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MOSAIC MINDS

Official Newsletter of Midwest Autism & Therapy Centers



AUTISM MYTHS & FACTS

MYTH: Autism is a mental illness.

FACT: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder developed in a child's brain before they are born.

MYTH: Everyone with Autism is the same.

FACT: Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning each person's symptoms vary in presentation and severity.

MYTH: Autism is caused by vaccines.

FACT: A 2010 study retracted the formerly completed study from 1998, showing falsification of data and ethical violations, thus concluding there is no evidence to prove childhood vaccines cause Autism.

MYTH: Children with ASD do not like to socialize.

FACT: Some children with ASD might not pick up on social cues, or might follow strict routines, and avoid crowds, but some are also considered "sensory seekers" and love to make new friends.

MYTH: There is no official diagnostic test for Autism.

FACT: While there is not a blood test for diagnosis, an Autism diagnosis can be received through developmental screenings and a Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation.

MYTH: Only boys have Autism.

FACT: Girls are less likely to be diagnosed, but they can still be on the spectrum. Girls are more likely to be misdiagnosed with another condition, versus the ASD diagnosis they should have.

MYTH: People with Autism have severe intellectual disabilities.

FACT: Most people living with Autism are able to function relatively normal in society. In fact, 44% have average or above-average intelligence.

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5 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day brings multiple potential triggers for our friends with ASD. Including breaks in normal routines, unfamiliar words and phrases, unusual decorations or games, and unclear social expectations. Check out these tips below to help them enjoy the holiday.

1. Share their Special Interests

Allowing your child to pick Valentine's cards that feature their favorite character, show, animal, toy, etc. can help them to connect with other students while giving them something to talk about that you know they enjoy. They could also draw such characters or interests for teachers or other special people in their lives.

2. Practice Some Classrooms Scenarios

Practicing new situations beforehand can help your kiddo familiarize him/ herself with what to expect during these changes in their standard routine. Your child may want to practice what to do or say while distributing or receiving Valentine's cards, how to navigate changes in the social routines, or how to handle displays of affection, like hugs, from their classmates.

3. Go Back to Basics

Reviewing the history and the basics behind Valentine's Day might help your child more fully comprehend why we celebrate and how certain aspects of the holiday have evolved. They may feel comfort in being reminded that we are celebrating the people in our lives who are most important to us (another creative opportunity you could use outside of school).

4. Create a Social Story

A social story is a learning tool that helps to support the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals, and children with Autism. This technique was first introduced by therapist Carol Gray to support safe and meaningful exchanges between a child with ASD and their support. The goal of creating a social story is to accurately describe the skills, concepts, context, etc. of an upcoming event. This can help the child to immerse themselves into a learning experience that is meaningful, descriptive, and safe for all involved.

5. Connect Your Child's Network

Changes in routine can be difficult, but if you plan ahead and connect your child's network of teachers and other professionals, everyone can help to ensure your child has a great experience. Perhaps the teacher can notify you in advance regarding any games, new foods, decorations, schedule changes, etc. that they anticipate to help you prepare your child. Maybe the school nurse can provide a quiet space should your child need to decompress. Or the school librarian can offer books about all of their favorite things when they need to redirect away from their triggers.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
SOCIAL STORIES, VISIT:

carolgraysocialstories.com



MEET OUR CLINICIANS

HANNAH WOODS, BCBA, LBA - ALTOONA CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since June of 2022

Hannah received her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Drake University in 2022. She also holds a Bachelor's Degree from Grand Valley State University in Social Work. She completed additional coursework at the University of Nebraska at Kearney in speech and communication disorders.

Hannah strives to take everyone's preferences into consideration when pairing staff with clients. She operates with an "open-door policy" for communication and ensures social significance and client dignity. She enjoys having the opportunity to work alongside really incredible parents, RBTs, and other professionals to create a collaborative and supportive space to help learners reach their full potential. She loves that every day is another opportunity to make a positive impact and meaningful difference in the lives of the children we serve and their families. Hannah enjoys developing strong relationships with the kiddos, fostering trust, and encouraging learning through joyful interactions. She loves helping learners develop independence and autonomy through creating a positive therapeutic environment where the children are eager to learn each day.



