

# The Autism Connection

VOLUME 28 | SUMMER  
ISSUE 3 | 2018

**AUTISM SOCIETY**  
Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism  
Wisconsin



## In this Issue:

Circles of Comfort: A Framework for Addressing Anxiety in Students with Autism®	2-4
Affiliate Events	5
Sharing Community Resources	6
Call for Proposals	6
Not Your Mothers' Social Stories™ Conference	7

2018  
**FALL CONFERENCE**  
OCTOBER 11

## Message from the Executive Director

With our President, Bob Johnston, recovering from a major knee replacement surgery this summer, I'm taking the opportunity to greet all of our members and give a brief summary of our upcoming events. Bob sends his best and looks forward to reconnecting in our fall newsletter.

Our summer at the Autism Society of Wisconsin has been busier than usual as we prepare for our inaugural Tee-Time for Autism golf outing at SentryWorld Golf Course on August 2nd. We are so thankful for the community's support as we establish this event. It's been a pleasure to build new and strengthen current relationships with the goal of raising funds to support our mission of improving the lives of all affected by autism. Thank you to all who are participating by golfing, donating, sponsoring and volunteering! We're looking forward to spending a beautiful day out at SentryWorld with you.

There are so many fun opportunities to get involved locally this summer. Please read through the affiliate events on page 5 and let us know if you need help connecting to a local group. The Autism Society affiliates are here to provide support, education, information and referral, advocacy and community outreach. From family picnics and swimming events, to educational workshops—the affiliates have a lot to offer this summer.

Please also save the date for our fall conference featuring Carol Gray's workshop Not Your Mother's Social Stories™. With the support of the Department of Public Instruction and the Autism Society of the Fox Valley, we are able to offer this unique opportunity at a relatively low cost. Don't miss out on the opportunity to become officially certified by the creator of Social Stories™.

Best wishes for a great summer!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirsten Cooper".

Kirsten Cooper  
Executive Director  
Autism Society of Wisconsin

# Circles of Comfort: A Framework for Addressing Anxiety in Students with Autism<sup>®</sup>

by Connie Persike, M.S., CCC/SLP

More and more students are struggling with anxiety in today's schools. Research has consistently found higher rates of anxiety among students with autism when compared to their typically developing peers. According to a review of research conducted by Van Steensel, Bogels, and Perrin (2011), nearly 40% of children and adolescents with autism were estimated to have clinically significant anxiety or at least one anxiety disorder.

There are three components to anxiety: cognitive, physical, and behavioral. Cognitive components may include self talk, overgeneralizations or unjustified beliefs. An example of overgeneralizing would be thinking that if something goes wrong, everything will go wrong. Or, if something unpleasant happens once, it will happen over and over again. The physical component of anxiety is the body's physical response to the anxiety such as nausea, muscle tension, sweating, headache, or fatigue. The behavioral component refers to how someone responds to their anxiety, for example, avoiding situations, crying, or fleeing.

These components can look different depending on the student and can occur in different sequences based on the student or situation. For example, a student who is anxious about a test might develop physical components of their anxiety first. They might develop a stomachache followed by the cognitive component when they tell themselves they will fail. Lastly, they may avoid the situation by refusing school on the day of the test. A different child might exhibit the same anxiety about tests but experiences the components in a different order. This student might begin the sequence by refusing school, then exhibiting the physical component of their anxiety like a stomachache. Lastly, they might develop negative self talk and begin to tell themselves that they will fail the test. It's essential to know a student's sequence of anxiety to develop supports and strategies as soon as the first signs of anxiety occur.

## **INTERVENTION: CIRCLES OF COMFORT: A FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING ANXIETY IN STUDENTS WITH AUTISM<sup>®</sup> by Connie Persike, M.S., CCC/SLP and Jessica Nichols, B.A.**

