

CASD CHAT E-Newsletter

Self-Compassion and the Holiday Season For Autistic People and Their Families

It's hard to believe, but as November begins, we're once again beginning a time of year that holds a lot of joy for many families- the Holiday season! Beginning in November with Thanksgiving and generally ending in January with the start of the New Year the holidays are a time for many to take time off work, visit family, and reflect on the past year. But- along with all the joys this time of year can bring- come expectations. As a therapist, one of the hardest things I help individuals and their families navigate is what to do when they don't feel the way they think they *should* feel around the holidays.



- “My entire family is together- I *should* feel loved and included? Why don't I?”
- “I got the video game I've been wanting for months. I *should* feel happy, but I can't stop thinking about how Christmas trees don't belong inside. I can't wait for this season to be over.”
- “I *should* feel relieved that my mom came to town and took the kids out to Starbucks for hot chocolate, but why can't I stop checking my phone?”

“Should” can be one of the hardest words during the holiday season- especially for autistic people and their families who have so many “shoulds” thrown at them throughout the course of the year as it is. When I talk about this with my patients, one thing we focus on in navigating these thoughts is self-

compassion, or how to treat yourself and speak to yourself the way you would hope someone would treat/speak to your dearest loved ones. Here are some strategies and tricks that my patients and I use to practice self-compassion, let go of “should,” and find ways to celebrate things as they are.

1. Embrace Radical Acceptance

- Radical acceptance does not mean that we agree with, like, or condone the way things are. It’s just an internal shift where we acknowledge, even if only to ourselves, that it *is* the way things are.
- Just take a moment to tell yourself- “It doesn’t matter that *I should* be feeling happy calm, loved etc. I *am* feeling sad, scared, overwhelmed. That is the reality. No point in denying it.” This can be very healing and lead to a lot of relief!
- [Click here to learn more](#)

2. Try a 30-second Metta Meditation

- A metta- or ‘loving-kindness’- meditation is a very quick meditation that focuses on using imagery to take a little piece of the immense love that many of us feel for our loved ones or pets and practice turning it inward towards ourselves. Extending this compassion towards ourselves eases the impulse to get frustrated and down on ourselves when “shoulds” come up.
- [Click here to learn more](#)

3. Understand Alexithymia

- An extra layer of complication for many Autistic people during this time of year is something called Alexithymia. Alexithymia is the inability to identify or label one’s own feelings. Many Autistic people experience Alexithymia! When family members don’t understand this, it can create misunderstandings. Holidays increase situations where Autistic family members may feel criticized for “having a bad attitude”- especially around Thanksgiving when people are expected to feel and express gratitude! Having language to explain Alexithymia may help to ease expectations and pressures for Autistic family members.
- [Click here to learn more](#)

It may be helpful to start having conversations with loved ones now about how the holidays give joy and stress at the same time, and that feelings are hard to talk about. However you feel or whatever your celebrations may look like over the next few months, we all deserve to be treated with care and compassion and to feel valued. We at Children’s hope that this article can empower you to extend some of that compassion to yourself!



If you have feedback or suggestions, please scan the QR code or **CLICK HERE** to complete the survey! Thank you!

This article was developed by Ashley Muskett, Ph.D, and with the assistance of Andrea Lopez, B.S., CASD research assistant and Laura Campos, B.A., CASD research assistant.

Profiles Celebrating Neurodiversity

Dr. Neff

Dr. Neff is a neurodivergent (Autistic-ADHD) clinician, parent, and advocate. She works with late-in-life diagnosed Autistic and ADHD people and creates mental health and wellness resources with the neurodivergent person in mind.

She regularly speaks and provide trainings on topics related to Autism, ADHD, neuroqueering, alexithymia, and personality theory.

She is currently working on her forthcoming book, “Self Care for Autistic People,” set to release early in 2024.

She creates content on [Instagram](#) and [digital resources for Autistic and ADHD adults](#).

Find more on her website, [Neurodivergent Insights](#).



2023 Calendar of Events

ACEing Autism

Where: Southeast DC

When: FALL 2023 Session

- Saturdays: November 11, 18; December 2, 9, 16; 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (ages 6-18)

Register: [Click here](#)

Join the ACEing Autism Fall 2023 Sessions. We will be offering a 50% discount for Ward 7 residents. Full scholarships are also available. Class size is limited

to ensure a 1:1 volunteer/participant ratio. ACEing Autism is a private corporation with programs to support autistic individuals develop skills through sports.