DAN MURPHY, BCBA, LBA - ANKENY CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since July of 2022

Dan received his Master's Degree in Special Education and Teaching from the University of Colorado Denver in 2017, becoming a licensed BCBA in 2018. Additionally, he holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Colorado State University.

Born in Boston and raised in Denver, Dan discovered his passion for Special Education volunteering at a Summer Camp during Undergrad. He has been in ABA for almost 10 years and has been a BCBA for over 6. Dan is passionate about using the principles of ABA, especially ACT and OBM, in all aspects of work and life to help make the world a better place.



REYNA MELENDEZ, BCBA, LBA - ANKENY CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since July of 2022

Reyna received her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Drake University in 2022. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor's Degree from Iowa State University in Child, Adult, and Family Services. Reyna thrives in the program development of caregiver trainings and collaborating with other professionals.

Reyna loves having the unique opportunity to see our clients and their families grow each and every day! She loves knowing that we get to provide the families support that will go well beyond their time at Midwest.



MEET OUR CLINICIANS

MELANIE BREN, BCBA, M.ED., LBA - EDINA CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since July of 2023

Melanie received her Master of Education Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Arizona State University in 2018. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Minnesota in Family Social Science in 2014. Melanie opened our Edina, MN location and looks forward to seeing Midwest expand its reach in the area!

Melanie has a passion for working with children, being fascinated by how our environment impacts us as humans. She finds tremendous joy in her clients meeting huge milestones and seeing the closest people in their lives cheering them on.



SHAWNA JOHNSON, BCBA, MS, LBA - WAUKEE CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since 2022

Shawna received her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Simmons University. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology from McNeese State University. She is currently working towards a certification of Clinical Competency in Behavioral Feeding Therapy, and is returning to school to obtain a Master's Degree in Speech Language Pathology.

Shawna has been working with children in early intensive developmental and behavioral intervention for over five years. She says the best part of working with kids is being able to be creative and goofy, while teaching them important life skills. She has worked with children from 2 to 16-years old, and specializes in working with children ages 2-6. Shawna has a strong passion for teaching children to use their voice not only to meet their wants and needs, but to advocate for themselves across various settings and situations. She is dedicated to ensuring that all of the children she works with feel welcomed, supported, and safe to learn while also learning how to safely process their emotions and communicate them effectively.



ANTONIO SANCHEZ, BCBA, MS, LBA - WEST DES MOINES

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since 2022

Antonio received his Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Drake University in 2022. Additionally, he holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, also from Drake University.

Antonio completed Practicum Placements and Internships at ChildServe and Blank Children's STAR Center, respectively.



MEET OUR CLINICIANS

LEAH CHEATHAM, BCBA, LBA - WEST DES MOINES CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since July of 2022

Leah received her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Drake University in 2022. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor's Degree in Health and Human Physiology and Psychology from the University of Iowa.

Her favorite part of her job is the constant observation of individual and character growth, not only in the children served, but also their RBTs and client family members. Every person is armed with strengths that will support growth in themselves and in the people around them, and when that is found, a new being emerges. Leah gets excited about the look on a child's face when they form a word for the first time, siblings taking initiative to learn sign language to communicate with their brother or sister, parents' joy in connecting with their child in new ways, and Registered Behavior Technicians/ supervisees new to the field developing a passion of their own.



KARISHAN SOMU, BCBA, MS, LBA - WOODBURY CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since August of 2023.

Kari received his Master of Science Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from St. Cloud State University in 2016. Additionally, he holds a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire in 2013.

Kari has been working in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) since he started as an intern in 2012. He has served clients in their homes, at daycare centers, and other facilities. As a child, Kari saw many people who were not receiving services for their needs, and he had a lot of questions but no answers to his own experiences. Now, being able to serve clients and witnessing their growth and positive changes brings him a great sense of accomplishment.



ALISON BEYEL, MS, BCBA - WOODBURY CAMPUS

Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Midwest since 2022

Alison received her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Simmons University in 2021. Additionally, she holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Hamline University in 2018.

