

Autism Parenting Magazine

Issue 116

**Coping
with
Caregiver
Burnout**

**CONTEXT
BLINDNESS:
its Impact
on Older Kids**

**Are Your
Expectations
Affecting
Your Child?**

**Top
Tips for
Mastering
Virtual
Learning**

**Oral Motor
Exercises
to Try at
Home**

ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS



Celebrating Our 2020 CONTRIBUTOR HEROES!

By Emily ANSELL ELFER, BA Hons, Dip.

2020 has not been an easy year for anyone, with the COVID-19 virus affecting people's lives and lockdowns restricting daily living. For the autism community, it's been particularly challenging as families were forced to abandon their usual routines and ASD children found themselves living in an unfamiliar world.

At *Autism Parenting Magazine*, we take the opportunity every year to reflect and thank our exceptional contributors who have written for us over the previous 12 months. This year, our gratitude is exceptionally high as our readers required advice and support more than ever.

Many autism specialists, scientists, educators, doctors, advocates, parents, and carers collaborated with us over 2020 and every one of them deserves applause. Choosing names for our 2020 Contributor Awards was no easy task and I would like to add a huge thank you to every single supporter; you know who you are.

Drum roll please.....! We are thrilled to announce the following writers have been selected as our 2020 Contributor Awards recipients:

2020 TOP CONTRIBUTOR AWARDS



Top Autism Advocate

DERRICK HAYES

Derrick Hayes, also known as the "enTIETainer", is an author, professional speaker, consultant, and entertainer who lives in Columbus, Georgia. He provides interviews with autism parents for the magazine each month by asking six questions



Top Autism Solutions Writer

DR. RON MALCOLM

Dr. Ronald Malcolm is an Assistant Director of Special Education for a public school district, an Associate Faculty Member with the University of Phoenix, and a Special Graduate Faculty member at the University of Kansas. He has bachelor's degrees in English and Special Education. He holds master level degrees in Counseling, Special Education, and School Administration. His doctorate degree is from Northern Arizona University in Educational Leadership. His post graduate degrees are in Positive Behavior Supports and Autism Spectrum Disorders. He has worked for the past 36 years with autistic students between the ages of three and 21 in various school and community-based settings.



Dr. Ron Malcolm
Top Autism Solutions Writer



Top General Advice Writer

JC ELLINGER

JC (Juliet) Ellinger is an autism mom who enjoys sharing and learning through writing. She draws upon her own experiences in her magazine articles in order to support and inspire other parents. Juliet is currently working on her



JC Ellinger
Top General Advice Writer

first children's book geared at bringing relatability and support to other ASD children just like her amazing son. She carries an MBA from Regis University and a BA in Communications from CSU Long Beach.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/jc.ellinger.writer

Instagram: www.instagram.com/jc.ellinger

Email: Juliet.ellinger01@gmail.com



**Top Expert
Advice Writer**

**RACHEL
BÉDARD, PhD**



Rachel Bédard,
PhD
Top Expert Advice Writer

Rachel Bédard, PhD is a licensed psychologist practicing in Fort Collins, Colorado. She uses a strengths-based approach and her clients note she has the ability to help them laugh about even the most stressful or embarrassing events in life. Dr. Bédard has co-written two books alongside speech-language pathologist Mallory Griffith. Their most recent book is [*You've Got This!: The Journey from Middle School to College, As Told by Students on the Autism Spectrum and Their Parents*](#).

Websites: www.drrachelbedard.com and thesociallearningproject.com



**Top
Occupational
Therapist**

**REBECCA
CONNICK,
MOT, LOTR**



Rebecca Connick,
MOT, LOTR
Top Occupational Therapist

Rebecca Connick, MOT, LOTR is a pediatric occupational therapist and the OT Program Coordinator at Crane Rehab Center for Behavior, Language, and Learning in New Orleans, LA. Rebecca has extensive experience in treating children with ASD and feeding disorders as part of an outpatient interdisciplinary therapy program. Rebecca also authors the blog [*Fingertips: Pointers from a Pediatric Occupational Therapist*](#), where she posts content on a range of topics relevant to all parents.

