

# Executive Functioning Skills for Students with ASD During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Presented by:

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AUTISM TRAINING AND TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE PROJECT



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**Illinois**  
**State Board of Education**

**icsps** impacting  
educational  
equity

Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,  
Illinois State University, College of Education

# About Me: *Carissa Melody*

- **Role:** New Research Coordinator for the Autism training and Technical Assistance (ATTA) Project
- **Experience:** 10 years teaching special education
- **Degree:** Masters in Applied Behavior Analysis
- **Family:** A husband and 3 teenagers

# Covid 19 Pandemic & Executive Function Skills

- The Pandemic of Covid 19 has turned our world upside-down
  - New schedule
    - Work, school, sports (no sports)
  - Stress
  - Sudden and unexpected changes
  - Different rules
    - School, restaurants, stores



# Professional Learning Outcomes

- Understand Executive Functioning EF Skills
- Explore resources to help support EF skills
- Walk away strategies to support EF skills
- Evaluate our EF strengths and next steps to improve EF Deficits

# What are Executive Functions?

- Broadly, executive functions (EF), some call the CEO of the brain, are the cognitive skills or mental processes engrained into **EVERYTHING** we do and use daily to help manage information, plan, complete tasks, and goals.





# Causes of EF Dysfunction or Deficits

## Diagnosed Conditions

- ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders)
- ADHD
- Depression or Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Tourette's Syndrome
- Traumatic Brain Injuries

## Temporary causes

- Exhaustion
- Severe pain
- Stress
- Distracting environments
- Drug use
- Alcohol
- Severe boredom
- \*\*Pandemic: stress, distracting environment (remote learning), changing schedules, sudden interruptions

# Who might struggle with EF?

- Signs of an EF deficit & common struggles:
  - handling frustrations
  - controlling impulses
  - making plans
  - staying focused
  - analyzing and processing information

# Executive Functioning Skills

## Cognition:

- Planning/prioritizing
- Organization
- Time Management
- Initiate Tasks
- Working Memory
- Metacognition

## Behavioral:

- Emotional or Self-Control
- Attention & Focus
- Flexibility
- Perseverance

# Answer This:

Since the pandemic, my students, myself, or another family member have struggled **EVEN MORE** with one or more of the listed executive functioning skills in some way?

# Management Strategies

1. Organize and plan your day
2. Organize space
3. Focus on 1 thing at a time
4. Set time for tasks, processing, transitions
5. Flexible & In Control

<https://autismcollegeandcareer.com/>

Coping with COVID-19

Remote Learning for  
Students with  
Autism Spectrum Disorder



This publication is pursuant to a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education and funded 100% with Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project dollars.

The image features a white background with decorative circuit board patterns in the corners. These patterns consist of thin grey lines forming various shapes and paths, with small grey circles at the end of the lines, resembling electronic components or traces. The patterns are located in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners.

# Poll: Planning Assessment



# Organize and Plan Your Day

## Daily Schedule

### Type of schedule:

- Object
- Pictures
  - real or clip art
- Written w/pictures
- Written w/o pictures
- Technology

## School Planner

- Due dates
- Holidays
- In-person or remote learning days

## Task Schedule

- Work task schedule with built in done or reward
- First/then
- Play task list
- Lunch task list
- Chore task list

# Today's Schedule



- art
- science
- music group
- lunch
- break
- English
- geography
- gym
- swimming
- multimedia class