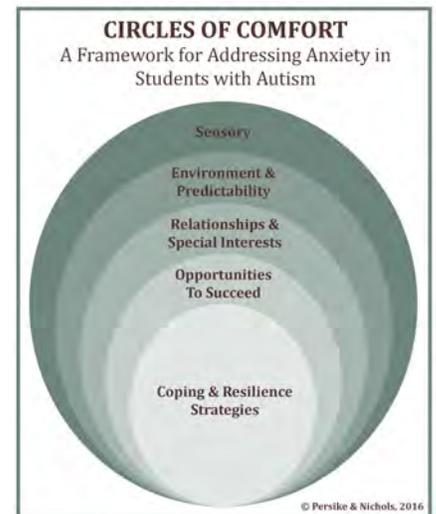
Universal prevention strategies in school settings have revealed reductions in anxiety symptoms for all children and beneficial effects for children at higher risk for anxiety disorders (Barrett et al., 2000; Lowry-Webster et al., 2001). As a result, we began with prevention strategies when developing this framework. Beginning with the outer circle, teachers and parents can provide scaffolds and supports, which will reduce the overall symptoms of anxiety. If anxiety persists, staff move on to provide more supports until they reach the inner circle, consisting of resilience and coping strategies students can utilize during times of high anxiety such as cognitive behavioral techniques and approaches. When developing the framework, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was relied upon as well as what we know about the neurology of autism, specifically taking into consideration the Sensory Funnel by Asperger's Experts, LLC. Circles of Comfort<sup>®</sup> consists of the following layers: sensory; environment and predictability; relationships and special interests; opportunities to succeed; and coping and resilience strategies.

## Sensory

Significant associations exist between intense-responsivity of sensory stimuli and anxiety in students with autism (White et al. 2009; Baker et al. 2008; Pfeiffer et al. 2005). By addressing sensory needs first, we may be able to extinguish feelings of anxiety and inhibit places or objects that are paired with an unpleasant sensory stimuli from creating an association with fear and anxiety. In addition, by addressing the sensory needs first, our students will be at an optimal level to learn and take in new information, making it easier for them to learn resilience and coping strategies, if needed. The following tools may be useful when helping address the sensory needs of your students: *Zones of Regulation* by Leah Kuypers and *The Alert Program* by TherapyWorks, Inc. Implementing a quiet spot into the classroom can be a beneficial tool as well. A quiet spot is an area in the classroom designated as a place to escape the stress of the classroom, to prevent anxiety, and to regain control if high levels of anxiety occur. This area should be seen as a positive place by students, not a time-out or punishment. Including an occupational therapist to the team to help develop sensory breaks or sensory diets will be beneficial as well.

## Environment & Predictability

A predictable environment helps all of us better regulate our emotions and decrease our anxiety. Environmental stimulation that is safe, consistent, controlled, announced, and only changed very gradually, at the pace determined by each child, can help decrease the symptoms of autism. Visual supports such as daily schedules, mini-schedules, timers, and calendars all help provide predictability and structure to the day. In addition, establishing clear and consistent procedures and routines clarify relationships between steps of an activity or objects and people. A *Name It to Tame It* book coined by Dan Siegel M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D. can be another beneficial strategy to increase predictability and ease anxiety. Teachers or parents create a book that give students facts about what will happen in a specific situation or activity, state feelings they may exhibit during the situation or activity, and give strategies to help students deal with their feelings during the situation or activity.



## Relationships & Special Interests

We find safety in relationships. Every time we receive comfort, the vagus nerve, which activates our calming system, becomes faster and more efficient at sending chemical signals. Therefore, we can help modulate stress responses by connecting safely with others. Home base is a strategy to help support relationships in the school setting. Home base is a safe area of the school with a person the student has established a secure relationship with. Students are taught to access their safe area at the first sign of anxiety. This should be in a location and with a person that the student has had positive experiences with and/or has had success with in the past. Simply seeing your safe person increases the oxytocin in your brain, which gives you a feeling of being safe and decreases anxiety.



Engaging in pleasurable activities increases endorphins in our brain making us feel happier. In addition, deficit areas are diminished when students with autism participate in their special interests. Emotional memory also plays a great role in emotional regulation. By encouraging students to engage in special interests, we help students create positive memories within the school environment, which in turn helps students be more emotionally regulated. The following resources are useful when working to embed special interests throughout a student's day:

- *The Power Card Strategy 2.0: Using Special Interests to Motivate Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Brenda Smith Myles and Elisa Gagnon
- *"Just Give Him The Whale!:" 20 Ways to Use Fascinations, Areas of Expertise, and Strengths to Support Students with Autism* by Patrick Schwartz and Paula Kluth.