Ivymount Fall Educational Groups

Register: [Click here](#)

Apply to participate in one of Ivymount's group programs led by expert teachers and therapists. Fall groups include the hallmark programs Unstuck and OnTarget! or Self Advocacy **AND a new Social Club!** Groups target different skills including executive functioning, flexibility, self-advocacy, transition, friendship, and social interactions. Questions?

Email outreach@ivymount.org

Partners in Policymaking

Where: In Person & Virtual Events

When: November 2023 - September 2024

Take your advocacy to new heights through Partners in Policymaking®! Maryland's year-long program prepares adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), parents, and family members of children and adults with IDD to be effective advocates at the local, state, and federal levels. Through 12 sessions, Partners in Policymaking® participants will learn about systems change: creating, working towards, and achieving a vision of shared values about people with disabilities. Partners graduates often become lifelong and long-term agents of change in the community. Partners in Policymaking® is free for participants due to the incredible financial support of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, with each spot in the program valued at over \$6,000. Applications for the 2023-24 Partners class are now open! Be sure to apply by October 16th at noon to participate in the upcoming class.

To apply and read more, [click here](#).

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](#).

Dr. Shapiro is offering new courses for parents of different age groups on a wide range of topics. Choose the topics that interest you. Real-life challenges. Real-life solutions.. To learn more about these courses, visit [parent-child](#)

[excursions](#): More information on various programs can be found on his website: <http://www.parentchildjourney.com/>

DC Peer Programs for Neurodivergent Youth & Adults

DC Peers is a community organization that offers social meetups, learning workshops, and a welcoming community to neurodiverse groups of teens and adults. Our neurodiverse staff have a lot of personal and lived experience with autism, ADHD, and other neurological differences, and we understand and embrace neurodivergent ways of being in the world. In our groups, folks can be themselves and connect – outside of clinics and therapeutic settings.

Register [here](#) for the following programs:

- Social Meetups
 - middle school, art, games, dungeons and dragons, teens discord and adult meetups
 - Support Groups and Facilitated Discussions
 - Teen and adult neurodiversity, women and non-binary persons support, and parent circle
 - Neurodiversity Workshops
 - Social Strategies Workshops
-

Participate in Research

Unstuck & On Target Intervention and Imaging Study

Children’s National and Georgetown University are recruiting for an exciting new research study looking at how kids with autism learn. We are looking at how *Unstuck and On Target: High School* impacts learning in kids 14-18 years old with autism. This intervention is designed to promote executive functioning skills including flexible problems solving, self-advocacy, and planning. Participation involves MRI scanning, cognitive assessments, and the treatment program.

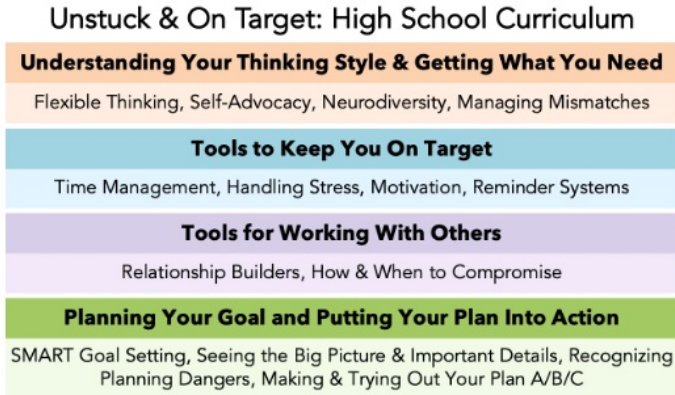
If interested, please contact Andrea Lopez at alopez4@childrensnational.org.

Unstuck & On Target High School Project

There is an exciting new research project from Children’s National Hospital and we are looking to partner with local high schools in the

DC Metro area!

