



Meeting the Unique Needs of Autistic Individuals with Diverse Strengths

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Registration: \$25.00

Continuing Education Units: \$15.00 each

This conference is sponsored by the WNY Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders and The Summit Center for teachers, therapists, other helping professionals, and parents/caregivers. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) encompasses a broad intellectual spectrum, ranging from individuals with significant intellectual disabilities to those with exceptional intellectual abilities. This diversity highlights the complex interplay between cognitive strengths and challenges for school, work and community integration.

For individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism can amplify communication, social, and adaptive behavior challenges. Conversely, individuals without intellectual disabilities often face challenges in navigating social norms which can hinder personal and professional relationships. This conference aims to provide strategies to better understand and assist individuals with autism to allow for reduced supports. Special attention will be given to enhancing executive functioning skills, developing social skills, fostering independence in daily living, and transition to adulthood.

REGISTER FOR THIS CONFERENCE AT:

<https://nysrcasd.org/events/1404/registrations/new>

OPENING COMMENTS

Stephen R. Anderson, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LBA
The Summit Center, Inc.

WNY Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

Presentation 1: The Quiet Impact of Executive Dysfunction on Classroom Participation in Autism

Presenters: Ericka Wodka, Ph.D., ABPP – CN, Clinical Director

Ebony L. Holliday, Ph.D., NCSP, Assistant Director of Community Programs

The Center for Autism Science, Services and Innovation, Kennedy Krieger Institute, Baltimore, MD



Dr. Wodka is the Clinical Director of the Center for Autism Science, Services and Innovation (CASSI) at Kennedy Krieger Institute and a board-certified neuropsychologist, with subspecialty certification in pediatric neuropsychology. She provides clinical neuropsychological evaluations at CASSI in coordination with other clinical services, with a focus on interdisciplinary care. Dr. Wodka is active in the mentoring programs at Kennedy Krieger and participates in the neuropsychological training of post-doctoral residents. Her research interests include examining motor development, attention and other aspects of higher-order cognitive processes in neurodevelopmental disorders, particularly autism spectrum disorder (ASD). She is the site principal investigator for a national study examining the genetic causes of ASD. She has also presented and published findings related to the relationship between executive functioning, attention, and sensory differences in autism, as well as factors that impact the identification and understanding of autism in females. Other research interests include examining differences in children with ASD, with and without co-occurring conditions (e.g., anxiety, ADHD, aggression).



Dr. Holliday is the Assistant Director of Community Programs at the Center for Autism Services, Science and Innovation (CASSI) at Kennedy Krieger Institute and a nationally certified school psychologist. She has worked extensively in early childhood settings, public and private schools, and alternative and nonpublic school settings to support the educational needs of students. Dr. Holliday provides direct and consultative services to school systems and Part C early intervention programs and has delivered training and coaching to teachers, related service professionals, and caregivers in the implementation of evidence-based practices to support the needs of students and families. Dr. Holliday's clinical and research interests include screening and assessment of social communication delays and autism in early childhood, assessment and intervention for severe and challenging behaviors, and scaling effective interventions for use in the local community through frameworks of community-engaged research and implementation science.

ABSTRACT

Executive dysfunction is an umbrella term used to describe higher order cognitive skills including planning, organization, working memory, inhibition, and flexibility. It is a common area of weakness in neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Additionally, in those with autism without intellectual disability, it may be the most impactful area of cognitive weakness on daily functioning and yet is often difficult to identify. Autistic students may face multiple challenges in educational settings related to effectively navigating academic and social demands related to executive dysfunction. It's important for professionals to be equipped with evidence-based strategies to support the educational success of neurodiverse learners. This presentation will provide an overview of executive dysfunction in autism and related conditions and provide strategies to mitigate the educational impact within the school setting.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will be able to define executive dysfunction and understand how it presents in autism.
2. Participants will be able to distinguish unique and overlapping features of autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
3. Participants will be able to identify effective strategies to support academic, social, and behavioral functioning of autistic students without accompanying intellectual disability.

