

OU webinar series helps families support children with autism during pandemic

Covering a variety of topics, the weekly webinars run through August 20.

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The Oakland University Center for Autism is sponsoring a summer webinar series to help parents, caregivers and siblings support children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) during the coronavirus pandemic.



The weekly webinars focus on a variety of issues, including facilitating online learning for children with autism, looking out for dangers such as cyberbullying, dealing with trauma and transitioning back to school.

“Children with autism thrive on routine, and that’s been disrupted during the COVID-19 crisis,” said Chaturi Edrisinha, director of research for the Center for Autism and associate professor of Human Development and Child Studies. “They also tend to be visual learners, so the switch to online learning has been difficult – not only for them, but for their parents and caregivers. The webinar series is a way for people to connect with each other, ask questions and share information about how to manage these challenges.”

The webinars also address challenges that siblings may face as they take on more caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic.

“If the parents are working, there are more demands on the sibling to care for their brother or sister on the spectrum,” Edrisinha said. “Two of our webinars are specifically geared toward siblings, and they offer guidance such as how to be a good friend to a sibling with ASD and how to explain ASD to their friends.”

Along with tips on how to support children with ASD, the webinars also focus on the importance of self-care for parents and caregivers. Edrisinha pointed to a [2010 study conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) that showed mothers of adolescents and adults with ASD experienced chronic stress comparable to the stress levels of combat soldiers.

“Self-care has become even more important now because people are getting burned out, and there are limitations on what they can do at home or where they can go to de-stress,” said Edrisinha. “That’s why we’re offering webinars on stress management and mindfulness to help people find ways to cope, rest and rejuvenate.”

The webinars are presented by:

- Chaturi Edrisinha, Director of Research, Center for Autism, and Associate Professor of Human Development and Child Studies
- Tomoko Wakabayashi, Early Childhood PhD Coordinator, and Associate Professor of Human Development and Child Studies
- Shawna Boomgaard, Manager of Academic Accountability
- Abbigail Sievers, Middle School Special Education Teacher
- Cassie Bentley, High School Special Education Teacher
- Nicola Fitzsimmons, Elementary School Special Education Teacher

For a full listing of webinars, view the [PDF](#). To register for a webinar, visit oakland.edu/hdcs/center-for-autism.

For additional information, contact Chaturi Edrisinha at ouca@oakland.edu.