



TELEBEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Webinar Series:
**Supporting Autistic Females:
Strategies for Home and
Community**

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Michele Iemolo PsyD, BCBA, R-DMT;
Dina Hill, PhD

October 18, 2024

Introducing the Presenters

Ann Branscum is a licensed psychologist and a nationally certified school psychologist (NCSP). She currently works as an associate professor with New Mexico State University's Papen-Aprendamos Autism Diagnostic Center (ADC) as well as a school psychologist and autism evaluation team lead for Region 9 Education Cooperative. Dr. Branscum completed her predoctoral internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability (CDD) in the Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities Division (AODD). Dr. Branscum has extensive experience providing autism-related evaluation, intervention, and professional development services.

Michele Iemolo is a licensed psychologist with experience in the screening, assessment, diagnosis and treatment of children with autism and related neurodevelopmental disabilities. Dr. Iemolo has extensive training and experience in treatment approaches for children and families including applied behavior analysis, dance-movement therapy, as well as parent coaching programs aimed at improving social communication. Dr. Iemolo is professor at New Mexico State University (NMSU) and conducts diagnostic evaluations of children zero to five years of age within NMSU's Autism Diagnostic Center. Dr. Iemolo has a contract with Indian Health Services through UNM to develop and disseminate webinars in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders.

Dina Hill is a licensed clinical neuropsychologist with experience in the assessment and diagnosis of children with genetic, neurological, and neurodevelopmental disorders. Over the past three years, Dr. Hill has worked with the UNM CDD Prenatal Exposures Clinic and on the UNM Center grant investigating the effects of prenatal exposure on the developing child. Dr. Hill has a contract with Indian Health Services through UNM to develop and disseminate webinars in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders.

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Unmasking Autism: Towards a Better Understanding of Autistic Females

- October 4, 2024, 12-1:00 pm MT: Presentation

Supporting Autistic Females: Strategies for Home and Community

- October 18, 2024, 12-1pm MT: Presentation

Supporting Autism in Females

This webinar will focus on developing healthcare providers' skills in identifying reasons for the importance of timely identification of ASD in autistic females, adapting their practice to support autistic females, and counseling families in providing supports and resources for autistic females. Teaching tools will include a resource page and quick facts for providers.

Objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Examine reasons for the importance of timely identification of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in autistic females.
2. Integrate supportive strategies in clinical work with autistic females.
3. Counsel families in providing supports and resources for autistic females.

A note about language

Person-first language



"I am a person with autism"

Identity-first language



"I am autistic"

<https://starautismsupport.com/march-newsletter-autism-acceptance-and-advocacy>

"Female" Terminology

<https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sex-gender>

ASD Diagnostic Criteria: *DSM-5 TR*

- **Deficits in social communication and social interaction (3)**
 - Social approach/interaction
 - Nonverbal communication
 - Relationships
- **Presence of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (2)**
 - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, objects, speech
 - Routines
 - Restricted interests
 - Sensory



**Objective 1:
Examine reasons for the importance of
timely identification of autism spectrum
disorder (ASD) in autistic females.**

Why Identification Matters

Concerns with Under-, Mis- or Late-Identification (Begeer et al., 2013)

Delays Interventions

- Unique behavioral needs
- Unique social needs
- Sensory functioning

Social Difficulties

- Increasing complexity of social relationships
- Bullying (subtle, relational)
- Exclusion
- Coercion/Manipulation
- Understanding consent

Increase Chance of Mental Health Challenges

- Anxiety
- Depression, suicide, self-harm
- Eating disorder
- Impact of masking
- Impact of misdiagnosis

First Person Narrative: Eloise Stark

- Before I got diagnosed, I did not understand **why I felt different**. It was **lonely**. Just as I didn't understand neurotypical people, they did not understand me.
- “I was really badly bullied. Someone spat on me once, while others would react by getting angry. I would respond by saying “that’s a violation of the criminal behavior act” or something like that. It was not how people would expect you to react.” Eloise Stark
- Diagnosis as a child would have made a difference - I would have **understood myself better** and been able to have a **more positive autistic identity** rather than feeling like a part of it was missing.
- I am learning to be more **authentically autistic** and **authentically Eloise**, even if that means that I sometimes stand out. It's **wonderful and very liberating**.

(BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com.news/uk-England-51475739>)

Potential Benefits of Identification

- Access supports
- Increase self understanding and self acceptance
- Provide new communities of belonging



Objective 2:
**Integrate supportive strategies in
clinical work with autistic females.**

Supporting Autistic Females

1. Reframing our perspective
2. Recognizing and valuing strengths
3. Adapting ourselves and our environments
4. Supports for specific settings

1. Reframing Our Perspective

- Acknowledging and questioning the necessity of neurotypical practices
- Recognizing environmental contributions to disability
- Questioning the idea of “normal”
- Understanding and embracing neurodiversity

Reframing Our Language

(Price, 2022, p. 144)

Old Label	New Label
Stubborn	Assertive, Persistent
Wild	Energetic
Distractible	Perceptive
Picky	Selective, Discriminating
Demanding	Knows clearly what he/she/they want
Inflexible	Traditional; prefers routine
Anxious	Cautious
Explosive	Dramatic
Nosy	Curious, Inquisitive
Loud	Enthusiastic, Zestful
Argumentative	Opinionated, Committed

2. Considering Strengths: Neurodiversity Superpowers

Creative

Logical
thinkers

Adherence/respect
for boundaries

Attentive to Detail

Unique
perspective on
the world

Passionate and knowledgeable
about interests

Strengths-Based Resources

- **Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths Surveys**
 - Adult
 - <https://www.viacharacter.org/>
 - Youth (ages 8-17)
 - <https://www.viacharacter.org/professionals/youth>
- **Guide to using the Youth Survey with youth with disabilities**
 - <https://via-assets.global.ssl.fastly.net/76d1ea39-a4eb-4270-b9dc-899653415f8f/assets/VIA%20Supplement-%20Using%20Youth%20Survey%20with%20Children%20with%20Intellectual%20Disabilities.pdf>
- **Embrace Autism**
 - Superpowers, kryptonite
 - <https://embrace-autism.com/>

3. Adapting Our Environments

- Double empathy problem (Milton, 2017)
- Communication shifts
- Considering sensory needs
- Visual supports

Clear Expectations and Explicit Messaging (Price, 2022, p. 208)

- Specific plans
- A clear “yes” or “no”
- Advanced warning/preparation
- Detailed instructions
- Alternative methods of communication/interaction

Building Sensory-Friendly Public Spaces (Autistic Self Advocacy Network)

- **Visual**
 - Make lights **dimnable**.
 - Used **diffused light** sources rather than overhead or fluorescent lights.
 - **Limit “visual noise;”** remove distracting posters, graphics, etc.
- **Auditory**
 - Replace applause with “sparkle fingers” or another quieter alternative.
 - Equip spaces with materials that absorb and **dampen** echo, when possible. Even a large rug can make a difference!

Building Sensory-Friendly Public Spaces (Autistic Self Advocacy Network)

- **Tactile**
 - Make elbow or waving the default greeting, not handshaking or hugs.
 - Adopt a relaxed dress code.
 - Normalize the use of stress balls, fidget spinners, doodling, etc.
- **Olfactory (smell) and Gustatory (taste)**
 - Ban the use of perfumes or colognes.
 - Use physical distance, barriers, or fans to keep kitchen and bathroom smells out of other areas.
 - Use sensory-friendly, green cleaning supplies.
 - Provide “bland” foods as a backup.