## Opportunities to Succeed

The pleasurable feeling that comes with success is brought on by a surge of dopamine. This chemical signals us to keep doing whatever we did that led us to succeed. By increasing our student's opportunities to succeed, we are giving them a neurological boost for future success. We are also increasing positive emotional experiences, which leads to positive emotions and increased emotional regulation. The more positive memories we have in a location, the more emotionally regulated we will be in that location. We can help prevent anxiety by meeting our students, where they are, and providing scaffolds to help them succeed in fearful or anxious situations.

## Coping & Resilience Strategies

Finally, some children may need to learn new skills to help them manage their anxiety. Several resilience and coping strategies exist. For instance, teaching students to label their emotions in a few words activates their prefrontal cortex, thus reducing activity in their inner brain (the portion responsible for activating the fight, fright, freeze response). In addition, attribution retraining can be a useful strategy to teach students to assess their circumstances so that there is a sense of hope that they can control and improve the situation. Without this ability, they feel helpless to change the situation, contributing to feelings of anxiety. Cartooning and visual choice mapping are two additional strategies that can be used to support students with attribution retraining. In addition, *The Eclipse Model: Teaching Self-Regulation, Executive Function, Attribution, and Sensory Awareness to Students with Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, and Related Disorders* by Sherry A. Moyer is a helpful resource.

By addressing anxiety in students with autism, we are strengthening the neurological pathway of calm, with the goal of decreasing anxiety symptoms over time. Circles of Comfort® can be a valuable tool to guide you as you support students with autism experiencing anxiety.

---

**Connie Persike is an educational and behavioral consultant serving Wisconsin families and schools. For more information regarding Circles of Comfort® contact her at [info@cpconsulting.us](mailto:info@cpconsulting.us).**

# Summer Events

- 
- July 23**  
4:30–6:00 pm  
**Autism 101 Workshop, Session 1 | Autism Society of the Fox Valley**  
Brightstar Care, 35 Park Place, Suite 100, Appleton.  
This will be a two session training for BrightStar Care staff, but parents, grandparents and caregivers are also welcome. The first session will include Autism 101 information targeting myths and facts, autism statistics, characteristics and features, and strategies needed to increase communication. To register, email [jane.zornow@brightstarcare.com](mailto:jane.zornow@brightstarcare.com).
- 
- July 25**  
6:00–8:00 pm  
**Tweener’s Social Group–Swimming | Autism Society of Central WI**  
Schulenberg Pool, Wausau  
Free admission. Come and join other 8–12 year olds to swim and socialize! Parents welcome. Contact [autismsocietycw@gmail.com](mailto:autismsocietycw@gmail.com) for more information.
- 
- August 1**  
10:00 am–  
2:00 pm  
**Bay Beach Family Day | Autism Society of the Fox Valley & Bertrand Schmitz Consulting**  
Bay Beach Amusement Park, 1313 Bay Beach Rd. Enjoy the day at Bay Beach! We have reserved Pavilion #3 for registration, lunch and a resting spot. Lunch is from 11:00–1:00. For more information visit <http://www.autismfoxvalley.org/event/asfv-family-day/>
- 
- August 2**  
8:30 am–  
5:00 pm  
**Tee-Time for Autism | Autism Society of Wisconsin & Autism Society of Central WI**  
SentryWorld Golf Course, 601 N Michigan, Stevens Point.  
The event will feature special guest, Bill Schroeder, former Green Bay Packers Wide Receiver and Tour Swing Golf Long-Drive Team World Finalist.
- 
- August 4**  
10:15 am–  
12:00pm  
**Reel Movies for REAL Needs: Christopher Robin | Autism Society of Northeast WI**  
Marcus Bay Park Cinema, 755 Willard Dr, Ashwaubenon  
Please join us for a sensory friendly movie experience! Sound is down and lights are up. ASNEW will cover up to four tickets per family for members. Please try to be there by 10:15 to check in at the front desk. Your membership must be current.
- 
- August 6**  
4:30–6:00 pm  
**Autism 101 Workshop, Session 2 | Autism Society of the Fox Valley**  
Brightstar Care, 35 Park Place, Suite 100, Appleton.  
Session two will include: detailed sensory, communication and behavioral information and materials to increase communication while decreasing behaviors.  
To register, email [jane.zornow@brightstarcare.com](mailto:jane.zornow@brightstarcare.com).
- 
- August 12**  
1:00–3:00 pm  
**Tweener’s Social Group–Swimming | Autism Society of Central WI**  
Rothschild/Schofield Aquatic Center  
Free admission. Come and join other 8–12 year olds to swim and socialize! Families welcome! Contact [autismsocietycw@gmail.com](mailto:autismsocietycw@gmail.com) for more information.
- 
- August 16**  
6:30–8:30 pm  
**Swing & Swim! | Autism Society of the Lakeshore**  
Village on the Lake Hotel, 3310 Memorial Drive, Two Rivers.  
Play 18-hole mini-golf and splash around in the indoor pool! All families affected by autism are welcome, and it’s all on ASL!
- 
- August 21**  
6:00–8:00 pm  
**Parent/Caregiver Support Group | Autism Society of Northeast WI**  
Kavarna Coffee House, 143 N. Broadway, Green Bay. Join us for coffee and conversation. Contact [administrator@asnew.org](mailto:administrator@asnew.org)
-

