



Foundations

For Parenting

ALL Children



**“Don’t mourn
for us”
Jim Sinclair**

“You didn't lose a child to autism. You lost a child because the child you waited for never came into existence. That isn't the fault of the autistic child who does exist, and it shouldn't be our burden. We need and deserve families who can see us and value us for ourselves, not families whose vision of us is obscured by the ghosts of children who never lived. Grieve if you must, for your own lost dreams. But don't mourn for us. We are alive. We are real. And we're here waiting for you...”

...This is not the child you made all those plans to share all those experiences with. That child never came. This is not that child.” Then go do whatever grieving you have to do--away from the autistic child--and start learning to let go.

Professionals need to provide a safe place for parents to process their grief and let go.

“All children need positive, engaged, energetic parents!” – Robert Naseef

**Racial Disparities and Neurodivergence in
Autism:**

**Strategies for Systemic Change for Equitable
Care**

**2nd Annual Autism Symposium
April 21-22, 2022**

**Michael Hannon, Ph.D., Montclair State University
Robert Naseef, Ph.D., Alternative Choices**

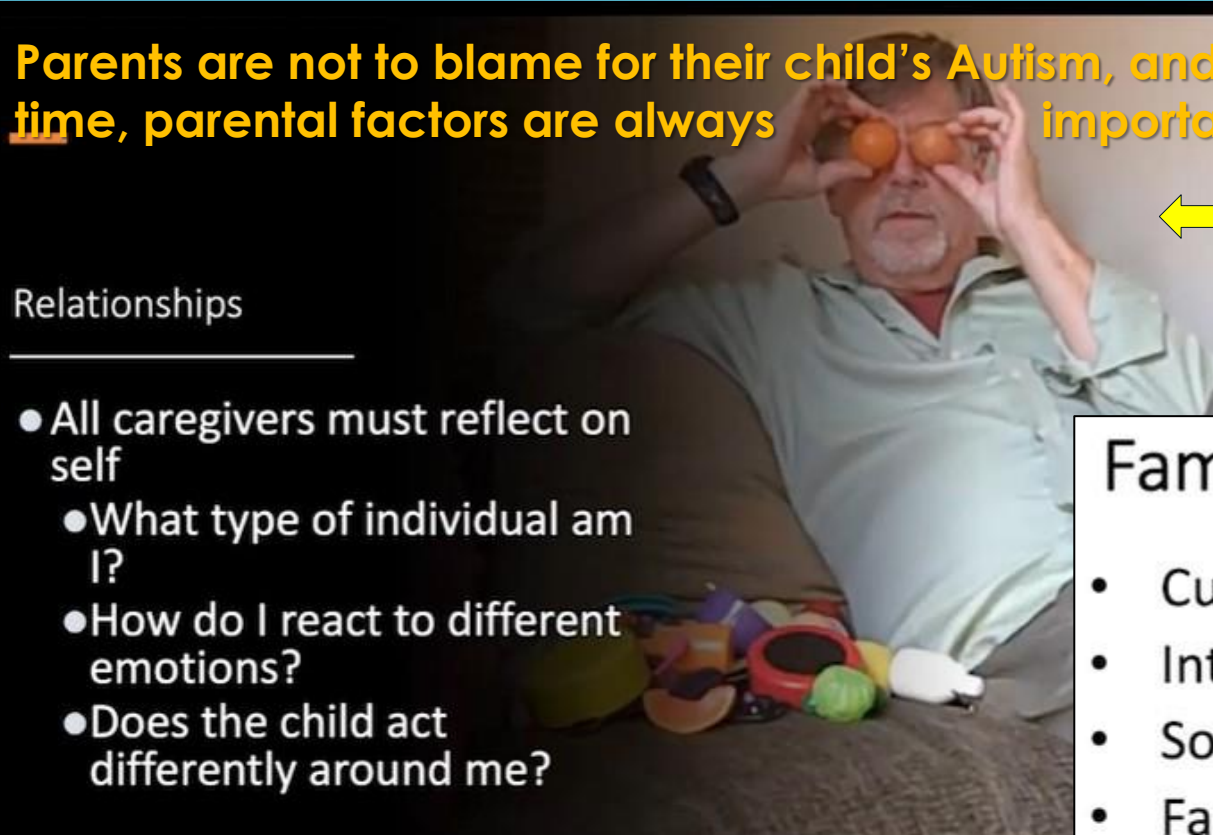
This **“grieving” process** is no different with ASD kids than with the parent who wanted their son to be a football star, but the boy never even liked sports; or the parent who wanted their daughter to be a cheerleader, but the girl was always far too shy to do anything in front of a group, much less a big crowd.