Presentation 2: Transitioning to Competent Adulthood

Presenter: Dr. Peter Gerhardt, Ph.D., BCBA-D, Executive Director, EPIC School, Paramus, NJ



Dr. Gerhardt is the Executive Director of the EPIC Programs in Paramus, NJ. Dr. Gerhardt has over 40 years of experience utilizing the principles of applied behavior analysis in support of adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders in educational, employment, residential, and community-based settings. He has authored or edited several publications, including *“Make it Meaningful: Creating Programs that Matter into Adulthood for Learners with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders”* (Make it Meaningful Press, 2024) with Dr. Shanna Bahry, *“Clinician’s Guide to Sexuality and Autism”* (Academic Press, 2024) with Drs. Jessica Cauchi, Mary Jane Weiss, and Justin Leaf and *“The Handbook of Quality of Life for Individuals with ASD”* (Springer, 2022), on which he is a co-editor. He has presented nationally and internationally on these and related topics. Dr. Gerhardt serves as Co-Chairman of the Scientific Council for the Organization for Autism Research and is on numerous professional advisory boards, including the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies. He serves as Affiliate Faculty in the Institute for Applied Behavioral Science at Endicott College. Dr. Gerhardt received his doctorate from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey’s Graduate School of Education.

ABSTRACT

Historically, most intervention research (and practice) has focused on the quality of the intervention rather than on the quality of the intervention’s outcome. While this has allowed for a greater understanding of the technical process of effective intervention, it has not offered much in terms of achieving socially significant outcomes. However, socially significant behavior change is central to science and the promise of a positive quality of life. (e.g., Baer, Wolf & Risley, 1968; Wolf, 1978). To fulfill this promise, the same attention paid to how we teach needs to be paid to what we teach, particularly with regard to the transition to adulthood process. Two reasonable first steps are the identification of, and instruction in, meaningful and relevant goals and supporting instruction and intervention that takes place outside the controlled classroom or clinic environment in the less controlled community. This workshop will discuss these requirements and others, from a practical, hands on, evidence-based, perspective. Recommendations for future research and practice will be offered.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the characteristics of instructional goals that are meaningful and, therefore, socially significant.
2. State the difference between applied skills and functional skills and which are more likely to be retained after instruction is finished.
3. Discuss at least three strategies associated with more effective group instruction in ASD.

Presentation 3: Supporting Autistic Students in Making Social Connections: The UCLA PEERS® Model

Presenter: Christine T. Moody, Ph.D., Director of Research, UCLA PEERS Clinic, Los Angeles, CA.



Dr. Moody is a clinical psychologist at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, with involvement in the UCLA PEERS® Clinic and UCLA Tarjan Center. In the UCLA Tarjan Center, she leads several postsecondary and employment initiatives, including partnerships to provide training and technical assistance to the California Community Colleges and California Department of Rehabilitation related to better serving individuals with intellectual disability and/or autism. Dr. Moody is the Director of Research at the UCLA PEERS® Clinic, which offers evidence-based social skills programming for neurodivergent youth and adults who are struggling socially. As Director of Research, she facilitates and publishes research on the efficacy and implementation of the various PEERS® social skills programs across the lifespan and oversees a large team of trainees. She received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from UCLA in 2020.

ABSTRACT

Autistic youth experience social isolation and peer rejection at rates much higher than their peers, which can significantly and negatively impact academic and mental health outcomes over time. The UCLA PEERS® Programs offer evidence-based social skills programming across the lifespan and have been translated, disseminated, and cross-culturally validated across the globe. Most relevant to K-12 educators, the PEERS® for Adolescents program aims to empower students in middle school and high school by teaching effective skills for making and keeping friends, as well as skills related to handling conflict and rejection. Using a neurodiversity-affirming and strengths-based approach, research evidence suggests that PEERS® is effective for not only autistic teens, but also teens with ADHD, anxiety, and depression who are struggling socially – making it a versatile tool for school-based professionals. In this presentation, attendees will learn about the common social challenges facing autistic youth, the PEERS® methods for teaching social skills, and concrete strategies for making and keeping friends that can be used with students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the social challenges facing many autistic youth.
2. Recognize effective methods for teaching social skills.
3. Concrete and ecologically valid strategies for making and keeping friends in adolescence.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8:20 – 8:30 Opening Comments

