiversity within higher education, focusing on the experiences of Autistic college students. Our discussion navigates the complex transition from high school to college, examining the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by neurodivergent learners. By spotlighting emerging practices and successes, we aim to empower Autistic students, parents, and professionals with practical strategies to enhance college readiness and foster a supportive environment conducive to academic and personal growth. Join us as we unravel the evolving landscape of resources and support systems vital for the success of Autistic learners in the collegiate sphere.

Empowering Individuals: Let's Talk About Rights

Sally Flaschberger, Kaitlin McNamara

This presentation will focus on helping individuals with disabilities become aware, understand and assert rights. Many people with disabilities face challenges in exercising their rights due to discrimination, stereotypes, and legal barriers. Participants will gain knowledge and tools needed to advocate for their rights. We will focus on using the Let's Talk About Rights guides which include practical strategies. In addition, self-advocates will share real-life examples to inspire effective advocacy and the promotion of equal rights.

Dating and Marriage as an Autistic Adult

Katlyn Marshall, Jordan Marshall

Katlyn Marshall shares her perspective and experiences of both dating and marriage, as an autistic adult – the good, the bad, the ugly, and the hilarious. We will look at some of the common barriers that autistic teens and adults face when seeking relationships and how to overcome them. Katlyn will also be joined by her husband Jordan, who brings his unique perspective as a neurotypical male, who is married to an autistic female. This session will also include a question and answer session at the end.

Breakout Session 4 | Friday, April 26 | 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Tools and strategies to support communication and self regulation

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 implement strategies to identify and support the root cause of the exhibited behavior.

Turn that Down! Heavy Metal Music and Autism

Hunter Markle and Tim Markle

There are many ways to deal with being different and being anxious. I (Hunter) use different kinds of music, but especially heavy metal music to help me get through my days. Yes, some of the lyrics are harsh and yes, some of the music is really loud, but with the way my mind works, I need all the help I can get! I hope you will join me and my dad to talk about the positive effects heavy metal music has in our lives along with listening to some of the songs on my mental health playlist. (Warning: it might get loud!)

Caregiver Wellness: Living The Valued Life

Tanya L Walker, Angela Bergeron

We are our loved ones protectors, nurturers, advocates, confidants, and sometimes bookkeepers. As a caregiver, we proudly wear many hats. Unfortunately, we also experience fatigue and burnout, and then guilt over being fatigued and burnt out. Sometimes we even avoid friends or stop doing activities we enjoy because we no longer have the energy. As caregivers, we sometimes get so focused on the next task, or appointment we need to prep for, that we lose sight of who we are as a person and forget how to enjoy our daily lives. During this fun and interactive session, we will introduce how you can renew and re-charge your life by incorporating a values-based living approach. We will empower you with practical strategies you can use now. It's time to get out of our heads and into our lives!

Expanding Autism Support and Inclusion in the Workplace

Reanin Stone, Christian Dorantes

Everyone deserves an opportunity to make a difference and contribute to society. For many Autistic adults, there are unique challenges that may prevent them from gaining and maintaining employment. Providing an accommodating and inclusive work environment is key for setting up Neurodivergent and Autistic individuals for success in a career where they can feel empowered. This session will review what an inclusive work environment should look like and define reasonable accommodations to educate Autistic individuals to be better advocates in the workplace to have their needs met. Some topics that will be discussed include doing a soft skill self-assessment, preparing for job interviews, and advocating for reasonable accommodations and communication preferences.

Interactive Roundtable Discussion: Updating Wisconsin DPI Educational Assessment Guide for Autism

Eva Shaw

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) wants to hear from you! The DPI is updating the Educational Assessment Guide For Autism. Although there are no proposed changes to Wisconsin's autism criteria found in state code, the guidance on how to interpret the criteria needs an update based on current best practices and understanding about students with autism. In this session, participants will rotate to discuss and provide feedback on two of the six major areas of the guide, with additional opportunity to provide feedback using a google form in all six areas.

Breakout Session 5 | Saturday, April 27 | 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.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Intervention to Foster Autonomy and Connection

Megan Leick, MS, CCC-SLP

This presentation aims to educate professionals on theory and autistic neurology impacting AAC selection and intervention along with discussing specific neuro-affirming methods to apply in practice. The knowledge bases of speech language pathology and related fields, scientific research, and feedback from autistic adults and families informs this presentation.

Love is a Good Therapist, Too. Connecting with Your Child Through Play and Daily Routines

Angie Fellenz, MA, BCBA

This session aims to explore the significance of play as a powerful tool for fostering connection with your young child with autism. We will discuss various tips and strategies for parents to engage their child in play and build a strong relationship with them, teach them skills, and foster their strengths. The session will highlight the significance of love, empathy, and play in the therapy process.

Leverage your skills and talents to launch your career!

Bryan Mischler, MSW; Jeremy Chapman, MD

This presentation aims to help autistic individuals and those who support them to unlock their career potential and take the first step in launching their careers. The neurodiverse community is a valuable, yet often overlooked, resource of talent. The presentation will explore the importance of relationships and mentorship in professional development and provide strategies for building a professional network and identifying potential mentors. Attendees will gain practical knowledge on resume writing, interview preparation, and advocating for their needs in the workplace. By tapping into our unique talents, we can create a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

LGBTQ and You

Emily Luna Everson

In this session we will cover queer terminology and discuss the links between the queer and neurodiverse communities, the emergence of Autgender, and how our struggles connect us. We will discuss how family and friends can support their Autistic Queer loved ones, and resources to help them in the journey to self discovery.

Breakout Session 6 | Saturday, April 27 | 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.

Transitioning from Children's Long-Term Supports to IRIS

Tara Ditter, Matthew Staab

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.

5 Visual Supports For Smoother Transitions!

Tara Phillips, MS CCC-SLP

How do I create smoother transitions for my young autistic child or student? You might be saying "Wait...there's a way to encourage smoother transitions with simple visual supports?" Yes! It's possible! By implementing foundational visual supports that create predictable routines, a less chaotic classroom and home is possible. In this session, I will share 5 visual supports that have stood the test of time and worked to decrease anxiety and encourage smoother transitions for my students. These visuals have also been used by countless parents in the home environment with massive success! The visual supports include: all done bucket, wait mat, star chart, visual schedule, and change card.

Autistic Masking

Diane Nackers

We all wear masks to some extent. At the heart of the issue is belonging. For the vast majority being women, show a history of "masking," or camouflaging, their symptoms. They do this in order to make and maintain friendships, fit in at school and higher education, and pass as "normal" in a variety of social contexts, including the workplace. During this presentation, you will learn more about masking, when and what triggers masking, how to support someone who is masking and learn strategies to be self-compassionate.

Advocate for Essential Special Education Funding at the State Level

Jackie Nider, Jim Bowman, Carol Lenz, Patti Clark-Stojke

It's hard to believe Wisconsin only funds approximately 33% of special education costs incurred by local districts. Education is a shared responsibility but 33% reimbursement is not adequate and has been described as "worst in the nation" compared to other states using the reimbursement model. Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education has been studying this issue for a decade and will provide current information about reimbursement levels, how low state funding creates challenges for local schools and how to advocate within your community and with local legislators for a return to the 66% reimbursement level Wisconsin once had.