Parents are not to blame for their child's Autism, and yet at the same time, parental factors are always important to consider:

Relationships

- All caregivers must reflect on self
 - What type of individual am I?
 - How do I react to different emotions?
 - Does the child act differently around me?

“You have to think, as a parent: Am I willing to do certain things to help my child? Am I only happy when my child is happy? Can I tolerate only happy affect, or am I able to handle it when my child has less pleasant emotions? Can I tolerate it when others are sad? Can I tolerate it when another person is indifferent or ignores me? How do people typically react to me in my normal way of being? How am I affecting what's going on?”



Gil Tippy acting silly at home to connect with his toddler

Families

- Cultural Values
- Intergenerational Pressure
- Social Support
- Family history (e.g. neglect, abuse, trauma history)
- Coping Skills
 - Emotional availability or reactivity
 - Grief (shock, denial, guilt)
 - Coping patterns
 - Goodness of fit (e.g. play favorites)
- *Need to control/protect*
- *Warmth versus authority*
- *Desire for more or less information*
- *Internal family teamwork*
 - Communication styles
 - Division of labor
 - Emotional support
 - Ability to problem-solve

PESI
2022 Autism
Symposium



Helping Autistic Clients Relate and Communicate through DIR/Floortime®:
A Powerful Evidenced-Base Developmental Model That Works!
Gil Tippy, PsyD



The infant's mind is "wired" for relationship. It is in the context of relationship that development occurs.

The developing brain is "plastic" - malleable-able to grow and create new connections

Interactions with caregivers stimulate brain development

Harvard Study on Adult Development



The key to happiness and a long healthy life?
Relationships

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOogmgjFTYk>



Helping Autistic Clients Relate and Communicate through DIR/Floortime®: A Powerful Evidenced-Base Developmental Model That Works!
Gil Tippy, PsyD

"When I figure out what is important to the child, then I hang my intervention on that."

- Dr. Gil Tippy

Critical Features of Interactions:

- Warm
- Secure
- Regulating
- Engaged
- Pleasurable
- Reciprocal
- Emotionally Meaningful

How to Join With Your ASD Child:

- Mobilize Affect-the child's emotions, feelings, and expression of emotional response
- Ask yourself-What is the child's wish?
- Look for intent-how do you know what the child has in mind?
- Facilitate enactment-how can you help the child do what he/she wants to do?

“There’s no such thing as a ‘bad’ child, only an unhealthy, confused, unsupported, lonely, grieving, inexperienced, hurting, scared, immature, neglected, traumatized, blocked, ill-equipped, unskilled, or overwhelmed child ... with some kids also struggling with Autism.”

(credit goes to Dr. Ross Greene for first stating that kids aren’t bad, just unskilled and/or overwhelmed; quote adapted by Greg Handleton MA, LPCC-S, TRCC)

People with ASD Still Come into This World with the Normal Things, too ...

Personality & Temperament:

From: **The Parent Project**, a class we teach here at Juv. Court for parents of an out-of-control teen or teen who is engaged in self-destructive behaviors:

But remember, a strong-willed ASD child might **NOT** be rebellious so much as **overwhelmed**.

Strong-willed vs. Compliant Children

Strong-willed

- Frustrating
- Argumentative
- Traditional parenting generally ineffective

Compliant

- Try to please parents
- Listens to reason
- Traditional parenting usually effective



An ASD youth can have a “Compliant” personality that gets **masked** by the demands of their sensory sensitivities!

When it comes to an Autistic child *feeling or not feeling* loved at home, how true is the following statement? ... please explain your thoughts as to why it's true, partially true, or not true at all. Thank you!:

The child who is not embraced by
the village, will burn it down to
feel its warmth.

- African Proverb

Love and Affection

Our *MOST* effective parenting tool
must be expressed daily!

Love and affection are the keys to:

- Communication
- Discipline
- Self esteem
- Changing destructive adolescent behavior

Without demonstrated love and affection – especially when they need it the most (which is actually when they don't "deserve" it because of destructive behavior) – all kids will tend to question their worth both individually and within their family. However ...