1

2

3

4

5

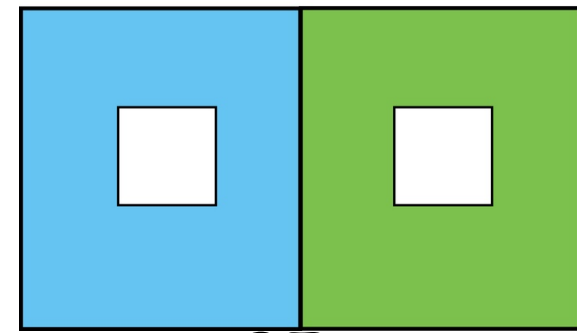


# School Schedule

- Language Arts
- Recess
- Library
- Lunch
- Math
- Music

First

Then



**OR**

**FIRST**

DO MATH

**THEN**

WRITE A STORY

**THEN**

PLAY ON COMPUTER

**Kids ToDo List 4+**  
Useful Picture  
Card Scheduler  
LITALICO Inc.  
**FREE**

## DAILY ROUTINE

**Morning**

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Dirty Clothes in Laundry							
Make Bed							
Take Vitamin							
Breakfast Clean Up							
Brush Teeth							
Check Backpack/Lunch							

**Afternoon/Evening**

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Homework							
Practice Instrument							
Put Away Laundry							
Dinner Clean Up							
Read							
Tidy House							
Shower							
Brush Teeth							

Chiceworks \$14.99 or Chiceworks Calendar \$9.99  
**BUNDLE: \$20.99**

I am waiting

for

**4:52**

Pause Timer

While I am waiting I can

color or use the computer

When I am upset

I can

get help or take a break

Then I can

watch a dvd/video or play a game

My nighttime schedule

First I need to

eat dinner **2:00**

take a bath

put on pajamas

brush teeth

go to sleep

All done

Then I can

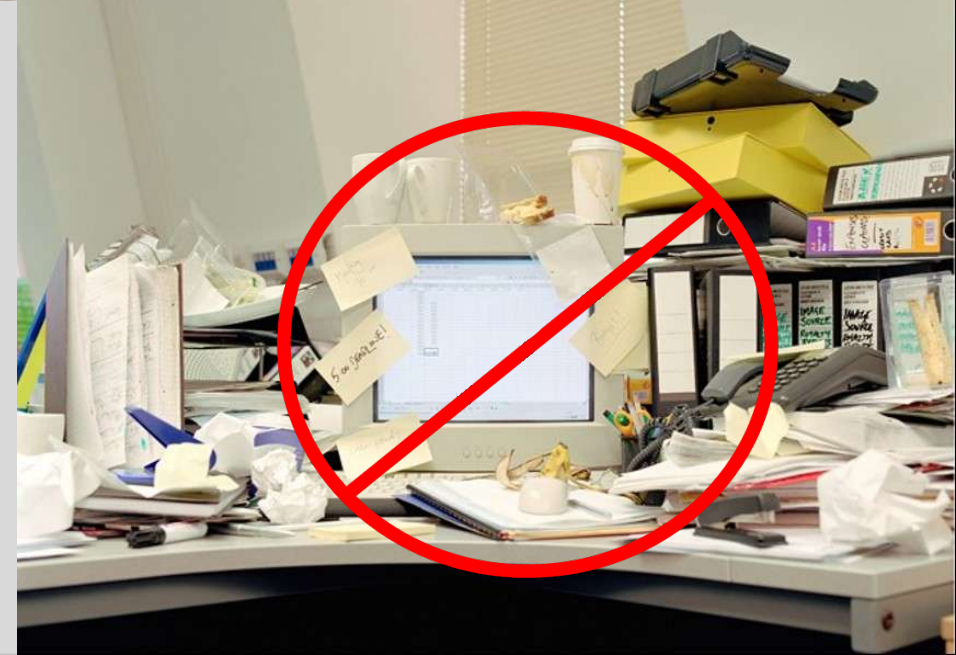
read a book or listen to music

The image features a white background with decorative circuit board patterns in the corners. These patterns consist of thin grey lines forming various shapes and paths, with small grey circles at the end of the lines, resembling electronic components or nodes on a circuit. The patterns are located in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners.

