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The UF-JAX CARD program provides support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism spectrum disorders and related disabilities. Services are provided at no cost. The UF-JAX CARD program provides services to Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, and St. Johns counties.

Summer Smiles: Teaching Kids to Manage Big Emotions

By Brett Walden, MPH

Summer gives families a chance to slow down, relax, and enjoy more time together. It's also a great time to help children learn how to understand and manage their emotions. One of the best ways to teach this is by modeling it yourself. When you feel upset, try talking out loud about what you're feeling and what you're doing to calm down. For example, you might say, "I'm feeling a little stressed, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths."

Children learn a lot just by watching how adults handle emotions. Sticking to simple routines—like regular meals, bedtimes, and quiet time—can also help kids feel safe and more in control of their day.

It's important to help children name their emotions and know that all feelings are okay. When your child is upset or excited, you can gently name what they might be feeling: "You seem really frustrated that your game isn't working," or "You're so

Continued on pg.2



CARD's Mission

To educate and empower individuals and families throughout the lifespan by providing support, assistance, and awareness within the community; with the goal of optimizing the potential of all individuals with autism and related disabilities.

Upcoming Events

Oct. 23 UF Fall Festival

Jan. 16— 33rd Annual CARD
Jan. 18 Conference
2026 (Orlando)

Join the CARD Weekly Update
Email Newsletter.
To sign up please email
Anthony.Rhodes@jax.ufl.edu.

excited about going to the park!” Naming emotions helps kids understand what’s going on inside and gives them the words to express themselves. You can also help them learn calming strategies like deep breathing, counting to ten, or taking a break with a book or toy. Making a calm-down space or a kit with favorite calming items—like coloring pages, a stuffed animal, or fidget toys—can make this easier and even fun.

When problems come up, like disagreements with siblings or changes in plans, talk through the situation together. Ask simple questions like, “What happened?” and “What could we do differently next time?” This helps build problem-solving skills and emotional resilience. Most of all, make sure to spend quality time with your child every day. Play a game, read a book, or just talk and listen. These moments of connection show your child they are loved and supported, which helps them feel more confident and better able to manage their emotions. A summer filled with teachable moments, family connection, and gentle guidance can help your child grow into a more emotionally strong and aware person.

Here’s a list of engaging and age-appropriate books that help children understand and manage their emotions. These titles are great for starting conversations about feelings and emotional regulation at home:

For Ages 2–6 (Toddlers to Early Elementary):

- 1) *The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions* by Anna Llenas
- 2) *In My Heart: A Book of Feelings* by Jo Witek
- 3) *Grumpy Monkey* by Suzanne Lang
- 4) *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang
- 5) *A Little Spot of Emotion Box Set* by Diane Alber

For Ages 6–10 (Elementary Age):

- 1) *What Should Danny Do?* by Ganit & Adir Levy
- 2) *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- 3) *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain
- 4) *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss
- 5) *Breathe Like a Bear* by Kira Willey

Working Together: Building Connections Between Families and Teachers

By Sarah Falls, M.S., CCC-SLP



Whether your child is just starting out in school or navigating the teenage years, having a strong, trusting relationship with their teacher can make a real difference, especially when your child has learning differences or receives special education support.

1. Start with a Hello

Reach out early in the school year, even if it is just a quick email or note. Let the teacher know a little about your child, like what lights them up, what they find challenging, and what helps them at home. That small gesture can go a long way in setting a positive tone and helping the teacher understand your child beyond the paperwork.

2. Keep the Connection

You don't need to wait for a formal meeting to check in. A short message here and there can help keep everyone in the loop. If something changes at home, like a new routine, a health issue, or a tough week, sharing that can help the teacher understand and support your child better.

3. Go into Meetings Ready

Before any school meeting, take a few minutes to think about what's working, what's not, and what you'd like to see happen next. Write down questions or concerns. If something doesn't sit right with you, speak up, but try to keep the conversation focused on finding solutions together. You are all there to help your child succeed!

4. Lean on the Whole Team

Your child's support system might include teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and counselors. Each person brings something valuable to the table. Share what you see at home and listen to their insights. When everyone works together, your child gets more consistent and individualized support.

5. Let Your Child Take the Lead (When They're Ready)

As children grow, it's important to help them speak up about their own learning. Encourage your child to share what is working and what is difficult. If they're comfortable, let them be part of meetings or conversations. Learning to advocate for themselves builds confidence and independence.

6. Celebrate the Little Things

Progress doesn't always come in big leaps. Sometimes it's a small win, like a good day, a new word, or a moment of calmness. Share those wins with your child and their teacher. It keeps everyone encouraged and reminds your child that their efforts matter.

At the end of the day, families and educators are on the same team. When we work together, we create a space where children feel supported, understood, and ready to grow.