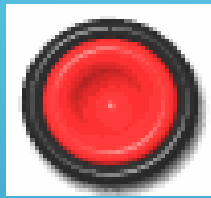
Love and affection are not received by ASD kids as readily as by non-ASD kids, however, a cold or unloving dynamic between parent and ASD child will surely be perceived by that child which, in turn, will only increase their stress reactions; feelings of insecurity, isolation, fear, anxiety, and shame; and a felt need to withdraw and react self-protectively.

From:
<https://parentproject.com>



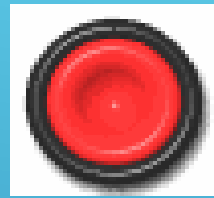
THE HUMAN HEART (MIND, SPIRIT, & EMOTIONS) IS LIKE A SPONGE

Slide created by
Greg Handleton
MA, LPCC-S, TRCC



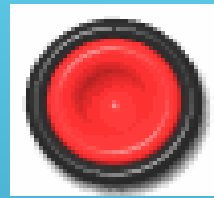
Vinegar

"I'm no good
- unlovable"



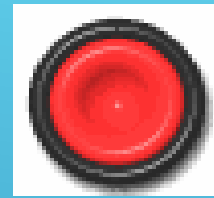
**Motor
Oil**

"I don't matter"



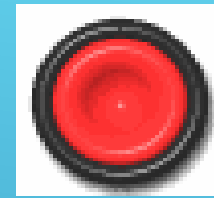
Ammonia

"I can't trust
people or God,
no one cares"



**Creek
Water**

"I have to do it
all myself"

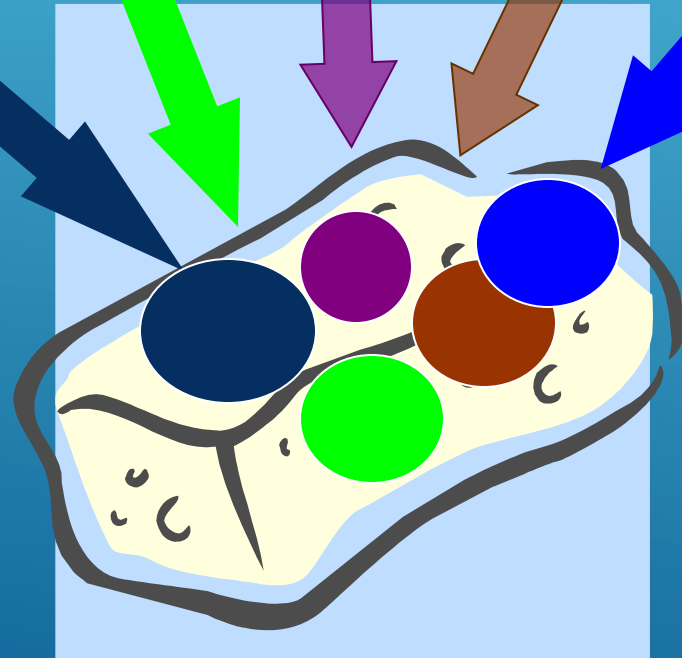


**Pure
Water**

"I am loved
unconditionally, even
when I mess up"

What are dry
sponges
really good
at? ...

Absorption!



How many
human
hearts are like
dry sponges
at birth? ...

*All of
them!*

What effect does unconditional love and affirmation have on the dirty sponge?

Toxic Adult Behaviors

The following parental behaviors are toxic to the relationship and will essentially put a "hole" in the bottom of your parenting "bucket," resulting in all positive outcomes "draining-out" and making things worse:

- Yelling/screaming/cussing
- Negative comparisons
- Scapegoating
- Threats of harm
- Name-calling in all forms
- Shaming
- Predictions of failure
- Character assassination
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Having (other) unsafe/unhealthy adults in the home
- Sarcastic put-downs
- Hitting/slapping/shoving
- Openly favoring siblings
- Invalidating of wants/needs/feelings
- Telling them they were a mistake
- Using the past against them
- Threats of abandonment
- Cold-shoulders & guilt-trips
- Neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Being absent, uninvolved, self-centered



These behaviors will put a hole in the bottom of the relationship bucket!

No matter how much expressed love, affection, and help a parent provides, they can expect all these efforts to amount to nothing – like pouring water into a bucket with a hole in the bottom – if any of these adult behaviors are also present in the relationship. In other words, no child – whether neurotypical or neurodivergent – will benefit from being **told** that they are loved if their parent is **also** screaming at them, calling them names, putting them down, or engaging in any other items from this list.

