



CASD CHAT E-Newsletter

The Intersection of Autism & LGBTQ Identities

Approximately 3.5% of adults in the U.S. identify within the LGBTQ+ umbrella (as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc.). Studies from the last decade suggest that these rates may be higher for autistic individuals. For example, a recent international study of more than 600,000 adults identified that autism spectrum disorder was 3 to 6.4 times more common among transgender people compared to cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) people, and studies of autistic adults report that more than 10% may identify as a gender different from their sex assigned at birth. Similarly, evidence indicates sexual orientation diversity (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual sexual orientations) may be more common among autistic individuals. We do not understand why LGBTQ+ identities may be more common among autistic people.



Some autistic LGBTQ+ people have explained that it is not so helpful to focus on why LGBTQ+ identities are common in ASD, but instead how best to affirm and support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender autistic people.

Sometimes a parent may wonder whether their autistic LGBTQ-exploring child is in fact LGBTQ+. We've heard some parents express ideas such as, "I think my child is just confused because they're autistic." The process of a young person coming to know their sexual orientation and gender takes time and can unfold over years. It is not uncommon for young people to explore a range of identities before learning what is most true for them. The same is true for autistic LGBT-exploring youth. It is important to give your child the room to figure out what fits best for them. Shutting down that exploration process with statements that suggest that the young person is confused because of their ASD can be experienced as profound rejection.

LGBT and LGBT-exploring youth need acceptance and affirmation from their parents/caregivers, families, and the larger community. In fact, support, acceptance, and affirmation are among the most powerful predictors of mental health outcomes in LGBTQ+ and LBGTQ-exploring youth. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ+ youth—including many autistic LGBTQ+ youth—do not experience the support and acceptance they need, and this puts them at risk for mental health problems (depression, anxiety, and suicidality). Our recent research found that experiences of LGBTQ-related stigma and rejection were just as predictive of depression and anxiety in autistic transgender youth as in non-autistic transgender youth.

When our child is young we do not know what gender identity or sexual orientation they will ultimately have so it is important for parents to communicate that their child

will be loved and accepted no matter what their gender identity or sexual orientation will be. The following are a few ways of communicating LGBTQ+ acceptance and support within families for younger children:

- Provide stories, books, movies, and TV shows that include affirming story lines about LGBTQ+ people
- Make sure the family communicates clearly about how LGBTQ+ people are a valued and celebrated part of our society
- Make sure kids know LGBTQ+ people (such as in the media, family friends, at places of worship, etc.)
- Avoid assumptions (and statements) that imply that your child will be heterosexual/cisgender. For example, instead of saying, “when you have a girlfriend someday” try instead, “when you find a person you want to date someday”

And if your child has indicated that they are LGBTQ+, the following are some additional ways to support them:

- Explore with your child what they want and need from you regarding their gender or sexual orientation
- Learn more about LGBTQ+ communities and supports for LGBTQ+ youth
- Work with other family members who are less accepting to help them move along (or when necessary, shield your child from their negative judgments/behaviors)
- Provide support to your child (as they want/need) in managing social situations such as with “coming out” to others (e.g., how to “come out”, how to deal with people when they are less accepting). In some cases, parents may benefit from consultation with a specialist to know how best to support their LGBTQ+ autistic child around these types of needs.

Autistic LGBTQ+ youth may need more supports than neurotypical LGBTQ+ youth. It may be harder for them to effectively connect with LGBTQ+ communities, and advocating for their needs (such as around gender, dating, etc.) may require extra support.

We founded the **Gender and Autism Program at Children’s National** to support gender-diverse (transgender, nonbinary, gender exploring) autistic youth. We provide consultations and an ongoing affirming support program for gender diverse neurodiverse young people and their families. For autistic youth who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, we can also provide ideas for a range of supports and affirming communities.

The following are some additional resources:

The LGBTQ+ page on the Sex Ed for Autistic Self Advocates (good for parents and teens):

<https://researchautism.org/sекс-ed-guide-sexual-orientation-gender-identity/>

An article in the Washington Post on how to raise an LGBTQ+ child:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/parenting-an-lgbtq-child/2020/08/14/02892532-d727-11ea-9c3b-dfc394c03988_story.html

An article in Spectrum News on LGBTQ+ autistic people:

<https://www.spectrumnews.org/opinion/viewpoint/need-respect-sexual-orientation-gender-diversity-autism/>

The Children's National Gender and Autism Program website:
<https://childrensnational.org/departments/gender-development-program/gender-and-autism-program>

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Welcoming Schools initiative:
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/schools>

2021 Calendar of Events

Recreational Programs: Clubs & Activities

Where: Virtual through Ivymount School

When: Beginning week of February 1-March 26th

Virtual after-school clubs provide a space for participants to stay social, practice new skills and have fun. Groups are led by Ivymount's highly-trained staff and are designed for individuals of all abilities ages 6 - young adult. The upcoming spring session will run for 8 weeks. First session dates are the week of February 1st and will run through March 26th. Cost is \$80 per club (\$10 per class) *Minimum number of participants required for group to run.* Choose from the following clubs: games group, cooking club, IvyMoves Club.