CARD Social Events & Support Groups



CARD Adult Resources and Support Group

1st Wednesday of each month. Adults with autism spectrum disorder will have the opportunity to engage in facilitated social conversations via Zoom. We will be having a varying rotation of topic discussions, that include adaptive, life and social skills. For additional information on how to register, please contact bernardo.cuadra@jax.ufl.edu.

CARD Retro Diner Hour

A support group for adults on the autism spectrum. The focus of Retro Diner remains on building social skills and fostering independence. Participants will be fully responsible for ordering, requesting, paying, and socializing for themselves. Location changes from event to event. Parents or transportation providers must be present and remain on-site during Retro Diner unless the adult participant is responsible for their own transportation. Parents can use this time to connect with other parents and enjoy themselves while the group is in session. If you have any further questions, please contact bernardo.cuadra@jax.ufl.edu.

Growing Girls (ages 8-12 years)

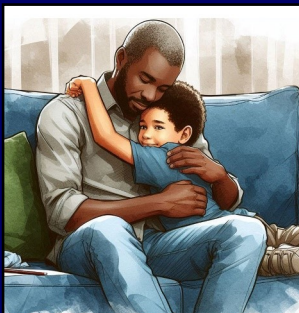
Growing Girls is a supportive group designed to help tween girls (8-12yo) with autism and related disabilities navigate the unique challenges of growing up. Through engaging activities and guided discussions, participants will learn about personal hygiene, making healthy choices, developing and maintaining friendships, and practicing essential social skills. To benefit fully from the program, participants should have a level of communication that allows them to express their needs and interact with others. For additional information on how to register, please contact jamie.park@jax.ufl.edu.

CARD-io: Indoor Walking Group for Adults

Join CARD-io, a fun, fitness-focused walking group for adults with autism and related disabilities. Our INDOOR workouts feature upbeat pop music while we walk or speedwalk together, aiming to reach a set step goal each session. No prior experience is needed—just bring your energy, wear comfortable clothes and sneakers, and don't forget a water bottle. Get fit, make friends, and enjoy moving to the music! Ages 18+. For more info contact Jamie.Park@jax.ufl.edu



CARD Parent and Community Support Groups



After the Diagnosis: Social/Emotional Disorders

A Parent Support Group for families that have recently received a medical diagnosis for their child. This group will offer resources and guidance on "what to do next" and how to process your child's diagnosis. Together, we'll address the mixed emotions that often come with receiving a medical label. The more the family understands the characteristics of your child's diagnosis, the better the family can support the child. For more information please contact lotoya.odom@jax.ufl.edu.



Teacher Strategy Hour (online)

Teachers, are you running into some challenging behaviors? If you said yes, then consider joining Teacher Strategy Hour - a group designed to help you learn new strategies from your peers. Before joining, teachers are requested to share a scenario they are struggling with. During the group session, these scenarios will be discussed collectively, allowing participants to "fish bowl" ideas and strategies for addressing challenging behaviors or working with specific students. All scenarios will be kept anonymous and won't include individual names. The group's purpose is to establish a community of educators that openly share strategies and resources within our communities. The group meets once per month virtually. For more information contact brett.walden@jax.ufl.edu.



Parent Support Group (online)

A Parent Support Group led by the UF Health Jacksonville CARD and FLDRS-MDC clinician. It's conversation-based with the goal of helping strengthen the relationship between child and parent, while learning about resources and supports from other parents with professional support. Parents will be able to join virtually from the comfort of their home. For more information please contact chanel.baldwin@jax.ufl.edu.



Black Parent Outreach: An Initiative to Include & Inform

The purpose of this group is to help spread awareness of the characteristics and disparities of developmental, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social disorders /disabilities to practitioners and Black families. Parents will have to opportunity to hear from panelists, professionals in the community, and to sign-up for our mentorship program. For more information please contact lotoya.odom@jax.ufl.edu.

Moving with Confidence: Summer Relocation Tips for Families of Children with Unique Needs

by Maria J. Robles, Ed.S.

Summer is a popular time for families to move—whether it's across town or to an entirely new city. While moving can bring exciting opportunities, it can also be a stressful time, especially for children with disabilities like ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These children often rely on routines and familiar environments, and the unpredictability of a move may increase anxiety or behavioral challenges.

With thoughtful preparation and the right support, your family can make the transition smoother and more positive. Here are some helpful strategies to consider as you plan your move:

1. Start Preparing Early

Children, especially those with ADHD or ASD, often benefit from having time to process changes.

- Talk about the move using age-appropriate and concrete language.
- Use visual supports such as social stories or picture schedules to explain what's happening and when.
- Visit the new home or neighborhood (if possible), or explore it virtually using Google Maps or pictures from real estate listings.

2. Keep Routines Consistent

Maintaining daily routines provides a sense of security.

- Try to preserve mealtimes, bedtime routines, and screen time schedules, even during packing or travel.
- Pack your child's essential items last so they remain accessible.
- Bring comfort items, like a favorite toy, blanket, or noise-canceling headphones, during the move.