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Help us add to our resource guide!

In an effort to list more autism-related resources located in the 53 counties we serve, we need your help. We are asking service providers, families, County Human Service Agencies and others to share information about helpful programs or services. We are especially interested in including services or supports that were identified as lacking in the Autism in Wisconsin 2017 Report:

1. Adult Services
2. Caregiver/Parent Support
3. Access to Quality Treatment & Therapy
4. Social Opportunities

To add a resource please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CC2VD9J> or you can email [asw@asw4autism.org](mailto:asw@asw4autism.org) with the name, address, telephone, email and website address, along with a brief description of the resource.



Call for proposals to present at the Autism Society of Wisconsin's  
30th Annual Conference is now open!

April 11–13, 2019

Submit your proposals here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019Call4Proposals>

Proposals are due by November 8th, 2018



2018  
**FALL CONFERENCE**

OCTOBER 11

## Not Your Mother's Social Stories™

Presented by: Carol Gray

Bridgewood Resort Hotel & Conference Center

Neenah, WI

October 11, 2018

Social Stories™ are a very popular evidence based instructional strategy used worldwide with people with autism and other social communication disorders. They are a wonderful 'go to' intervention for a infinite variety of purposes. Unfortunately, they are frequently misused and misunderstood – resulting in stories... but definitely not Social Stories. Using lecture, discussion, demonstration, and a series of very short, fun, and informative activities, participants will learn how to develop a Social Story (or Social Article for adults) according to the current Social Stories 10.2 criteria. The day will fly by. Participants will leave understanding and knowing how to develop Social Stories, with a certificate to prove it.

This workshop is for any parent, professional, family member, or friend who is working on behalf of one or more infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, or adults with autism. Participants who complete the workshop will receive a Social Stories 10.2 Certificate.

**Registration to attend is open until October 1st:**

\$100 for a member of the Autism Society

\$125 for a non-member

\$50 for a person with ASD

More details available on our website: <http://www.asw4autism.org/event-cal/fall-conference/tml>

Contact Jessica Fischer at [jfischer@asw4autism.org](mailto:jfischer@asw4autism.org) with questions.

Autism Society of Wisconsin  
1-888-4-AUTISM (WI only)  
1477 Kenwood Drive  
Menasha, WI 54952

NONPROFIT  
US Postage  
PAID  
Appleton, WI  
Permit No. 188

Return Service Requested



Help us fulfill our mission!

Support the Autism Society of Wisconsin by making a tax deductible gift! All donations are appreciated.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_\_\_ \$75    \_\_\_\_\_ \$100    \_\_\_\_\_ \$200    \_\_\_\_\_ \$ Other

Donations may be sent to:  
Autism Society of Wisconsin  
1477 Kenwood Drive  
Menasha, WI 54952

We also accept donations online. Click the Donate Now button on our  
homepage: [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

Thank you for your support!

### Board of Directors

**President**  
Robert Johnston

**President Elect**  
Rob Peyton

**Treasurer:**  
Kerry Hoops

**Secretary**  
Kendra Mateni

#### Members At Large

Eric DeGroot  
Eric Kissinger  
Diane Messman  
Lawren Olivanti  
Meg Puddy

#### Affiliate Representatives:

**Fox Valley**  
Diane Nackers

**Chippewa Valley**  
Bobbi Wagner

**Central WI**  
Dale Prah

### Staff

**Executive Director**  
Kirsten Cooper

**Education & Outreach Coordinator**  
Jessica Fischer

**Office Manager**  
Kelly Brodhagen

ASW Board Meeting  
October 20, 2018