In partnership with educators, autistic youth, and their families, autism experts from Children's National Hospital have developed an upward extension of the school-based *Unstuck and On*



Target! curriculum for **diploma-track, autistic high school students needing executive function and socio-emotional support**. This research-based curriculum is designed to be taught at school and targets transition-readiness skills such as self-advocacy, flexible problem-solving, time management, and independent goal-setting and planning skills.

We have received funding from the National Institutes of Mental Health to evaluate the (free) curriculum on a larger scale, and **we are looking for schools to partner with**. Once we receive approval from the school district, we will provide participating schools with free training, materials, and ongoing support for school staff to teach *Unstuck* at local schools.

If you are a teacher or parent and are interested in hearing more about how to bring *Unstuck* to your high school or school district, please contact Julianna McKenna at jmmckenna@childrensnational.org.

Praise from Parents & Teens

He has **needed less help** to complete schoolwork tasks. **Things got done** without me even knowing.

I learned that **being flexible isn't always giving in**. There are plenty of ways I can get what I want too.

It gave us **another way to communicate** without yelling or getting frustrated.

I think about what could happen, how I can **make the plan**, & how to make sure the plan **doesn't overwhelm me**.

ASD Research Study

George Washington University and George Mason University are studying brain development in autism. As part of the study, participants play child-friendly computer games while we track their gaze and brain function. Families can earn up to \$90 for participating.



We are recruiting 5-17 year olds with an autism diagnosis.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Chelsea Armour:

- Email: aarmour@childrensnational.org or andilab@email.gwu.edu

Daily Living Skills Study

The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into what daily living skills are important to you, and what is the best way to write questions about daily living skills for a new questionnaire.



We are recruiting 18-30 year olds with an autism diagnosis.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Jamie Kleiner:

- Email: dailylivingskills@chop.edu

PUSHED Study

Are you interested in a puberty and sexual health education program for autistic youth? We are conducting a research study to understand better how autistic youth and their families can learn together about pubertal development and sexual health.

We are inviting families with a child/adolescent diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder or who self-identifies as autistic and who is in the 9th to 12th grades or between 14 and 19 years old.



This is an online study. Families will be asked to complete the online puberty and sexual health toolkit, answer questions about their experience with the toolkit.

Families will be compensated \$100 for their time participating in this study.

Please contact Jenny Phan for more information about the study at (240) 397-8208 or jmphan@childrensnational.org.

ASD Research Study - DSCN Lab

Dr. Elizabeth Redcay at the University of Maryland, College Park and her team are studying behavioral and brain responses in children and adolescents on the autism spectrum during social interactions. Participation involves virtual visits, in-person visits, and longitudinal virtual follow ups over the course of about two years. Families can earn up to \$1000 for their time.

We are recruiting 11-14 year olds



with an autism diagnosis.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Kayla Pereira:

- Email: marylandbrainstudy@umd.edu

Unstuck & On Target Resources



A resource for **TEACHERS!**

- Free, asynchronous, online educator training
- First 600 to finish get 3.5 free CE credits!

Unstuck Elementary is a Tier 2 executive functioning curriculum

- Planning
- Transitioning
- Following directions

[Click here](#)

"One student had three meltdowns per day, and Unstuck reduced her outbursts to two a quarter."



A resource for **PARENTS!**

Free, online supports for preventing overload, compromising and staying motivated

Created by parents, educators, and experts

- 15 3-5 min videos
- 5 also in Spanish
- Tip sheets

[Click here](#)

"The videos made me feel less alone, and hopeful that there are more things I can try to help [my child]."



¡Feliz Mes de la Herencia Hispana!

Explora nuestros recursos en Español:

- Videos en Español
- Manual para padres en Español

[Haga clic aquí](#)

Unstuck Elementary es un plan de estudios de la función ejecutiva de Tier 2 para estudiantes neurodivergentes

A continuación: Todos los videos traducidos al Español Grabación de seminarios web en Español para implementadores

"Un estudiante tuvo tres crisis por día y Unstuck redujo sus arrebatos a dos por trimestre."



Un recurso para **PADRES**

- Apoyos gratuitos en línea para padres de niños con dificultades para manejar las emociones, concentrarse, hacer planes y más

Creado por padres, educadores y expertos.

