With 2020 almost fully behind us I think we all are welcoming a fresh start in 2021. As we prepare for a holiday season like no other MPF remains committed to assisting families in navigating all systems of care. We continue to track guidance from the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Center for Disease Control and pass along important information to you and your family. We remain vigilant in the education of our staff so we are able to properly field the questions you may have as well as provide you with the resources you need.

Our office has remained open and staffed to take your phone calls. We are not providing in-person trainings and peer-to-peer assistance during the pandemic but continue to offer these services virtually until further notice. We offer these programs by using the platforms of our website, Zoom, and Facebook. If you have been unable to attend live you can check out the recordings of all the topics, we have offered at: http://mpf.org/trainings.html.

Our regular trainings are being offered monthly on a rotating basis. Stay tuned to your email and our social media pages for a schedule of events. Newly developed trainings will include Navigating the Katie Beckett Waiver Program, S.M.A.R.T. IEP Goals, and Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits for Your Special Needs Child.

We are excited to announce a new partnership with UNE Dental School and Maine’s Partnership for Oral Health. Our work will include advocacy for better access to oral health for children with special health care needs as well as the development of a training for parents and family-friendly materials pertaining to oral health.

Please continue to watch our website and social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, & YouTube for continued updated information and please reach out to Maine Parent Federation with any questions or concerns. We continue to be here for you during these unsure times.

Kind Regards,

Carrie Woodcock, Executive Director
What’s New in the Information Center at MPF?

Maine Parent Federation has informational packets available on more than 200 topics. These packets contain researched information, tips, local and national resources, and a list of related lending library material available here at MPF. The following information packets have recently been updated:

Disability/Disorder Related Topics:

- Hearing Impairment
- HiSet
- Intellectual Disability
- Learning Disability
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Speech and Language Impairment
- Surrogate Parent (Educational)

If you would like to receive any of our information packets, or would like information on another topic, please contact MPF by:

- Phone: (800) 870-7746
  (Ask to speak with a Parent Information Specialist)
- E-mail: parentconnect@mpf.org
  (Please provide mailing information)

These materials are offered free of charge!

Family Support Navigator Program

Maine Parent Federation has trained Family Support Navigators (FSN) that can help support your family at no cost to you! A FSN is an experienced parent who lives in your area and is available for 1:1 peer support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic all peer support is being offered via email, phone, texts, and through online platforms such as Zoom to support social distancing and keep all families safe.

A FSN can help you:

- organize your paperwork.
- interview a prospective service provider.
- prepare for a meeting with your child’s doctor, school, or service provider.
- provide support at an IEP meeting.
- locate resources in your area.

To learn more about the FSN program, visit our website at www.mpf.org or call us at (800) 870-7746.

We are currently accepting referrals to the program. If you are a parent that needs peer support, know of a family that needs help, or would like to learn how you can become a Navigator, please contact the Regional Family Support Coordinator in your county for more information:

Androscoggin, Cumberland, Franklin,
Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Piscataquis,
Sagadahoc, Somerset, Waldo and York
Deborah Newcombe, (800) 870-7746,
dnewcombe@mpf.org

Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, and
Washington
Robin Levesque, (207) 538-0866,
rlvesque@mpf.org.
The Benefits Of Music Therapy For Autistic Children
October 15, 2020 | Staff Writers | https://nursejournal.org

Understanding Autism
Autism can usually be noticed within the first three years of our lives and is recognized as a highly complex disability that affects development of our social, verbal and cognitive abilities. This disorder can affect the way that we communicate with other people, and although there are similarities between different cases of autism, it’s difficult to narrow down a specific sign of cause or symptom.

Approximately one in sixty-eight of Americans will have a form of autism, and it is not something that we can outgrow, although being diagnosed early means that there is a better chance for treatment.

How Music Can Make a Difference
One of the reasons that music has quickly become a tool used in autism therapy is that it can stimulate both hemispheres of our brain, rather than just one. This means that a therapist can use a song or instrument to support cognitive activity so that we can build self-awareness and improve relationships with others. Music encourages communicative behavior and can encourage interaction with others, which is something that autistic children have great difficulty with. If we look closely at the way that a band works, it is obvious that the instruments must all interact with one another, but the player only needs to interact with the instrument at first. For children dealing with autism, interacting with others can be difficult, but through introducing an instrument to their therapy, they may bond first with the object and then open up to others interacting with their instruments as well.