Healthy Replacements:

If one or more of the toxic behaviors on the previous list have become **bad habits/negative coping strategies** for you as a (stressed-out!) parent, **what you can do at this time is:**

1. Recognize and take full responsibility for your own behaviors without blaming your child for them,
2. Catch yourself as quickly as possible when you recognize that you're starting to do one of those toxic behaviors, and
3. Say something like this to your child instead (as awkward as it may sound): *"Sweetheart, we all have bad habits and I just caught myself starting to fall right back into one, one that I know hurts you and doesn't solve anything. I don't want to hurt you like that any more because you deserve Basic Respect as much as anyone else." I'm going to take a ___-minute Time Out until I know that I can talk with you in a better way. In the meantime, I need for you to stay here and be available when I'm ready."*

We will talk more about Time-Outs in a later unit, but we have added this here so that your efforts to show love and affection **are not destroyed** by toxic behaviors that might have been happening "under the radar" of your awareness so far.

No parent is perfect.
However, the point here
is this:

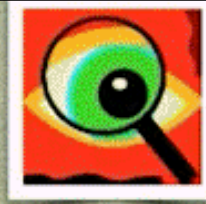
"Children might remember what you say, they'll usually remember what you do, but they will always remember **how you make them feel!**"

"If a child doesn't feel the warmth of love at home, they someday might burn it down **just to feel the heat.**"

In other words, parents should do everything in their power to not just **NOT** do "bad things" that are hurtful, but they also should **actively engage** in healthy and affirming behaviors that create, at best, a positive connection or, at least a "neutral" connection. The problem is when kids **feel unloved and rejected.**



Research on autism:



Studies have documented that schedules and routines influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development.

- Predictable and consistent schedules in classrooms help students feel secure and comfortable.
- Schedules and routines help children understand the expectations of the environment and reduce the frequency of behavior problems, such as tantrums and acts of aggression.

-Ostrosky, Jung, Hemmeter,
Thomas

Techniques for After an Autism Meltdown

Supporting Prevention of Future Eruptions

Kathy Kaluza Morris, MeD, BS

(Part of the 2022 Autism Symposium: What's New + What's Next in Supporting Clients on the Spectrum - by PEI.com)

“Kids, [even ASD kids,] need to be doing things. I get asked all the time, ‘What would you change about the public school system if you could?’ I tell them that I would put all the hands-on classes back in: Theater, Art, Sewing, Woodworking, Music, Welding, Auto Mechanics. All of these things expose kids to career options. We have a tremendous shortage right now of those clever visual thinkers who can fix anything. People I know who are [ASD] own metal fabrication shops, they are in photography, they’re in moviemaking,” etc. “If a child doesn’t get exposed to a lot of different things, they will not develop an interest in anything,” which results in the kid becoming an adult “playing video games in the basement” which results in them “not being able to support themselves.”

Dr. Temple Grandin

What is normal? - parental frustration: Parents are human, too, and can easily feel high levels of stress because of the constant demands that their child's ASD symptoms place on them ... not to mention that ASD kids can also be strong-willed, defiant, impulsive, emotional, etc.

And, it's also normal for parents to have the **same expectations** for their ASD child that they do for their neurotypical kids ...

... but unfortunately, this is where parents inadvertently cause a lot of pain for themselves!

A lot of these (unrealistic) expectations have to do with:

- 1) Eye contact
- 2) Sitting still while being spoken to
- 3) Using fully formed sentences / skillful use of words
- 4) Processing speed / how quickly their child responds
- 5) Remembering perfectly what the parent has said, point-by-point
- 6) Taking what the parent has said and following through with the expected behaviors

An OT with ASD, Kimberly Clair, says, *"I speak best when I'm moving!"*



It is out of frustration, then, that parents end up lecturing, nagging, and getting louder when expectations 1) through 6), above, are not being met over and over again. Unfortunately, this creates a Negative Feedback Loop of emotions and behaviors that the ASD child cannot break out of, and which the parent often doesn't know how to resolve. When emotional safety, love, and basic respect go out the window, so too should any expectation that the child will be able to perform.