- 5 videos de 3-5 minutos en español
- Hojas de consejos

[Haga clic aquí](#)

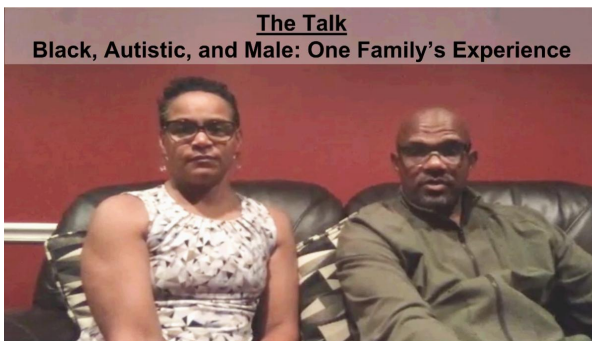
"Los videos me hicieron sentir menos solo, y con la esperanza de que hay más cosas que puedo intentar para ayudar [a mi hijo]."

The *Unstuck* author team has created short videos to help parents of children with executive functioning difficulties. Please click the playlists below to view the videos in both English and Spanish! **We have added new videos to address feedback from parents. Please click on our playlist to view our new 3-part video series on "troubleshooting."**



[Playlist of all videos](#)

[Recursos para padres](#)



[Click here for the video](#)

The Talk—Black, Autistic, and Male: One Family's Experience

We would like to share an interview with a family of a college-bound autistic young adult and an accompanying reflection by Tawara Goode, Director of the National Center for Cultural Competence and Director of the Georgetown University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

Additional Resources

Social Thinking Free Resources

For over 25 years [Social Thinking](#) has been a guiding resource for schools, clinics, and families around the world, and they're here for you, too! Their Free Stuff Portal is filled to the brim with teaching ideas and resources to foster the development of students' social competencies. Discover free support strategies to use with your students, clients and children.

[Click here](#) to view Hundreds of Free Resources

Ivymount Outreach Resource Guide

[Ivymount Community Outreach](#) partners with service providers to bring families a helpful one-stop spot for information. The Outreach Resource Guide 2023 is an online tool with information on 70 plus diverse organizations that provide specialized services. The Guide includes provider descriptions and links that help you easily navigate to meaningful supports.

[Click here](#) to view the Ivymount Outreach Resource Guide

Arc Maryland, "Together We're Better"

The Arc Maryland, with its statewide partners, provides a school inclusion program called ["Together We're Better" \(TWB\)](#). The objective of the program is to raise awareness of the value and importance of inclusion of students with disabilities. The program involves a 4-way partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, the

Maryland Department of Disabilities, and The Arc Maryland. [Visit the website here](#) to see the different components to the program, broken up for elementary, middle, & high school students.

DC Autism Collaborative

The [DC Autism Collaborative](#) (DC-AC) has developed several resources for parents of young children and professionals (including health providers, early childhood educators, and community leaders) on topics related to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). All materials have been, or are in the processes of being, translated into both Spanish and Amharic. These resources can be downloaded as PDFs, though we encourage you to [visit the website here](#) as we plan to update these regularly.

Pathfinders for Autism

Pathfinders provides a list of programs for all ages including video group for spouses/partners of adults with Asperger's; Transitioning services and Job skills; Baby and Family Navigator programs, and new this month, Autism from the Autistic Perspective and free Pediatric Occupational Therapy Screening and more! <https://pathfindersforautism.org/calendar/>

20+ free resources available to view anytime, anywhere!

Enjoy these [information-packed free webinars](#) on your own or make them a powerful group learning event with your colleagues, friends, and family members. Topics include:

- Working/learning in groups
- Face-to-face communication
- Social anxiety
- Executive functions
- Children's stress
- Self-regulation
- Individual webinars on 10 core Social Thinking Vocabulary

Hosted by Social Thinking

Supporting Mental Well-being

Yetta Myrick, Executive Director/President of [DC Autism Parents \(DCAP\)](#) and CDC's Act Early Ambassador to the District of Columbia has multiple resources to share with families to support mental well-being.

Additional Resources

Advocacy Resources

[Autistic Self Advocacy Network-Navigating College: A Handbook on Self Advocacy](#)

Resources on Anti-Racism

[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](#)

[Visit Children's National Hospital COVID-19 Resources](#)

Children's National Hospital, Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders | 15245 Shady Grove Road,
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