Listening and Singing Support
Our interpretation of music, both in lyrics and in sound can greatly assist in teaching us to communicate. For children with autism, this could mean learning a new word from a song, or better understanding how to act in a social situation based on the messages that a song is expressing. We know that autism can create barriers for children in social settings, but small groups of children listening to music together may feel confident and comfortable enough to comment or sing along with others. Dancing exercises can also help to stimulate our sensory systems, and allow us to enhance fine motor skills.

Early Intervention Studies
Studies of early intervention have shown that if we learn together with our autistic children through gentle play, fun musical activities, and non-invasive games then we can create a supportive environment where parents and children can bond in a healthy way. The reason that we use music therapy is to help our autistic children learn to relate to us and to others; other family members may be invited to participate after children become accustomed to one on one sessions. Aside from the sensory of dance, verbal advancement of lyrics and the social dynamic of learning an instrument, rhythm can help to motivate impulsive play time that involves our entire brain and body as one.

What To Expect in Music Therapy
Music therapy is beneficial to us all, not just our children, and the sessions usually involve crucial communication building exercise as well as relaxing playtime and motivation. Most therapists will give us the chance to develop these new skills slowly by introducing one thing at a time whether it be singing, dancing, listening, or playing our own sounds on an instrument, but each class or program should offer patience, and a safe learning environment.
Innovative Holiday and Winter Gatherings in the Time of COVID-19

The pandemic will not be over anytime soon. We have to learn how to connect in new ways.

More than six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. finds itself at a precarious point. Controlling the spread of SARS-CoV-2 remains challenging, and transmission rates are high in many areas. And now we’re moving into a time when winter weather in our part of the country may limit outdoor activities. We also have to think about how to make winter holidays meaningful in new ways.

We need to plan how to have fun with friends and family. Nothing is zero risk, but we can all make choices that minimize risk.

Here are a few core elements to consider as you plan for the holidays and gatherings ahead:

**Outdoors is still better than indoors** - This may involve being creative in the winter months, layering up in warm gear, and setting up yards and outdoor spaces such as parks in new ways.

If you have to be indoors, consider air-flow. Ventilation and air circulation are your friends. Open windows, increase circulation, and keep room density as low as possible with fewer people in one space.

**Mask up** - Wear masks whenever you are around people outside of your immediate household.

**Wash your hands** - Hand hygiene remains a critical way to help stem the spread.

**Have a plan for quarantining and isolation** - Be prepared in case someone in your household has exposure to a known COVID-19 case, exhibits symptoms, or is diagnosed. Know where you can be tested. Plan for how you would implement a 14-day quarantine if you are exposed. Plan for how you would isolate and care for an infected person in your home for at least 10 days (with an additional 14 days of quarantine after the infected person recovers for the caregiver who was in close contact).

**Getting sick with COVID-19 is not the only risk to consider** - We tend to think the two greatest risks of the pandemic are contracting or spreading COVID-19, but there are other risks as well.

Consider whether anyone has a work or home situation that could be complicated by quarantine or isolation. Not all jobs allow for time off or working from home in the event of a need to quarantine, and some employers may require testing before returning to work if there has been known exposure.

**Think carefully about travel** - Travel brings its own particular considerations. Some states have implemented mandatory quarantines that could impose travel restrictions or fines for out-of-state travel or visitors. If you are exposed at an out-of-state gathering, you may have to unexpectedly extend your stay in that area for 14 days.

Traveling out of state may also mean quarantine requirements from your work or child’s school when you return home, particularly if you traveled to an area with high levels of community transmission. If you become ill shortly after you arrive at your destination, you may have to seek medical care in an area away from home.

Adapted from an article by Keri Althoff & Elizabeth Stuart published by John Hopkins, Bloomberg School of Public Health
SRC Announcement of Meetings/Recruitment of Members

The Maine State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) wants your input!

The SRC is a statewide citizens group created to advise the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in Maine about how well its programs and services match the needs of people with disabilities.

The council meets monthly and invites you, as members of the public, to attend. The meetings are all being held virtually through Zoom at this time. A meeting link can be obtained by contacting the SRC through the webpage listed below. (Otherwise, meetings are held at the Department of Labor in Augusta.) All meetings take place on the third Monday of the month from 1-3 PM. There will not be a meeting in December, the next meeting will be held on January 25, 2021.

The SRC is actively looking to recruit more members to represent the voices of those impacted by disability. Please visit www.mainsrc.org for more information.

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Telehealth Groups Available

Invitation to participate in a Research Study:
Investigating the delivery of the PEERS®
interpersonal skills curriculum
delivered via Zoom

Sarah K. Howorth, PhD, BCBA-D, Assistant Professor, UMaine
Libby Stone-Sterling, PhD, Director Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

- We are looking for individuals between the ages of 14-19 to participate in interviews conducted via phone or Zoom (30-60 minutes) to determine eligibility to participate in a research study.