# Poll: Organization Assessment

# Organize Space

- Separate place to work
- Organized for each task or subject
- Free of clutter





# Student Binder – all in one place



SIMPLY SPECIAL ED

Task work system, done bin



The image features a white background with decorative light gray circuit-like lines in the corners. These lines consist of vertical and horizontal segments connected by small circles, resembling a stylized PCB or network diagram. The lines are positioned in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners, framing the central text.

# Poll: Working Memory and Metacognition Assessment

# Working Memory

## Working memory

Holding information in your brain while you use it

- Read and immediately answer a question, follow multi-step directions from memory

## Working memory STRATEGIES

- Directions – write down oral, take a picture of long directions
- Paraphrase – in your own words or relate to a personal event
- Repeat, repeat, repeat – directions, information (read 3x, cover it up, repeat, read, repeat)

# Metacognition

**Metacognition** - An accurate understanding of what you already know.....and don't know

## Metacognition STRATEGIES

- Self-monitor to always improve your learning - if you are doing well, keep going. If you are confused, stop, get back on track: re-read, ask for help
- Consider your skills academic and other activity related skills
- Know your learning style – visual, auditory, visual, physical, logical, social, solitary, verbal



# Learning Styles

## VERBAL

Words are your strongpoint!  
You prefer to use words both  
in speech and in writing!

## VISUAL

You prefer to use pictures,  
diagrams, images and spatial  
understanding to help you  
learn

## MUSICAL / AUDITORY

You prefer using sounds or  
music or even rhythms to  
help you learn.

## PHYSICAL / KINAESTHETIC

You use your hands, body  
and sense of touch to help  
you learn. You might 'act  
things out'.

## WHAT'S YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

## LOGICAL / MATHEMATICAL

Learning is easier for you if  
you use logic, reasoning,  
systems and sequences.

## SOCIAL

You like to learn new things  
as a part of a group.  
Explaining your  
understanding to a group  
helps you to learn.

## SOLITARY

You like to work alone. You  
use self-study and prefer your  
own company when  
learning.

## COMBINATION

Your learning style is a  
combination of two or more  
of these styles.

The image features a light gray background with decorative circuit-like lines in the corners. These lines consist of straight segments connected by small circles, resembling a stylized PCB or network diagram. The lines are positioned in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners, framing the central text.

# Poll: Sustained Attention and Perseverance Assessment

**Sustained Attention** – Using focus to reduce anxiety, increase productivity, & have time for other activities. If it is used socially, it encourages friendships

- **Sustained Attention STRATEGIES**

- Identify distractors (list 5 biggest), brainstorm and list 2 ways to reduce the distractor
- Pay attention – how? Do you need to fidget, doodle, take notes, ask for teacher notes to follow, take short breaks
- \*practice w/ Simon Says – attention game
- Shift focus – transition break, more time between tasks

## Perseverance STRATEGIES

- Keep goal in mind
- Talk – self or trusted friend or adult
- Take breaks
- Look back in time at past accomplishments

Perseverance - Stick to a task  
without giving up

The image features a white background with decorative circuit board patterns in the corners. These patterns consist of thin grey lines forming various shapes and paths, ending in small grey circles, resembling a printed circuit board (PCB) layout. The patterns are located in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners.