Stephen R. Anderson, PhD., BCBA-D, LBA

8:30 – 10:00 Presentation 1: The Quiet Impact of Executive Dysfunction on Classroom Participation

Dr. Ebony L. Holliday and Dr. Ericka Wodka

10:00 – 10:15 Break

10:15 – 11:45 Presentation 2: Transition to Competent Adulthood

Dr. Peter Gerhardt, Ph.D., BCBA-D

11:45 – 12:30 Lunch Break

12:30 – 2:00 Presentation 3: Supporting Autistic Students in Making Social Connections: The UCLA PEERS® Model

Dr. Christine T. Moody, Ph.D.

2:00 p.m. End of Conference

Conference Cost: \$25.00

AHSA, BCBA, CTLE, OT/OTA, PT/PTA, PSY CEUs are available for an additional fee of \$15.00 for each type of CEU.

These courses are made possible by a grant from NYSRCASD. Requests for accommodation/special needs may be sent to wnyrcasd@thesummitcenter.org or by calling 716-629-3417.

Cancellation Policy: If cancellation is received 48 hours prior to the start of the conference, the cost of the conference and CEUs will be fully refunded.

CEU Opportunities: There is a separate charge for each type of CEU.



Genesee Valley Speech-
Language-Hearing Association

Intermediate Level
0.45 ASHA CEUs

SPEECH PATHOLOGISTS: Course Completion Requirements: To obtain ASHA CEUs, participants must log in/out using their unique online seminar link and complete the learning assessment survey at the end of the day. Registrants will receive a certificate of

completion via email when the course has been successfully completed. If participants wish to earn ASHA CEUs, participants are required to attend all three presentations, complete an ASHA CEU Participant Form, and submit at the end of the workshop via email.

No partial credit will be provided. The entire conference is offered for .45 ASHA CEU (Intermediate Level; Professional Area).



OCCUPATIONAL AND PHYSICAL THERAPISTS: Participants who attend all three presentations receive **4.5 NYS Continuing Competency Units for OTs/OTAs** and **5.4 NYS PT Contact Hours for PTs/PTAs**. To obtain CEUs, participants must log in/out using their unique online seminar link and complete a required

learning assessment survey and post-test provided by APOT. Registrants will receive a certificate of completion via email when the course has been successfully completed. Associated Physical & Occupational Therapists is recognized by the New York State Education Department Office of the Professions as an approved sponsor of continuing education for Occupational Therapists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Physical Therapists, and Physical Therapist Assistants. Associated Physical & Occupational Therapists, PLLC can be reached at apotcontinuing@gmail.com or 716-874-6175.



ACE: The Authorized Continuing Education (ACE) program exists to make a wide array of continuing education (CE) events available to Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BACB®) certificants. ACE providers have been authorized by the BACB to provide Learning CE events for BCBA and BCaBA certificants. **4.5 ACE event CEUs** will be provided.



CTLE: The Summit Center is an NYS Department of Education approved provider of CTLE continuing education events available to teachers and administrators. **4.5 learning CEUs** will be provided.

PSYCHOLOGISTS: The Summit Center is a provider of CEU credits for Psychologists through the NYS State Education Department, Office of the Professions. 4.5 CEUs will be provided. Provider number: PSY – 0222.

Each organization/entity uses its own calculation to determine the number of CEUs based on contact hours. As with all continuing education, the attendee should always verify CEU requirements by his/her professional organization and/or state licensure board.

ABOUT

The Summit Center is Western New York's leading provider of services for children and adults with autism and other developmental concerns. Programs include a special education school, pediatric behavioral health clinic, intensive early intervention program, and adult and community programs. Visit TheSummitCenter.org for more information.

The WNY Regional Center for ASD is a collaborative program of The Summit Center, University at Albany, and The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities. The Center is committed to providing information and practical strategies that are supported by scientific research – commonly referred to as evidence-based practice. The Center's activities consist of workshops and resource materials that provide practical guidance to professionals and parents. Workshops are offered at various locations throughout WNY. Visit TheSummitCenter.org/what-we-do/wny-regional-center-for-autism-spectrum-disorder-asd for more information.