There is a sense in which ASD kids need exactly what neurotypical kids need, namely:

- 1) **Patience as a foundation** for all conversations. If you immediately give off an impatient, critical, demanding, or condescending vibe, they're going to pick up on that and will shut down and/or resist you from the start.
- 2) **Support:** "Even though your behavior is making me feel stressed, I still love you, want what's best for you, and will still support you so that you can be successful." Showing basic love and affirmation even though they "don't deserve it."
- 3) **Practice:** Practicing new skills in a baby-steps fashion, starting with one realistic goal and moving up the ladder at a pace and at a level of difficulty that stretches them, but not too much!
- 4) **More patience**
- 5) **Praise**
- 6) **Avoiding causing overwhelm**

The Following, “Yes, absolutely” Skill Comes from *The Parent Project Curriculum*:

If neurotypical kiddos have trouble with being told “No,” then many ASD kiddos struggle with it even more. One way to bypass using the word “No” is:

Let’s say your child asks you if they can do something that you DO approve of, but you can’t say “Yes” to yet because there’s still something they need to do/finish first. Instead of saying,

- “No, you have to finish _____ first,” instead say,
- “Yes, absolutely you may _____, just as soon as you finish _____”+ “Take as much time as you need.”

See how this totally changes the negative into the positive while also allowing you to hold them accountable for something that they need to do/finish BEFORE they get to do what they want?

What if what they’re asking permission to do is something you CAN’T/SHOULDN’T say “Yes” to?:

- Say, “I can’t really say ‘yes’ to that, but I’m glad you’re trying to think of something to do.”
- Then, give them two or three APPROVED activities to choose from so that, no matter which one they choose, you can both live with that choice and also actively support them in it:
 - “I can’t let you go to Johnny’s house because we already know that they smoke pot over there and his parents aren’t always providing proper supervision, but ... instead I can take you to Jimmy’s house if his parents are home, Jimmy can come here, or you and I can go shopping for some school clothes (and Jimmy can even tag along) and then we can eat at Yummy Bowl when we’re done.”

Most Parenting of Autistic Children Involves Providing Support Much More Than Instituting Punishments or Implementing Normal Methods of Discipline*:

Defiance & Rebellious Behaviors That **ARE** Rooted in Underlying Issues (like Autism)

With **neurotypical kids**, you provide discipline **WHILE ALSO** addressing “underlying issues” like trauma, grief, learning challenges, social skills deficits, mental illness, and other life stresses. Remember, even with severe trauma, for example, you still can’t just give-in to every whim, since their immaturity combined with the effects of their trauma are still driving them in self-destructive directions. They need to be protected from themselves even while getting connected with therapy. Kids “with issues” still need the **security** of knowing that you are the responsible adult in charge. Kids who end up raising themselves or getting to do everything they want to do because their parent(s) are too afraid to exercise healthy and appropriate parental authority end up actually resenting it later on: *“Why didn’t you love me enough to discipline me properly?”* Still, when disciplining a neurotypical child who is struggling with multiple issues at once - any one of which would make even an adult’s life difficult - the “proper implementation of discipline” should look **less** like punishments and more like **providing** support, providing structure, helping them to develop their (healthy) interests and skills, helping them to develop healthy friendships, reminding them that they’re loved, etc. Successful parents are those who provide discipline, **in a consistent, loving, and supportive manner**, not in an angry, shaming, whimsical, or emotionally distant or rejecting manner. Expressing your love right after your child messes up is NOT the same thing as condoning their bad behaviors.

Defiance & Rebellious Behaviors **NOT** Rooted in Underlying Issues

Providing Consistent & Loving Discipline to Create an Internal Locus of Control

Support & Meeting Underlying Needs

* The reason for this is because an Autistic child can't just turn off their Autism. Therefore, they should not be punished for behaviors that represent reactions to their own ASD symptoms.

Before a School Can Expel a Child on an IEP ...

They have to first show that the behavior that got the child in trouble was NOT directly related to their mental, emotional, or behavioral disability.

Therefore it also makes sense that parents with an ASD child should be asking the same question before deciding what to do:

- If your child's harmful behavior **IS** directly related to their Autism, you want to move away from discipline/punishment and towards support, problem-solving, improving communication, making environmental adjustments, providing physical helps (like weighted vests, noise-cancelling headphones, or anything else they might need on a physical basis), etc.
 - **NOTE:** Some parents of ASD children have disciplined their ASD child in the same way they have disciplined their non-ASD children ... *with varying degrees of success and non-success.*
- If your child's harmful behavior **IS NOT** directly related to their Autism, then logically you should be able to move away from providing supports and towards providing discipline/punishment, right? ...