# Poll: Time & Task Management Assessment

# Time

## Time Management

accurate understanding of time to complete tasks

~how long ~your pace ~prioritize

## Task Initiation

ability to start work right away

~overcome procrastination ~reduce stress



# TIME MANAGEMENT - UNDERSTANDING OF TIME TO COMPLETE TASKS

~HOW LONG    ~YOUR PACE    ~PRIORITIZE

- **ESTIMATE TIME** – SOME TASKS TAKE LONGER OR SHORTER USE A LOG TO ESTIMATE AND PRACTICE DID YOU DO IT IN THE TIME YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE? (WALK 100 STEPS, RESEARCH THE HOTTEST CAR OF 2020, READ A CHAPTER, DO 10 MATH PROBLEMS)
- **PACE YOURSELF** - TO MEET BIG DEADLINES – THE DUE DATE IN YOUR PLANNER, CHUNK INTO MINI DEADLINES, START IMMEDIATELY, FINISH A FEW DAYS BEFORE
- **PLAN A BALANCE** – WORK AND LEISURE TIME, SET WORKING LIMITS, ENOUGH SLEEP, HEALTHY EATING, LISTEN TO YOUR BODY
- **PRIORITIZE** – LIST TASKS AND ORDER THEM BY DATE & TIME IT TAKES
- **SET GOALS** – SET LONG- AND SHORT-TERM GOALS AND WRITE THEM IN YOUR PLANNER
- **MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS!**

# Task Initiation - ability to start work right away


~overcome procrastination ~reduce stress

- Make a plan, chunk into mini tasks, use self-talk, get unstuck, reward at the end

## Get Unstuck **STRATEGIES:**

- reread directions
- turn question around
  - research online
- reread what you've written
  - ask your teacher
    - ask a friend
- Trick yourself – ex. start with a goal of doing 10 problems  
(you might surprise yourself by finishing the entire task)



The image features a white background with decorative circuit board patterns in the corners. These patterns consist of thin grey lines representing traces, with small circles at the end of the lines representing components or vias. The patterns are located in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners.

# Poll: Control and Flexibility Assessment

# Flexible and in control

## Flexibility

~adapt to new situations, handle frustration, problem solve

- **Deal with change** - Acknowledge feelings, Identify the positive, use self-talk, accept uncertainty – some things don't have answers
- **Handle frustration** – turn a bad situation into a positive one, manage stress with physical activity, talk with friends or adults, do things you love, self-care,
- **Problem Solve** – be solution focused
- **Other People have Perspectives** – what would you feel or think if you were the other person?
- **Try new things** – can be fun or scary, makes life interesting and you might find a new love!

## Self-Control

~Ability to regulate self: thoughts, actions, emotions

- **Identify triggers** – face hot, mind blank, clench fist or jaw, breath heavy, sick stomach, sweaty
- **Self-control** – stop and think, write out problem (rate it 1-10 and the solution )
- **“I” statements** – I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ happens because \_\_\_\_\_ and next time I could \_\_\_\_\_
- **Anger & Stress Management** – “I” statement (affirmation), solution focused, breathe, self-talk, exercise regularly, ask for space, listen to

# Zones of Regulation

## The ZONES of Regulation®

<b>BLUE ZONE</b> Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	<b>GREEN ZONE</b> Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b> Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	<b>RED ZONE</b> Mad/Angry Mean Terrified Yelling/Hitting Out of Control

<b>BLUE ZONE</b> Bored, Hurt, Exhausted, Sick, Tired, Sad	<b>GREEN ZONE</b> Calm, Good, Proud, Okay, Ready to Learn, Content	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b> Frustrated, Annoyed/Worried, Excited, Silly, Scared, Overwhelmed	<b>RED ZONE</b> Aggressive, Mean, Terrified, Mad, Angry, Yelling
<b>Blue Zone Tools</b> Stretch	<b>Green Zone Tools</b> Drink water	<b>Yellow Zone Tools</b> Deep breaths	<b>Red Zone Tools</b> Take a break

## Social Thinking

### Whole Body Listening!

Larry wants to remind you to listen with your entire body



Eyes = Look at the person talking to you



Ears = Both ears ready to hear



Mouth = Quiet - no talking, humming or making sounds



Hands = Quiet in lap, pockets or by your side



Feet = Quiet on the floor



Body = Faces the speaker



Brain = Thinking about what is being said



Heart = Caring about what the other person is saying

## Visual Supports for 10 Key Social Thinking® Vocabulary



Social Thinking Vocabulary concepts in visual form!

