

PROJECTSUN

Helping children flourish

Exploring the Autism Spectrum



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Word of the Month

Autism

"Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. There is often nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but people with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged."

www.cdc.gov, 2020 - "What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?"

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition which is characterized by restricted interests and activities and disturbances in social relatedness and communication. Autism is usually diagnosed in the first 3 years of life. Some of the early signs of autism are delay or lack of language development, repetitive motor mannerisms, poor eye contact, and lack of interest in peer relationships or making friends. Some children also demonstrate a lack of make-believe play and demonstrate a persistent fixation on certain objects.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), about **one in 54** children has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. It is 4 times more common among boys than among girls. The exact cause of autism is unknown. However, it is believed that autism may be due to multiple factors like genetic, environmental, metabolic, and neurological conditions. There is no link between vaccines and autism.

During the May Parent Café presentation, **Exploring the Autism Spectrum**, parents and caregivers will have the chance to learn more about the signs and symptoms of autism spectrum disorder, steps towards an official diagnosis, and treatment options. This event will be held via webinar on June 17 from 5:00 - 6:30 PM. For registration information, visit the Project SUN Facebook page or [CLICK HERE](#).

"The Misunderstood Child"

- Kathy Winters

I am the child that looks healthy and fine.
I was born with ten fingers and toes.
But something is different, somewhere in my mind.

And what it is, nobody knows.
I am the child that struggles in school.
Thought they say that I'm perfectly smart.
They tell me I'm lazy-can learn if I try-
But I don't seem to know where to start.

I am the child that won't wear the clothes
Which hurt me or bother my feet.
I dread sudden noises, can't handle most smells,
And tastes-there are few foods I'll eat.

I am the child with whom no one will play-
The one that gets bullied and teased.
I try to fit in and I want to be liked,
But nothing I do seems to please.

I am the child that tantrums and freaks
Over things that seem petty and trite.
You'll never know how I panic inside,
When I'm lost in my anger and fright.

I am the child that fidgets and squirms
Though I'm told to sit still and be good.
Do you think that I choose to be out of control?
Don't you know that I would if I could?

I am the child with the broken heart
Though I act like I don't really care.
Perhaps there's a reason God made me this way-
Some message he sent me to share.

For I am the child that needs to be loved
And accepted and valued too.
I am the child that is misunderstood,
I am different-but look just like you.

Confronting Racism and Its Impact on Children's Mental Health

Project SUN will be organizing opportunities for community members to come together to confront the negative impact racism has on children's mental health. Issues related to overt, systemic, and institutional racism will be explored, along with actions that can be taken to dismantle the structures that support these behaviors. If you are interested in helping to shape these opportunities, please contact Deb Baron at debra@cfkvr.org or call 815-304-5933.

"How to Talk to Kids about Race and Racism"

There's no such thing as 'quick tips' or foolproof advice when it comes to discussing the complexities of race. But, there are better ways to go about it and parents will have to decide for themselves what makes the most sense for them and their family.

[READ MORE](#)



Helpful Resources

We challenge you to read at least one of these resources!

Visit projectsunkankakee.wordpress.com/ to comment and share your thoughts or questions. Pass along what you find helpful to a friend or family member!

FRIENDLY READ - Less Than 5 Minutes

- "[What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?](#)" - Learn the signs and symptoms of autism as well as treatment options.
- "[Coming Of Age: Autism and the Transition to Adulthood](#)" - Focusing on daily living skills and strategizing a transition to adult services are two elements of planning for graduation from high school for a child with autism.

REFLECTIVE READ - More than 5 Minutes

- "[How to Work Well With Your Child's Therapist](#)" - 5 strategies to more effectively partner with your child's therapist.
- "[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - Overview](#)" - June is PTSD Awareness Month. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event.
- "[How to Decipher the Emotions Behind Your Child's Behaviors](#)" - Being open to your child's thoughts and feelings can help with the trickiest parenting struggles.

ACADEMIC READ - Longer than 10 Minutes

- "[Health Equity Principles for State and Local Leaders in Responding to, Reopening, and Recovering from COVID-19](#)" - A review of 5 health equity principles that can help local leaders as they seek to respond to COVID-19's impact.



July Parent Café



Project SUN's next Parent Café will be held **Thursday, July 16, from 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM**. Presenter Debra Tamez will lead participants in, "**Recognizing the Needs of Siblings Living with a Child Who Has Behavioral Health Concerns.**"

[CLICK HERE to register by July 15.](#)

Let's Talk - June 23, 5:30-7:30 PM

A virtual event will be held for Kankakee County young adults (16-21) to address the connection between **alcohol, marijuana, prescription drug misuse, and mental health**. This collaborative effort between Project SUN and the Pledge for Life Partnership is intended to gain feedback on how to best communicate with, and actively engage, young adults in promoting mental health and wellness by avoiding the harmful impact of substance misuse.

Do you know a young person who might be interested in joining this conversation? **[CLICK HERE to register.](#)**

Free Resilience Webinars

ChildSavers, a trauma-informed therapy organization, is offering free webinars for parents and educators on the topic of resilience. **[CLICK HERE for upcoming webinar dates.](#)**

Following Up With Theraplay Questions

These three key questions were answered by Theraplay therapist, Andrea Bushala, LCSW, at May's Parent Café on "The Importance of Parenting with Play." An "At-Home Theraplay Parents Kit" is available for purchase on the [Theraplay website](#).

If you did not grow up playing with your own parents, how do you learn how to play with your own children?

Watch how children play when they are together! They are very spontaneous. It does take time to get you out of your own head because it feels silly for people who didn't necessarily grow up with parents who would play with them. Once you get into it, however, it will come more easily than you might think.

What are Sunshine Circles?

Sunshine circles are group Theraplay activities that is a "whole person" intervention. This is proactive prevention through play at the whole classroom's level! Sunshine Circles do not have to be administered by mental health providers; they can be led by teachers, classroom aides, or social workers. Sunshine Circles are beneficial to all children. By giving early mental health support, the hope of Sunshine Circles is that a much more intensive and expensive intervention can be prevented later on. **[CLICK HERE](#)** for more information about Sunshine Circles.

Can Theraplay activities also be used with older youth, such as teenagers?

When people come to The Theraplay Institute and are interested in learning activities, we often remind them that we recommend games that meet a child's social and emotional age, which might be different from their developmental or chronological age. Theraplay has over 200 activities, many of which are appropriate for teenagers.

The nice part about using Theraplay with older children is that you can add humor to your play in a way that would not be appropriate for younger children. Owning that some of these activities may feel silly goes a long way!

Teens like challenges! Activities that focus on the element of challenge go over better with teens. With younger children, on the other hand, parents are better off adding the dimension of challenge later into the mix once they've mastered the dimensions of structure, engagement, and nurture.