Visual Support Examples

- **Labels, pictures, timelines**
- **Organizational systems**
- **Visual representation of expectations**
 - First->Then
 - Checklist of hygiene tasks
 - Daily schedules
 - Behavior Contingency Maps
 - (theautismhelper.com)
 - Social stories/narratives/scripts
 - Visual scaling
 - (e.g., *The Incredible 5-Point Scale Revised*)
 - What to expect with office visits and procedures
 - (e.g., *My Hospital Story*, Boston Children's Hospital, <https://www.childrenshospital.org/patient-resources/you-arrive/your-visit/my-hospital-story>)

4. Supports for Specific Settings

- a) Medical
- b) Education
- c) Behavioral Health

a) Supports in the Medical Setting

Neurodiversity-Affirming Resources

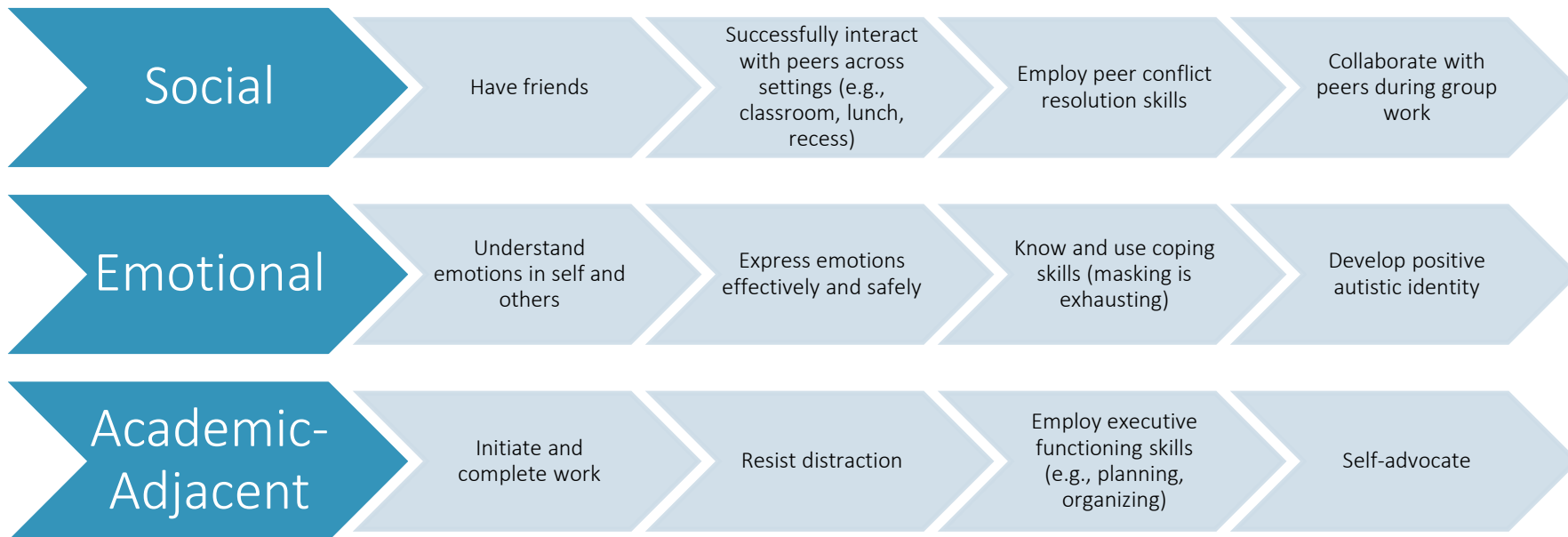
- Two Sides of the Spectrum Podcast (OT)
- Learn, Play, Thrive (Occupational Therapy, OT)
 - <https://learnplaythrive.com/>
 - Continuing education for becoming using strengths-based autism interventions
- Play, Learn, Chat (Speech and Language Pathology, SLP)
 - <https://playlearnchat.com/>
 - For Professionals dedicated to understanding and supporting Autistic & neurodivergent children in affirming ways.