Perfect visual support for teaching in a classroom, treatment room, or at home

Sold as a set; not sold separately



To be used as supplemental visual supports for the teaching you are already doing

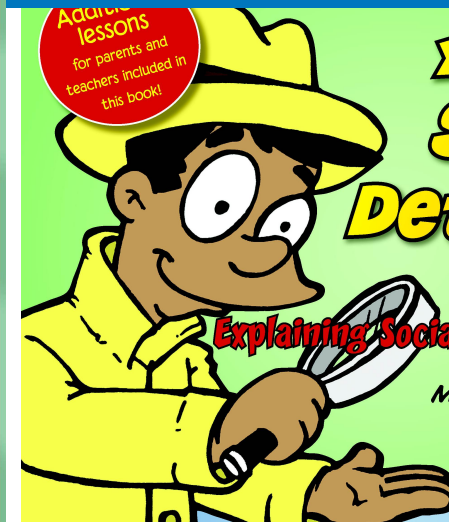
For ages 5 - young adults

Think Social Publishing, Inc.  
Santa Clara, CA

[www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com)



Additional lessons for parents and teachers included in this book!



## You are a Social Detective!

### Explaining Social Thinking to Kids

WRITTEN BY:  
**MICHELLE GARCIA WINNER**  
AND  
**PAMELA CROOKE**  
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
**KELLY KNOPP**

## Executive Functions

~Each is intertwined ~Each will affect the other

WELL-PLANNED

Organized, time saver, focused, prepared for changes, work through challenges

ORGANIZED

Plan quickly, use time wisely, proper tools, manage emotions, focus, organized back-up plan & strategies ready for when you need help

TIME MANAGED

Plan for the right amount of time, work done on time and no wasted time, more flexibility with time worked in for tweaking, planned time to work through challenges

TASK INITIATION

Materials ready to start immediately, stay on task, extra time for getting unstuck

WORKING MEMORY

Plan accurately, understand and know what you need

METACOGNITION

Plan accurately, no wasted time on topics you don't need, focus on specific learning

SELF-CONTROL

Plan w/o overwhelming, responsibility before fun, flexible when challenged, manage frustration

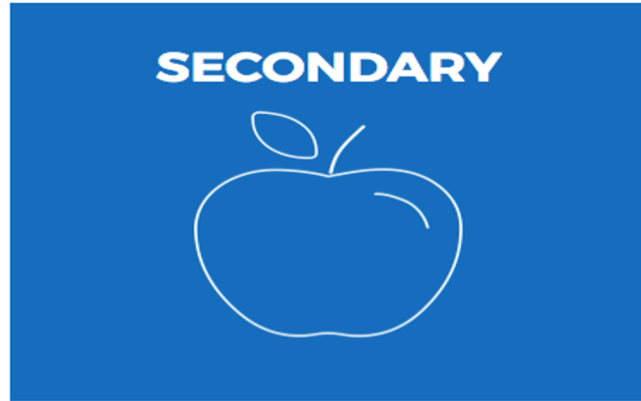
FLEXIBILITY

Plan and make changes as needed, best organization system, high priority 1<sup>st</sup>, use different or new strategies if not working or efficient

PERSEVERANCE

Plan with detail, thoroughly organized, stronger time management, push memory to the limits, readjust learning goals until task is done, self-control when stuck, stay focused even when boring, flexible until completion

# Autism Training and Technical Assistance (ATTA)



[Autismcollegeandcareer.com](https://www.autismcollegeandcareer.com)



