



REFLECTION

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MOMVERSATIONS: RAISING CHILDREN ACROSS THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

We're introducing *Momversations*: a new series highlighting the experiences of moms with children on the autism spectrum.

In this month's Momversation, Alicia Curran, Director of Operations at ECHO Autism, and Jenn McNaught, CEO and fellow autism mom, dive into parenting children on different ends of the spectrum. From explaining the diagnosis to their children, to how strangers perceive them in the world, these moms get real about expectations, labels, and what it really means to be an autism mom.

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WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS SO IMPORTANT?

In September 2020 ECHO Autism Communities, the Missouri Department of Mental Health, and Autism Speaks partnered to launch **ECHO Autism: Mental Health**.

The overarching goal of this program is to increase access to community-based clinicians who are well-equipped to deliver best-practice therapeutic modalities modified for individuals with autism. The program focuses on increasing clinician self-efficacy in identifying the need for and implementing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as one component of a comprehensive treatment plan for people with autism co-occurring psychiatric conditions.

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HOW CAN WE HELP PATIENTS TRANSITION TO ADULthood?

Transitioning to adulthood is no small feat for any child. From considering legal guardianship, to developing a plan to remember to take medication, to determining the likelihood of continuing postsecondary education, there are dozens of details to consider throughout this phase of life. Regardless of age, it's never too late to sit down and put together a plan for the future. By talking through an ideal future plan and taking small steps to reach it, families can have a better chance at helping their child reach their goals. The following resources provide excellent information to utilize and several considerations to think about while planning for transition:

- [Autism Speaks Transition Toolkit](#): This 118-page resource, reviewed by physicians, professors, doctors, and parents of children with autism, is full of contacts, questions to consider, and activities for families to work through. By including interactive exercises to help make decisions in job planning, housing, and other topics, this resource allows families to walk themselves through planning for transition, all while having access to specialists noted in the guide.
- [Puberty and Self Care](#): Explaining the unforeseeable changes in your body and how to care for yourself while going through puberty can be hard, no matter how mature a child is. These five resources on the ECHO Autism website provide easy ways to explain an array of topics related to bodily changes in teenagers.
- [Life Journey Through Autism](#): While in high school, a child with autism must work with their family to talk about what their life may look like as an adult. This resource guide tackles these age-specific topics, like considering agency help, employment, and life skills.
- [Charting the Lifecourse](#): This 20-page guide is extremely thorough in walking families through questions they should be asking themselves while planning for transition. The guide splits up questions into six main topics: daily life and employment, community living, safety and security, healthy living, social and spirituality, and citizenship and advocacy.
- [Community-based Skills Assessment \(CSA\)](#): This resource helps families work through a series of observation and question-based assessments to gather information for young adults on the autism spectrum to gauge their readiness to be more independent. Working through this resource can help families make a plan based on how the assessment's results guide them.
- [MODDC Supported Decision Making](#): This website includes 11 PDF resources ranging from guardianship to maximizing employment. This is a great resource to learn about different forms of legal decision making.





TRANSITIONING TO ADULthood: THE VANDERBILT ADULT PROGRAM

Every year, approximately 50,000 people with autism turn 18-years-old and transition to adult health care. In an effort to increase access to community-based primary care physicians and practitioners (PCPs), who are well-equipped to deliver best-practice autism care, Vanderbilt University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Missouri developed a program that enhances provider expertise to meet the unique needs of this population.

With funding from a Department of Defense grant, **ECHO Autism: Adult Healthcare** launched a six-month pilot study in November 2020 with 20 participating PCPs across the United States.

Read more about the initiative below!

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SPOTLIGHT ON: ENCIRCLE TECHNOLOGIES

EnCircle Technologies, a program of Mid-Missouri's non-profit group Woodhaven, is a center for training and educating people on the autism spectrum.

Columbia, Missouri is a hub for families with autism, due to the local access to autism specialists and research facilities. Founded by Teri Walden and Becky Llorens, this program offers three types of classes- social skills, tech skills, therapeutic recreation- to anyone neurodiverse from school age and older.

The first EnCircle class was taught to three students by one instructor in Llorens's basement and has been growing since then. Popular classes include "Make Your First Video Game," "Improv For Fun & Self Expression," and "Intro to C++ Programming." While many classes have been taught via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, classes are typically held at the program's downtown Columbia location.

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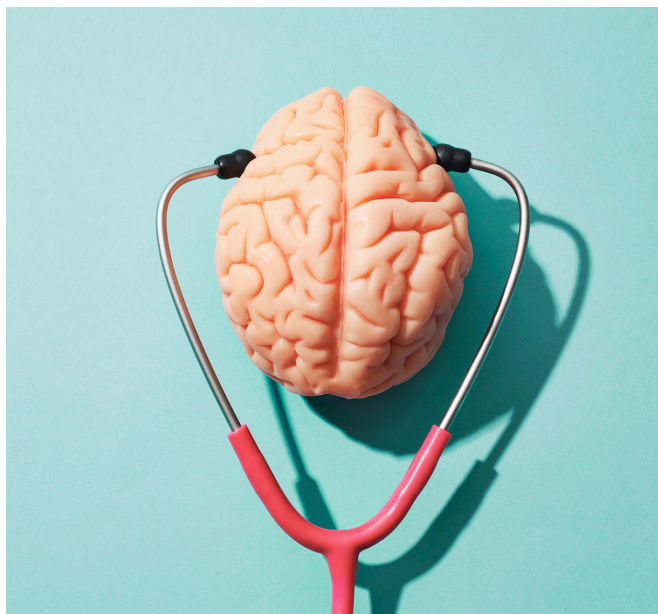


EXPERT VIDEO: CAN ADULTS GET AN AUTISM DIAGNOSIS?

In 2020, the first study of autism adults in the United States estimated that 2.2% of American adults are autistic. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that adds up to about **5.4 million, or, 1 in 45 people**. More than ever, as our understanding and awareness of autism has grown, adults may be asking themselves "is it too late for me to get an autism diagnosis?" The answer is, of course not!

Check out this month's Expert Video, "*Adults Can Get an Autism Diagnosis*" with Dr. Brenna Maddox.

Dr. Maddox is an Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, in the Department of Psychiatry. As the implementation scientist for the TEACCH Autism Program, her work focuses on improving community services for people on the autism spectrum across the lifespan.



DID YOU WATCH THE TAKE ACTION MENTAL HEALTH WEBINAR?

Don't miss this important conversation about mental health inside our on-demand webinars! This April, the ECHO Autism Hub Team sat down to discuss mental health across the lifespan for individuals with autism and their families.

Join Board Certified Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist Rachel Brown, MBBS, Licensed Clinical Social Worker & Training Manager at ECHO Autism, Melinda Odum, Autism Parent and Advocate, Ellie Madigan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Dr. Brenna Maddox, and Executive Director of ECHO Autism, Dr. Kristin Sohl, for this one-hour conversation about mental health.

Together, the team discusses co-occurring psychiatric disorders in autism, how to recognize them, treatments across the lifespan, and so much more.



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AUTISM 2021 SYMPOSIUM:
NOW AVAILABLE
ON-DEMAND IN OVER 100
LANGUAGES!**