Website: <https://fingertips.blog/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fingertipsblog>



**Top Autism
Therapy Writer**

**DR. ANNETTE
NUÑEZ**



Dr. Annette Nuñez
Top Autism Therapy Writer

Dr. Annette Nuñez is founder and director of [*Breakthrough Interventions, LLC*](#) and [*Breaking Through Autism*](#). She is a licensed psychologist and has worked with children with ASD and other related disorders for over 22 years. As part of her doctorate work at the University of Denver, Dr. Nuñez developed the Children's Social Competence Scale (CSCS). The CSCS is an early intervention evaluation tool that measures social competence in young children. She served as the Program Director for Connect Us, a non-profit organization that helps children cultivate positive relationships through facilitated play. Her research interests include the mainstreaming and socialization of children with high functioning autism. Dr. Nuñez conducts seminars nationally and internationally and has consulted with many schools in China and South Africa. Dr. Nuñez also consults and supervises the therapists at the Breakthrough Interventions site in South Africa. Dr. Nuñez has been widely featured in the media and hosts a podcast entitled *Behind the Breakthroughs*, where she shares advice.

Websites: www.btinterventions.com/ and www.breakingthroughautism.com/

Facebook: www.facebook.com/breakingthroughautism/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/breakthrough_autism/



**Top
Speech-Language
Pathologist**

**MALLORY
GRIFFITH,
MA, CCC-SLP**



Mallory Griffith
Top Speech-Language Pathologist

Mallory Griffith, MA, CCC-SLP is a speech-language pathologist living and working in Fort Collins, CO. In her office, she primarily works with people on the spectrum, coaching social communications skills. Mallory has co-authored two books with Rachel Bédard, PhD, including: [*Raising a Child on the Autism Spectrum: Insights from Parents to Parents*](#), and [*You've Got This!: The Journey from Middle School to College, as told by Students on the Autism Spectrum and Their Parents*](#).

Website: www.mallorygriffithslp.com

Email: mallorygriffithslp@gmail.com


Top Autism Rights Writer
SARA COLOROSA, PhD

Sara R. Colorosa, PhD, is the owner of The Engagement Catalyst, LLC. She completed a research study in an organization where employees and managers shared their experiences aligning people's diverse skills, abilities, and interests with career opportunities, especially for those on the spectrum. Sara understands the gap between theory and practice and focuses on adult learning styles, diversity in the workplace, and leader's roles in organizational success. She is passionate about helping individuals develop their executive functioning, organizational skills, and study habits to achieve career goals.

Website: www.theengagementcatalyst.com.


Top Autism Safety Advisor
JOSEPH PANGARO

Joseph Pangaro is a retired police lieutenant and former director of school security. He is currently the CEO and Chief Security Officer for True Security Design, a national company that provides safety, security assessments, and staff training for schools, businesses, houses of worship, and summer camps. Lt. Pangaro is also an award-winning writer for several publications and the author of *Securing Our Schools, a Roadmap to Safety*.


Top Autism Health Writer
DENISE VOIGHT, MS

Denise Voight, MS, is a clinical nutritionist with a Master of Science in Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine specializing in



Nutritional Intervention for autism spectrum disorders and ADHD. She is an expert in applying scientifically proven food and nutrition therapies to improve health, learning, and behavior in children with ASD and ADHD.

Website: <https://www.denisevoight.com/>


Top Social Skills Writer
CHRIS ABILDGAARD, LPC, NCC, NCSP

Chris Abildgaard, LPC, NCC, NCSP, is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, a board-certified national counselor, and a licensed professional counselor with a specialization in autism spectrum disorders. He is the owner and director of the Social Learning Center, LLC, located in Cheshire, CT, and an Adjunct Professor at the University of St. Joseph, located in West Hartford, CT. Chris earned a graduate certificate from the University of Massachusetts Lowell in Behavioral Interventions in Autism and is pursuing his doctorate of Education (EdD) in School Psychology from Loyola University.