- You will be asked to complete some surveys before the skills sessions begin, and again after they end. Each time it will take about an hour to complete these forms.

- If eligible, social skills group sessions will take place once per week for a total of 90 minutes via Zoom. There will be 6-12 participants in each group. Your teen must be willing to participate in 13 of the 16 weekly sessions.

If you would like to participate and/or have questions about this study, please contact: libby.stone-sterling@maine.gov

Other News from Vocational Rehabilitation

During this challenging time, Vocational Rehabilitation services continue and staff are available to accept referrals, registrations for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and applications. They have rolled-out a number of creative tools (Virtual Job Shadow, Virtual Career Exploration Workshop, Virtual Job Club) that can be delivered remotely to help students with disabilities to continue to make progress towards their post-secondary education and employment goals. They are seeing great success! Where it is safe to do so, we are able to see students face-to-face in school and in the community. Please encourage inviting VR Counselors to IEP meetings when transition will be the focus.

There is a VR Counselor assigned to every Maine high school. Students can receive Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through completion of a simple one-page registration form or can receive more individualized transition services through application and determination of eligibility. Pre-ETS include job exploration counseling, work-based learning, counseling on opportunities for postsecondary education, workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and instruction in self-advocacy including peer mentoring.

To learn more, visit: https://www.main.gov/rehab/dvr/vr.shtml
How to Help Kids Handle Holiday Disappointment During COVID-19

www.connecticutchildrens.org  By: Amy Adolfo Signore, PhD, MPH and Emily Wakefield, PsyD

This year has been difficult to say the least. With the holidays approaching – and the challenges and uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic still ongoing – you may be wondering how to help your child cope with the disappointment of things being different this year.

0-3 years old: Focus on quality time during the holidays – and don’t worry about the details.

- Children this age will not be able to recall detailed memories of holidays past and will not recall the events of this year in the future.
- It’s okay to keep things very simple for children this age in terms of celebrations and explanations.
- All children benefit from having quiet-down time to feel love and attention from parents. With social distancing and quarantine measures in place, this is the perfect season to indulge kids with affection.

4-6 years old: Create new, quarantine-approved holiday traditions.

- Establish traditions within your immediate family – make holiday decorations, make a homemade gift, cook a special meal.
- Instead of in-person visits with friends, family or even Santa, consider fun ways to have a video interaction, write letters or make cards.
- Don’t punish children for having a negative reaction to holiday changes this year. Tell them that it’s okay to feel sad, disappointed or angry.
- Find the positive and teach positive self-talk. For example, “Since we don’t have to travel, we get extra time to relax and play at home.”

6-12 years old: Help your child cope with holiday blues – and build resilience for the future.

- At this age, children understand the precautions that need to be taken due to COVID-19.
- Validate their feelings of disappointment and sadness about changes to their holiday traditions: It’s normal and OK to feel angry, frustrated or sad.
- Remember that helping children overcome disappointment helps them build resiliency.
- Ask them for their ideas about how to make the holiday special.
- Teach fun relaxation strategies – try yoga for the first time, or practice slowly breathing in and out the scent of a favorite treat, lotion or candle.

13-18 years old: Ask, listen and encourage COVID-safe holiday activities.

- Ask teens how they are feeling.
- Let them know you are there if they need to talk.
- Listen! Often, teens just want someone to listen and not solve the problem for them.
- Offer perspective on the situation by looking at the big picture.
- Allow them a sense of control by giving them choices – maybe to have friend over on a different day to celebrate the holiday, or allow them to plan a special activity.
- Encourage positive social activities to honor the holiday season, such as how to volunteer in a socially distanced way.

Parents and caregivers: Manage your own disappointment about this holiday season.

- Allow yourself to feel sad, worried or angry.
- Do something to nurture yourself.
- Adjust your expectations.
- Look at the big picture. Children take cues from their parents. If you maintain a positive, festive, and calm demeanor, your kids will pick up on that and to the same.
The Maine Parent Federation Mailbag Lending Library has these DVD’s available!