a) Supports in the Medical Setting

- My Health Passport for Autistic People
 - https://dy55nndrxke1w.cloudfront.net/file/24/.ZuLn47.Z3Oq7eJ.ZkJp.0QsoHD/Health_Passport_A4_Editable_2022.pdf
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Caring for Transgender and Gender Diverse Clients:
 - <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/4/e20182162/37381/Ensuring-Comprehensive-Care-and-Support-for>

b) Supports in the Educational Setting

Areas to Consider if Support Is Warranted in the Educational Setting



Evidence-Based Educational Practices

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism, 2020

- 28 practices met criteria for “EBPs,” 11 practices with “some evidence”
- <https://ncaep.fpg.unc.edu/>

AFIRM (Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules):

- Provides modules, resources, and professional development options for each of the 28 EBPs
- <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/user/login>

National Professional Development Center (NPDC) on Autism Spectrum Disorders Model Training, March 2023

- Interactive training session that provides real-world application of evidence-based practices.
- <https://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/>

c) Supports in the Behavioral Health Setting

Neurodiversity-Affirming Resources

- **Onwards and Upward Psychology**
 - Neurodiversity Affirming Resource List:
<https://www.onwardsandupwardpsychology.com.au/post/neurodiversity-affirming-resources>
 - Books, resources, podcasts, videos, clinical skills workshops, parent workshops, social media pages
- **Therapist Neurodiversity Collection**
 - <https://therapistndc.org/>
 - Therapy, Advocacy, Education



Providing Support

(Hartman et al., 2023, p. 293-294)

- Client-centered
- Internalized ableism
- Camouflaging/masking; support the process of becoming more authentically themselves while remaining safe.
- Autistic burnout and energy accounting

Therapeutic Activities

(Price, 2022, p. 147-149, 163)

Reframing Autistic Stereotypes

I was told I was:	But actually I am:	I value this quality in myself because:
Arrogant	Confident Principled Independent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps me stand for what is right. • I'm often the first person to speak out about a problem. • I can set a positive example for others. •

From Deficit to Strength

	Reflection
Thanks to Autistic hyperfocus, I've developed these skills:	
Thanks to my special interests, I've learned a lot about these subjects:	
Being Autistic is hard, but it has made me resilient in these ways:	

Masking/Camouflaging Measures

Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q; Hull et al., 2018)

- Open access:
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10803-018-3792-6.pdf>
- 25 item self-report, sample UK population 16+
- Three subscales:
 - Compensation
 - Masking
 - Assimilation

Compensation Checklist (Livingstone et al., 2020)

- Open access:
<https://molecularautism.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13229-019-0308-y>
- 31 item Compensation Checklist
- Can be completed as a self-report or clinician measure
- Subscale areas:
 - Masking
 - Shallow Compensation
 - Deep Compensation
 - Accommodation

Autistic Burnout

- **Understand Autistic Burnout**

- *The Ultimate Guide to Autistic Burnout* E-Book: <https://embrace-autism.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-autistic-burnout/>
- *What is Autistic Burnout?* Guide from Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network: https://awnnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/autistic-burnout.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2uMBPD6H7HBcL2Ilc-1TBpBYfpl23bggdgBFGjKH67rffZddRk_IfAIDE

Energy Accounting

- **Spoon Theory**
 - Christine Miserandino

- **Energy Inventory**
 - Embrace Autism
 - Mild, moderate, significant, catastrophic

Providing Support

(Hartman et al., 2023, p. 293-294)

- Self-advocacy
- Disclosure
- Sensory functioning
 - Interoception: Kelly Mahler, <https://www.kelly-mahler.com/>
- Mental health challenges
- Safety

Crisis Support

<https://www.autismcrisissupport.com/resources>

- Warning Signs of Suicide for Autistic People
- Reasons for Living Resource
- Crisis Toolkit



**Objective 3:
Counsel families in providing supports
and resources for autistic females.**

Support Families

- Holding the tension
- Linking them with community
- Monitoring their own wellbeing
- Providing resources
- Increasing their knowledge of autism
 - Parent-coaching models (e.g., *Project ImPACT*)
- Increasing their understanding and value for:
 - Flow states
 - Internal drives, such as the need for stimming
 - Passions and interests