Facebook: [@SocialLearningCenter](https://www.facebook.com/SocialLearningCenter)

Instagram: [@sociallearningctr](https://www.instagram.com/sociallearningctr)

Twitter: [@SLC545](https://twitter.com/SLC545)

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/chrisabildgaardslc


Top Communication Advisor
KAREN KAPLAN

Karen Kaplan recently completed ten years as Executive Director of Wings Learning Center, a school for children 5-22 years old with autism spectrum disorders, located in Redwood City, CA. She served as an instructor in the Autism Spectrum Certificate program at Alliant University. She completed her BS and MS in Speech Pathology from Arizona State University. She minored in Special Education and holds an Educational Administrative Credential and Moderate to Severe Teaching Credential. She has sat on non-profit boards to help build capacity for those with special needs. She founded and directed a residential school for nearly 20



years in Sacramento. Karen is an author and speaker, and she spent time globally helping non-governmental agencies in Indonesia and Africa. Currently she is consulting with families, schools, and adult programs.

Website: www.karenkaplanasd.com
Email: karensupportsu@comcast.net



**Top Parental
Advice Writer**

**DEANNA
PICON**

Deanna Picon is founder of Your Autism Coach, LLC, which provides personalized guidance, support, and seminars for parents of special needs children. She is a parent of a non-verbal young man with autism. Deanna is the author of *The Autism Parents' Guide to Reclaiming Your Life*, which is available at www.amazon.com.

Website: www.yourautismcoach.com



Deanna Picon
Top Parental Advice Writer



**Top Education
Writer**

**CRYSTAL
GALLAGHER**

Crystal Gallagher is a special education teacher and mom of two sons with autism. She is passionate about advocating for all students with special needs. She lives in Chesapeake, VA with her husband, two sons, and their mini zoo (two dogs, two cats, and one very old guinea pig).



Crystal Gallagher
Top Education Writer



**Top Personal
Narrative Writer**

**RUTHANGELA
BERNADETTE**

Ruthangela Bernadette is the author of *Special Kid to Super Kid*. She's a supermom who launched her daughter from super-stuck to super-



Ruthangela Bernadette
Top Personal Narrative Writer

hero. Her passion is to inspire and empower parents to do likewise, but that's only her day job. Her real job is raising her eye-rolling, door slamming, make-up wearing super daughter, and of course, saving the universe before dinner time.



**Top Young
Writer**

**CLAUDIA
ROSE ADDEO**

Claudia Rose Addeo holds a master's degree in Literacy Education and currently works at one of the top-rated school districts on Long Island. Claudia was diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) at two years old. As a flourishing freelance writer and inspirational speaker, Claudia aims to give hope to parents of special needs children, as well as to special needs children themselves.

Instagram: [@claudia.addeo](https://www.instagram.com/claudia.addeo)
Facebook: [claudia.addeo](https://www.facebook.com/claudia.addeo)



Claudia Rose Addeo
Top Young Writer



**Top Autism
Poet**

**RACHEL
ALEXANDER**

Rachel Alexander is married with two children, Max and Isla, and lives in Houston, Texas (although she is originally from the UK). Max was diagnosed with autism at the age of two and it was her family's autism journey that inspired Rachel to start writing poetry. Rachel hopes her poems will help other autism parents to know that they are not alone, and that her work can help encourage acceptance and create a better understanding of life with autism.

Website: www.autismthroughpoetry.com/
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/autismthroughpoetry>



Rachel Alexander
Top Autism Poet



Emily Ansell Elfer, BA Hons, Dip. is Editor of *Autism Parenting Magazine*, where she coordinates an extensive group of therapists, autism specialists, and writers to publish news and professional guidance for families affected by autism. An NCTJ-qualified journalist, Emily's work is published in newspapers, magazines, and across multiple websites. She previously managed content for women's careers website, *Where Women Work*, is a former Editor of a food magazine group, and is a former Deputy Editor of *Toy World Magazine*.

Elopement is scary. We can help.



Project Lifesaver is a program specifically designed to protect and recover special needs individuals who are prone to the life-threatening behavior of wandering, including those with Autism and other cognitive conditions. For more information on how you can protect your loved ones, visit our website.

www.projectlifesaver.org



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