Alison loves working with children and watching the kiddos accomplish their individual goals and milestones. One of Alison's favorite things is to do community outings with kids and their families to support generalization of skills to new settings and environments!



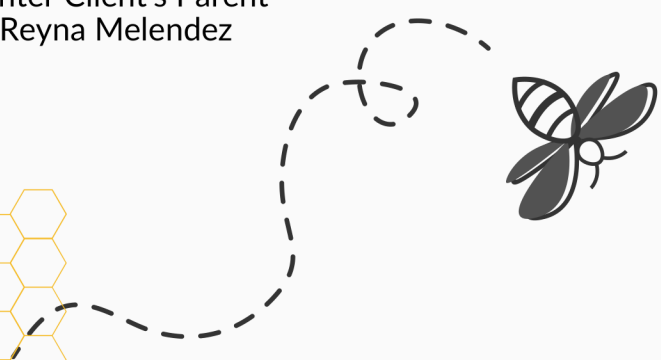


THE BUZZ AROUND TOWN

TESTIMONIALS FROM OUR CLIENTS & THEIR FAMILIES

Reyna has been life-changing for my son and our family. She is a constant support. Her communication is amazing. I would recommend her a million times over.

-Ankeny Center Client's Parent of BCBA Reyna Melendez



Shawna is the absolute best. I am so relieved to have her as part of our care team. I don't know what I would do without her!

-Waukee Center Client's Parent of BCBA Shawna Johnson



RBTs, clients and their parents are so lucky to have such a wonderful and brilliant BCBA as Leah Cheatham... I learned so many great things from her and I am forever grateful to all the hard work she and the West Des Moines center family is doing.

Alison is such an amazing ABA therapist and has made a huge difference with my daughter. We are so grateful for her!

-Woodbury Center Client's Parent of BCBA Alison Beyel





FIND MIDWEST AT THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

People to People Career Fair **Friday, February 16th, 2024** **10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

A professional environment to connect with our team, discuss internships, and learn opportunities that await in the field.

*Memorial Union, Great Hall - ISU
Ames, IA 50011*

DSMP Summer Camp Fair **Saturday, February 17th, 2024** **9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

Sensory-Friendly period from 9:00-9:45a.m.
A free event for families to learn about spring and summer programming in the Des Moines, Iowa area.

*Valley Community Center
4444 Fuller Rd West Des Moines, IA*

Fi & Friends **Autism Resource Fair** **Saturday, April 13th, 2024** **10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

A safe and inclusive space for all abilities to gain support and community resources.

*Horizon Events Center
2100 NW 100th St Clive, IA 50325*

MN Autism Conference **April 17th-19th, 2024**

This three-day conference will feature keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and a resource fair with in-person sponsors.

Marriott Minneapolis Airport Hotel

Striding 4 Awareness **Saturday, April 20th, 2024** **10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

Resource Fair 10:00-11:00 a.m.
4th Annual Walk to Include 10:30 a.m.
Lunch and Silent Auction 11:00-2:00 p.m.

*430 School Street Carlisle, IA 50047
35 Vine Street Carlisle, IA 50047*

Steps for Autism in MN **Sunday, May 19th, 2024**

An inclusive event for all abilities with a resource fair featuring in-person sponsors and activities. The walk will be at the pace and distance choice of each participant.

ROC at the St. Louis Park Rec Center



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Email updates include monthly newsletters, new blog posts, center updates, announcements and more.



Get Connected

ALTOONA CAMPUS:

950 28TH AVE SW, STE 2 ALTOONA, IA 50009 | 515-446-2075

ANKENY CAMPUS:

2405 N ANKENY RD ANKENY, IA 50023 | 515-446-2080

EDINA CAMPUS:

7550 FRANCE AVE S, STE 200 EDINA, MN 55435 | 952-955-4057

WAUKEE CAMPUS:

287 SE WESTOWN PKWY WAUKEE, IA 50263 | 515-446-3420

WEST DES MOINES CAMPUS:

1280 OFFICE PLAZA DR WEST DES MOINES, IA 50266 | 515-446-3420

WOODBURY CAMPUS:

748 BIELENBERG DR WOODBURY, MN 55125 | 651-796-2306



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