Teen PEERS Program

Where: Virtual through Center for Assessment and Treatment (CAAT)

When: Tuesday nights, 5-6:30pm

PEERS® for Teens is a 16-week, evidence-based social skills intervention for motivated teens in middle and high school interested in learning ways to make and keep friends. The Teens program is open to clients age 13-18 who have difficulty initiating and maintaining friendships. Teens learn social skills through didactic instruction, live demonstrations by trained coaches, and extensive practice via group play activities such as sports, board games, etc., while receiving real-time, individualized coaching from clinical staff. Regular attendance is imperative to program success.

Adult PEERs Program

Where: Virtual through Center for Assessment and Treatment (CAAT)

When: Tuesday nights, 7:15-8:45pm

PEERS® for Young Adults is a 16-week evidence-based social skills intervention for motivated young adults, ages 18-30, who are interested in learning ways to make and keep friends, navigate social interactions, handle conflict and rejection, and develop romantic relationships. Young adults learn social skills by didactic and role play models, and then practice in a group session while receiving immediate, individualized coaching from clinical staff. Regular group attendance is imperative to program success.

Unstuck and On Target! Group

Where: Virtual through Center for Assessment and Treatment (CAAT)

When: February-June 2021: Wednesdays 5-6 pm (Kids group), 7-8 pm (Parent group)

Program for Students ages 8-11 who are on grade level academically and able to access learning through a virtual based instructional format, and who struggle with: self-advocacy, compromise, differentiating between "Choice" and "No Choice" situations, emotional self-identification, executive functioning skills, verbal and non-verbal social cues, how to be a successful member of a group, and flexibility.

Unstuck and On Target! Group

Where: Ivymount School*

When: Saturday mornings for 12 weeks, beginning March 6-June 12

Unstuck and On Target! is a research based intervention developed at Ivymount School to promote problem solving in students who struggle with executive function deficits. The curriculum explicitly teaches flexibility, coping, and goal setting through fun lessons that work for learners with autism, ADHD, and other challenges. This program is a learning experience for the whole family with weekly student classes, as well as, weekly parent classes.

*Programs will begin virtually and transition to in-person if advisable.

Game Time Group

Where: Ivymount School*

When: Saturday mornings for 12 weeks, beginning March 6-June 12

In Game Time, students are explicitly taught the skills needed to play structured and unstructured games with peers. Participants are encouraged to apply cognitive flexibility scripts and strategies, such as Plan A/Plan B, Big Deal/Little Deal, Compromises, and Expect the Unexpected. The program helps children manage the common challenges of game playing, such as not going first, taking turns, and winning and losing gracefully. **Based on the current circumstances, special emphasis will be placed on playing games in a virtual environment.**

*Programs will begin virtually and transition to in-person if advisable.

Secrets of Friendship

Where: Ivymount School*

When: Saturday mornings for 12 weeks, beginning March 6-June 12

This engaging curriculum gives your child the key "secrets" to making and maintaining a friendship. After determining who is a friend, students participate in engaging learning opportunities to explore how to make and maintain the friendship over time. The curriculum focuses on both explicit and non-explicit social skills that are required to make and maintain positive relationships. **Based on the current circumstances, special emphasis will be placed on navigating friendships in a virtual environment.**

*Programs will begin virtually and transition to in-person if advisable.

Self-Advocacy Program

Where: Ivymount School*

When: Tuesday and Thursday late afternoons for 12 weeks, beginning March 16-June 10

Using a program piloted at Ivymount School, students will develop self-advocacy skills through a variety of activities. By the end of the course, students will have identified their strengths, interests and challenges. The program is designed for transition aged students 14-18 years old.

For participants that reside in MD, funding is available through the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). If interested, speak to your DORS Counselor for a referral AND click below to apply through our website. Private pay participants also accepted.

*Programs will begin virtually and transition to in-person if advisable.

Annual Diamonds in the Rough Virtual Conference

Where: Virtual

When: March 12-13, 2021

The Diamonds Conference is a unique event at which parents, advocates, and professionals learn, connect, and share, with the goal of empowering children and

ultimately launching them to becoming independent adults. The eleventh annual Diamonds in the Rough Conference 2021 will highlight up-to-date information about executive functioning and ADHD. Innovators in their fields will present essential and practical strength-based strategies for parents and educators to implement at home and at school. Dr. Ned Hallowell will also be speaking at the conference.

Job Searching for the Neurodiverse

Where: Virtual

When: Saturday, March 20 10a-12p

In this virtual MGH Aspire Works workshop, participants will learn about their unique strengths and challenges through structured activities. Participants will learn how to use their knowledge of themselves to find jobs that match their skills and abilities.

This workshop will feature an overview of online job searching tools.

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 George Washington University

Collaborators in the Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders Institute at George Washington University are looking for participants for a research study. [See the flyer for contact info and more details on how to get involved.](#)

New Study at the Kennedy Krieger Institute

Dr. Amy Keefer and colleagues at the Kennedy Krieger Institute are seeking children with suspected autism spectrum disorder and anxiety to participate in a study. [See the flyer for more details and contact info to get involved.](#)

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

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](#)

[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](#)