Quick Facts for Providers

Importance of Correct Identification of Autistic Females

- Address unique support needs
- Provide access to supports
- Build community
- Increase self-understanding and self-acceptance
- Support mental health and wellbeing

Adapting Our Environments

- Clear communication
- Explicit messaging
- Supporting sensory needs
- Using visuals

Adapting Our Perspectives

- Reframing our understanding of autism
- Embracing neurodiversity
- Using a strengths-inclusive approach
- Understanding masking

Supporting Families

- Link them with community
- Monitor their wellbeing
- Provide resources
- Increase their knowledge of autism

Resources for Providers

- **Books:**

- *Camouflage: The Hidden Lives of Autistic Women*, Bargiela, 2019
- *Divergent Mind: Thriving in a World that Wasn't Designed for You*, Nerenberg, 2021
- *NeuroTribes*, Silberman, 2016
- *Spectrum Women: Walking to the Beat of Autism*, Cook et al., 2018
- *The Adult Autism Assessment Handbook*, Hartman et al., 2023
- *The Ultimate Guide to Autistic Burnout* E-Book: <https://embrace-autism.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-autistic-burnout/>
- *Unmasking Autism*, Deon Price, 2022

- **Websites:**

- Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)
 - <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network (AWN)
 - <https://awnnetwork.org/>
- Embrace Autism
 - <https://embrace-autism.com/>
- Yellow Ladybugs
 - <https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/>

Resources for Autistic Individuals

- **Books:**

- *Camouflage: The Hidden Lives of Autistic Women*, Bargiela, 2019
- *Divergent Mind: Thriving in a World that Wasn't Designed for You*, Nerenberg, 2021
- *Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Autism*, Mendes & Maroney, 2019
- *Safety Skills for Asperger Women*, Holliday Willey, 2011
- *Spectrum Women: Walking to the Beat of Autism*, Cook et al., 2018
- *The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide*, Purkis & Masterman, 2020
- *The Ultimate Guide to Autistic Burnout* E-Book: <https://embrace-autism.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-autistic-burnout/>
- *Unmasking Autism*, Deon Price, 2022

- **Organizations/Websites**

- Autism National Committee: <https://www.autcom.org/>
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN): <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network (AWN): <https://awnnetwork.org/>
- Embrace Autism: <https://embrace-autism.com/>
- Yellow Lady Bugs: <https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/>

- **Online Groups**

- Peruse tags such as #ActuallyAutistic, #AutisticAdult, #AutisticJoy, #Neurodivergent, #AutisticSelfAdvocacy, #Neurodivergence
- Reddit: r/AutismTranslated; r/Aspergers; r/AspieMemes; r/AutisticPride
- Wrong Planet (<https://wrongplanet.net>): Long-standing forum for Autistic people

- **Special Interest Groups**

- Local comic book groups, anime/cosplay, foraging groups, hiking groups, etc.

Resources for Families

Guides

- Yellow Ladybugs: Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Girls and Gender Diverse Young People: <https://yellowladybugs.myshopify.com/en-us/products/hard-copy-resource-supporting-the-mental-health-of-autistic-girls-and-gender-diverse-young-people>

Books:

- *Ausome Parenting*, Loveson, 2024
- *Sincerely, Your Autistic Child*, Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network et al., 2021
- *The Pivot for Parents and Educators, Looking at Autism and ADHD Through a Different Lens*, Gallo, 2023
- *The Ultimate Guide to Autistic Burnout* E-Book: <https://embrace-autism.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-autistic-burnout/>

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 - <https://embrace-autism.com/>
- Yellow Ladybugs
 - <https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/>

IHS Previous Webinars

<https://www.ihs.gov/icp/training/>

Office Hours for Providers

- **Consultation Model**
 - One on one consultation with
Doctors Hill and Lemolo

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