

Accepting the Spectrum

A monthly newsletter sharing information and support for families, caregivers, and friends of children on the Autism Spectrum.

Written by: Olivia Sullivan, RBT

Valentine's day is right around the corner and it is a day filled with love! During this day, it is acceptable to show others how you feel by expressing how much you care about them. This might include hugging them or holding hands. However, some autistic children may experience sensory processing difficulties and may find additional affection overwhelming, leading to stress, sensory overload, and anxiety.



Understanding the Response to Affection:

Some children with autism may appear disinterested when engaged in play or in response to affection from loved ones while other children may be overly affectionate. Touch is a common aspect of affection that children with autism may respond to differently than other children. Touch is just one manifestation of sensory processing differences in individuals with autism. Some challenges with sensory processing include sensitivity to sounds, sights, and feelings which can be overstimulating, frightening, or overwhelming to children with autism. It is important not to force physical touch if it makes a child uncomfortable. It is likely that your child appreciates your company and enjoys the way you provide care to them even if they might show it differently. By being there to support your child in times of need, and engaging with their favorite activities and interests, you are providing the love, affection, and care that they truly need.

How to tell if physical touch is your child's love language:

- Your child likes holding hands with you
- Your child likes back rubs, or their hair brushed
- Your child asks for or seeks out hugs
- Your child likes roughhousing, or contact sports
- Your child likes to be cuddled with a soft blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal
- Bend down to your child's level with open arms. Smile and let your child know they are loved! See if your child runs into your arms, if not that is okay! They may not be ready for a hug yet

Activities that you can do to interact and show affection without overwhelming your child:

- Give high-fives, fist-bump, or thumbs up
- If high-fives may be too overwhelming, try "air high-fives" or "air clapping"
- Sit near each other
- Pat your child on the back
- Sing songs, or interact with hand motions and dancing (this stimulates the same 'feel good endorphins' as physical touch would)

Additional activities to try at home with your child

Create a sensory bin: This is a great way that your child can become familiar with new textures and touch. Common household items such as cotton balls, uncooked beans, uncooked rice, uncooked pasta, plastic eggs with hidden surprises inside, pom-poms, feathers, etc. This is also an opportunity to engage with your child by playing with the sensory bin with them!



Make playdough at home: Making playdough involves just three ingredients! Here is what you will need- 1 cup of flour, 1 cup of salt, 1/2 cup of water. You could also add food coloring. This is another great way for your child to become familiar with this type of texture. It is also an opportunity for your child to help make the dough and work on following one-step instructions!



Agency News:

Please welcome our new staff that have come onboard at Collaborative ABA Services



Meet Leandra - She graduated from the University of Scranton in Scranton, PA in 2018 with a Bachelor's degree in Health Sciences. The following year, she received her Masters degree in Occupational Therapy from the same university. At the beginning of 2020, Leandra began working as a vision therapist at 4D Vision Gym then transitioned into her current position as an occupational therapist in the Hartford Public School system. Leandra enjoys spending time with her family, staying active, painting, and golfing!



Veronica Saavedra is a Registered Occupational Therapist (OTR/L) who graduated from Bay Path University's Master of Occupational Therapy program. With 8 years of combined experience, her career first began as a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant. Veronica is passionate about serving the pediatric population and supporting individuals of varying needs to live to their optimal potential through meaningful engagement. She is excited to share her knowledge of utilizing evidence-based approaches, such as sensory integration to promote skills. In her spare time, Veronica enjoys spending time with family and her dog, hiking, traveling and, reading.



Meet Olivia- She graduated from the University of Maine at Farmington in Farmington, ME in 2019 with a Bachelor's degree in Rehabilitation Services. Upon graduating, Olivia discovered the field of Applied Behavior Analysis and has loved it ever since! She is currently a Registered Behavior Technician and has experience working in-home, in-clinic, and school settings. Olivia is pursuing a career as a BCBA and will graduate with her Master's in ABA from Western Connecticut State University in May. Olivia is passionate about helping others and her favorite part about working with individuals on the spectrum is having the opportunity to watch them grow and assist them in developing lifelong skills. Olivia enjoys spending her free time at the beach, snowboarding, and painting!

Lacresha Barnes- Behavior Technician

Courtney Sutcliffe, Behavior Technician

Katherine Izadi, Behavior Technician

Shevone Simpson- Administrative Operations Coordinator