1-2-3 Magic: Managing Difficult Behavior in Children 2–12
Asperger Syndrome: A Different Mind
Asperger Syndrome: Living Outside the Bell Curve
Asperger Syndrome: Transition to College and Work
Autism is a World - Academy Award Nominee for Documentary Short Subject
Autism Spectrum Disorders: Comprehensive Overview of ASD.
Autism Times Two - How one family copes with the challenges of Autism
Being Bullied: Strategies and Solutions for People with Asperger’s Syndrome
Beyond F.A.T. City: A Look Back, A Look Ahead – A Conversation about Special Education
Bullies are a Pain in the Brain - a DVD for children
 Discipline: Teaching Limits with Love
Down Syndrome: The First 18 Months
Endless Dreams: Building Educational Support for Youth in Foster Care
Facing Fear Without Freaking Out - a DVD for children
The First IEP: Parent Perspectives
How Difficult Can This Be?: The F.A.T. City Workshop on Understanding Learning Disabilities
How to Help Your Child Succeed in School - Strategies and guidance for parents of children with ADHD and/or Learning Disabilities
Getting Kids in Sync: Sensory-Motor Activities to Help Children Develop Body Awareness and Integrate Their Senses
I Have Tourette’s But Tourette’s Doesn’t Have Me: Dispelling the Myth One Child at a Time
In the Shoes of Christopher: A Story About a Bully and a Boy with OCD

Including Samuel - Captures the cultural and systemic barriers to inclusion and features interviews with teachers, parents, and disability rights experts
Making Our Way: A Documentary on Autism
Misunderstood Minds: Searching for Success in School
Once a Potty for Her – Designed to help kids understand, and use, their new potty and offers advice for parents on toilet training
Once Upon a Potty for Him – same as above
Paper Tigers – One high school’s unlikely success story
Parenting Children with Special Medical Needs – Offers essential parenting skills to help children of ages cope well, adhere to medical requirements and live a hope-filled life
Straight Talk about Autism with Parents & Kids: Childhood and Adolescent Issues
Stop Bullying Now: Take a Stand, Lend a Hand – A toolkit
Surviving Due Process: When Parents and the School Board Disagree
Tough Times/Resilient Kids – A Documentary on Problems Facing Today’s Youth

To borrow any of these materials, call the library at (800) 870-7746, or E-mail dnewcombe@mpf.org. Visit our website for a complete library list at http://www.mpf.org or call us for a printed copy.

Here’s an easy way to donate to MPF this holiday season!

AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. AmazonSmile is available at smile.amazon.com on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app for iOS and Android phones. When you shop at AmazonSmile, you’ll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added benefit that AmazonSmile will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice!
NERGN’s work is taking shape this fall and winter!

Recent and upcoming highlights:

After meeting (virtually) with the Aroostook Community Action Program in Presque Isle, Maine, NERGN developed a scope of work for a cultural liaison to help them connect with diverse communities, including American Indian communities in Northern Maine. NERGN will be hiring a person to fill this part-time position. There has already been some interest. Thank you Robin Levesque, Maine Parent Federation, for introducing NERGN to the group!

The Vermont State Team is actively recruiting representatives from diverse communities in VT to participate in their calls. Thanks to Betty Morse and the team.

NERGN is happy to be supporting Rare New England this year, including co-sponsoring the Rare Disease Day Speaker Series and their Career Fairs. The next fair is on December 10, 2020. Learn more and register here: https://rarenewengland.org/medical-genetics-career-fairs-2020?mc_cid=299bb2d1f&mceid=d97002b941

SAVE THE DATE!

Please hold April 8-9, 2021 for the virtual NERGN Annual Meeting! This is their typical time slot, and they will have online programming available on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning! More details to come.

"There's No Place Like Home for The Holiday's"

This year those lyrics from an old song take on a new meaning. This holiday season may be difficult for many families missing out on in-person visits and celebrations with friends and loved ones, yet for many of our kids they will do well in a quite less sensory triggering environment. One thing we know for sure is that the year 2020 will be different for all of us.

This holiday season will most likely be memorable because it is so different. We just need to find new, fun ways to make the most of it.

Maine Parent Federation invites you to share your tips, your ideas, your photo’s and your fun with us and others on our “Family Connections of Maine” Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/groups/familyconnectionsormaine

Let’s get creative!

What You Can Do to Build Relationships with Your Legislators:

During each legislative session, elected officials make policies that affect people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). It is often a steep learning curve for them to understand what matters most within this complex population. Their job as legislators is to serve their constituents; your vital role as a constituent, is to communicate which laws and policies matter to you. You may introduce yourself by phone, email or postcard to share your story. Any of these actions will build your relationship with them. To learn more, access email templates, postcards and additional resources use this link: https://communityconnectme.org/

Advocacy Development Tracker Tool

The Advocacy Development Tracker Tool is created for people that are interested in learning more about advocacy and tracking their progress over time. It is being piloted by Community Connect Maine and sponsored by Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. This tool can be found at https://communityconnectme.org/