3. Organize Important Records

Having access to your child's educational and medical records is critical.

- Collect IEPs, evaluations, therapy notes, and medical documents in a folder or digital file.
- Notify your current school and service providers about your move, and ask for recommendations or referrals in the new location.
- Contact the new school district as early as possible to start the registration and special education transfer process.

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4. Ease the School Transition

Starting at a new school can be overwhelming. A little planning can go a long way.

- Ask for a school tour, and try to schedule a meet-and-greet with teachers or support staff before the school year starts.
- Create a transition plan with input from your child's current and future IEP teams if possible.
- Share any helpful strategies or tools that work well for your child at their current school.

5. Connect and Communicate

Help your child build new relationships and feel connected in their new environment.

- Look into local support groups, parent networks, or community centers that offer inclusive programs.
- Encourage social opportunities

like summer camps, library events, or local autism-friendly activities.

- Keep an open line of communication with your child. Let them express their feelings—even if they don't have the words, behaviors may show how they feel.

Final Thoughts

Moving is a big change, but it can also be a fresh start. With preparation, structure, and support, your family can help your child with unique needs adjust and thrive in their new home and community.

For more guidance or individualized support during transitions, don't hesitate to reach out to your local FDLRS center. We're here to help families navigate these important changes with confidence and care.

FDLRS-MDC/CARD Satisfaction Survey

Here at FDLRS-MDC we continue to look for creative ways to meet individual and family needs. Please consider taking a moment to complete a short survey. We hope to use the feedback to tailor our services, group offerings, and training opportunities to best meet our constituent's needs. We look forward to hearing from you.

Use this QR Code to take our quick survey:

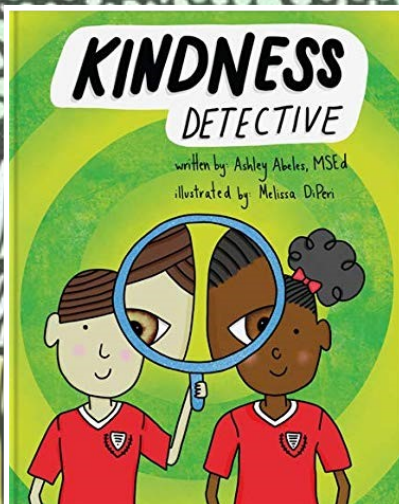
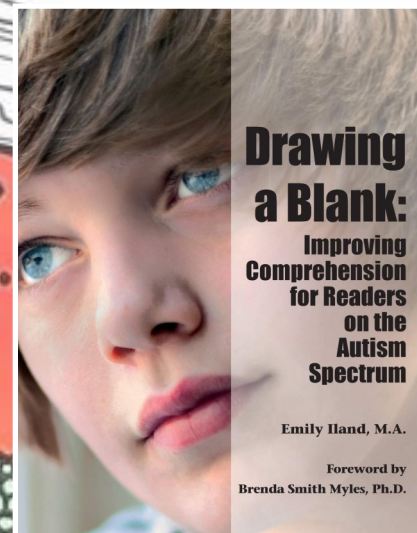


Now available in the CARD Lending Library:

Drawing a Blank: Improving Comprehension for Readers on the Autism Spectrum

by Emily Lland, M.A., & Brenda Smith Myles

Although they may be fluent readers - indeed, many have very precocious reading skills - individuals with autism spectrum disorders often need support for comprehension. Using a clearly stated and well-organized approach, this practical resource provides educational professionals and parents with the tools to improve comprehension for good decoders who have reading comprehension difficulties, as well as readers who struggle with both decoding and comprehension.



Kindness Detective

by Ashley Abeles & Melissa DiPeri

Join Owen and his friends as they learn how to step into each other's shoes and see things a little differently. Written by Ashley Abeles, MEd with illustrations by Melissa DiPeri, this charming book is a wonderful way to teach young learners about understanding and empathy. Readers will discover that despite our differences, we all have a little kindness to lend! Perfect for parents and professionals alike to share with the learners in their lives.

Autism and Appropriate Touch

by Abigail Werner James & Kaiyee Tay

This is a practical educational resource to help teach the social rules of touch and personal space to children and teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder with the aim of keeping them safe and helping them to understand what are appropriate interactions in family, educational and community situations. The lessons in the book look at different groups of people that the child is likely to encounter such as close family members, teachers, peers, strangers and medical professionals.



FALL FESTIVAL

October 23

5:30 pm to 8:00 pm

**6271 St. Augustine Rd, Suite 1
Jacksonville FL, 32217**



**A fun event for families to
indulge in activities and games
in an accepting and inclusive
environment. Costumes are
welcome and encouraged.**

**Participate in a raffle for hotel
stays, dinners for 2, and more.**

**Multiple vendors & community
service providers will
be available.**



**Use this QR Code
to register early.**

For additional information contact Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu or call 904.633.4332.