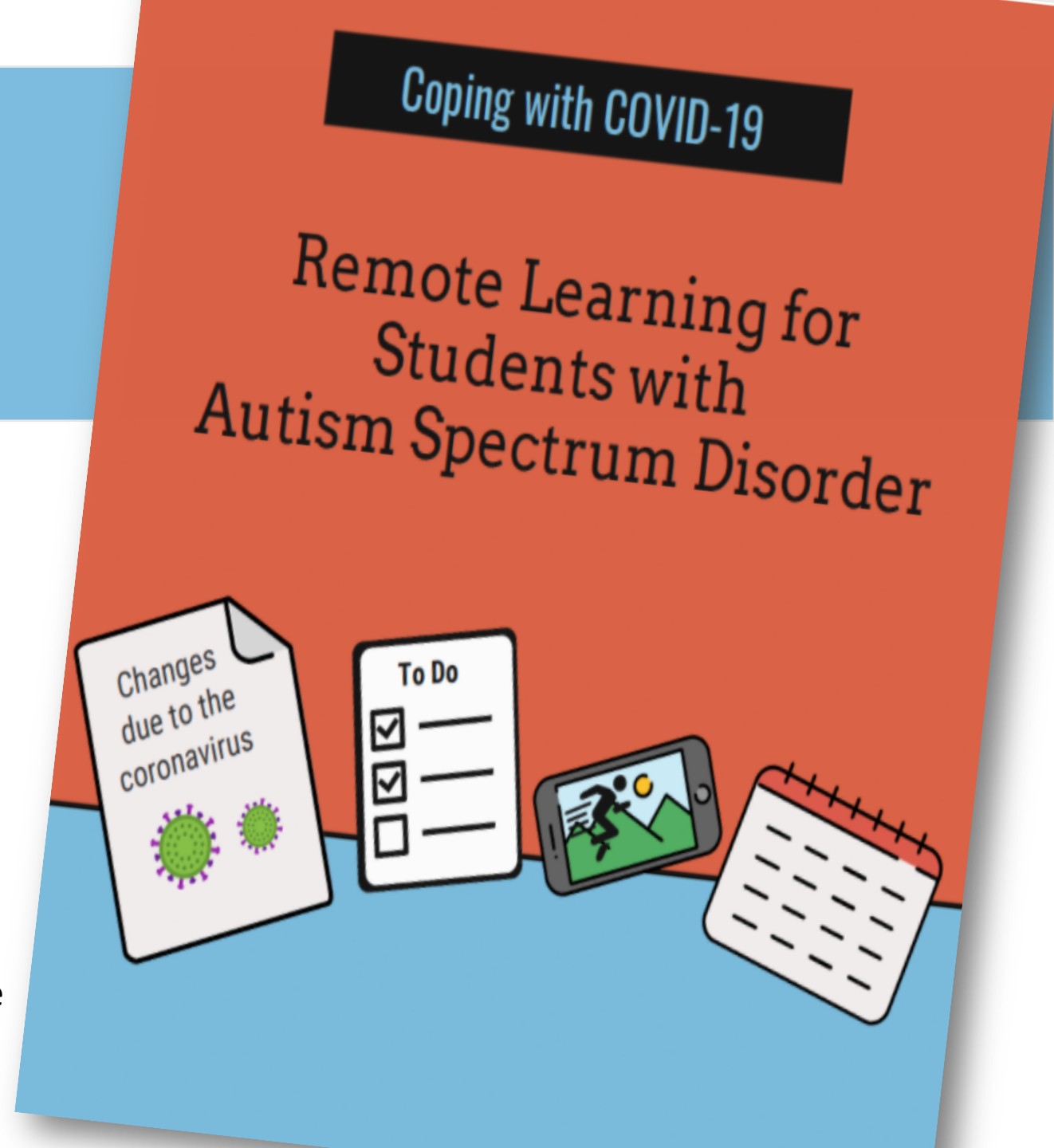
# Additional Resource

This resource can be located by visiting:

[AutismCollegeandCareer.com](https://www.autismcollegeandcareer.com)

[isbe.net/pages/covid19.aspx](https://isbe.net/pages/covid19.aspx)

Contact Nikki Michalak at [nakempe@ilstu.edu](mailto:nakempe@ilstu.edu) for more information or questions



# Thank you!

Please visit:

[AutismCollegeandCareer.com](http://AutismCollegeandCareer.com)