... the problem is, Autism is not just a "part" of your child, rather, it infuses and effects everything they think, feel, say, and do ...

... therefore, it is important to remember that with ASD children, 99% of the time, what they need is **help, support, collaborative problem-solving** (see www.livesinthebalance.org), **accommodations, and expectations that are adjusted to their capacities** rather than trying to force them to fit (school) standards that are not realistic. Not to say you shouldn't challenge your child and expect success, rather, **it's important to be proactive in educating the school system in what your child's needs demand from all of the adults around them.**

Speaking of School Standards:

As of right now in 2025 with President Trump being in office, and with the dissolution of the National Education Association (NEA), I wonder if Ohio is still following the same standards that have been handed down from the national level, or, is the state and/or local school districts taking steps to develop their own standards ... especially when it comes to educational testing and whether or not standards will apply equally to ASD students across the board? Perhaps this is an ideal time for parents of Autistic children to join the PTA and get involved, since (1) federal pressure is gone, (2) rates of Autism are on the rise, therefore, school districts can't just close their eyes and hope that the problem goes away, and (3) now there's more freedom within each district to do what they feel is best with the resources they have ... ?

Affirmations

➤ Research shows it's best to praise kids for **effort**, not smarts, or even for success. If you're going to praise them for success, be sure to emphasize how great it was that they put in the EFFORT to become successful.

<https://ohioemploymentfirst.org/the-journey-a-suite-of-resources/Autism-and-Trauma>

▶ Affirmations for Kids

- ▶ Positive feedback for positive behavior
- ▶ Positive feedback for success
- ▶ Immediate affirmation (catch them doing good):
 - ▶ “You helped your sister set the table, thank you!”
 - ▶ “You were frustrated, but you used your coping skill!”
- ▶ Delayed affirmation (if immediate affirmations embarrass them)
(Or if they're busy & won't really be able to receive the feedback until later)
- ▶ I am: _____



The success of parenting ANY child always involves the principle of **CONSISTENCY**:

One 30 year-old Autistic teacher (whom I'll call "Paul" and who now teaches at the Junior High for neurodivergent youth where he himself had once attended) expressed the following: "Consistency is the key" ... and he also has two older brothers who are both on the Spectrum as well! Can you imagine what their mother had to deal with *before* the right medications became available (i.e., this man takes Concerta for AD/HD, and his mother stated – in my presence – that, "Since he's living with us right now, he's not allowed to come downstairs until he has taken his medication ... he's the Devil if he doesn't!")

This man's mother also explained to me that she disciplined her boys just like she would have disciplined them if they were not Autistic. For them, it worked. When I asked her son if he thinks it's a bad idea to take things away from Autistic kids as a form of discipline, he thoughtfully replied: "It worked for us, but now I'd say you have to take it on a case-by-case basis" since some Autistic kids do and will have unresolvable meltdowns any time a preferred item/toy is removed. This is because their Autism has them so fixated on that item/toy, their nervous system literally cannot calm down afterwards and the child literally cannot learn anything from that form of discipline *because* their nervous system can't calm down.

This man credits his mother's consistency with being one of the main factors that helped him to grow up and become a functional and employed adult today.

One Autistic man who has earned his Master's degree in Education told me that Boy Scouts was a tremendous help to him. In Scouts, he and his brothers all earned their **Eagle Scout** ranking. This, of course, is a great thing to be able to put on one's resume ... i.e., employers love to see this kind of thing because it automatically proves that the young person applying for the job has spent years remaining focused, showing up, starting and finishing sequences of tasks, learning new skills, helping others, planning for camping trips, following directions, and caring about the community around them.

This teacher explained that, in essence, being involved with Boy Scouts **“helped me to develop independence”** since age-appropriate activities at all levels of Scouting are designed to foster responsibility and problem-solving. However, he made it clear that the only way he was able to be successful in Scouts was because **one or both of his parents were there at every Troop meeting and every camping trip**. In other words, his parents were supportive and present without being smothering or controlling. For Autistic kids who generally are not as sensitive to social stigma, their parent's presence serves MORE as a support than as a hindrance. His parent's presence also allowed for his peers to become more familiar with and accepting of his Autism, resulting in a more unified Troop.

Other things that being involved with Scouts helped him with:

- Budgeting his money when on trips with the Troop / Teamwork (which is huge in our post-COVID world)
- Managing transitions between tasks and activities / Asking for help
- Social learning in a supportive environment / Managing conflict and competing wants/needs