

AUTISM TRAINING AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROJECT

Mental Health Awareness Month: Self-Care

by Dr. Theresa Regan, PhD

The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project

The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (ATTA) develops and presents resources that assist individuals with autism in their transition from secondary education to postsecondary education or employment. ATTA provides training and support to important stakeholders as they work to provide an equitable experience for individuals on the spectrum.

The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support (ICSPPS) creates, supports, and delivers professional development for education professionals across Illinois. ICSPPS provides technical assistance, develops publications, and facilitates program improvement strategies for our partners as they relate to college transition, recruitment, retention, and completion—encouraging achievement of special populations learners. ICSPPS was founded in 1977 at Illinois State University and is housed in the Educational Administration and Foundations department in the College of Education.





Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (ATTA)

<https://autismcollegeandcareer.com>

icsps impacting educational equity



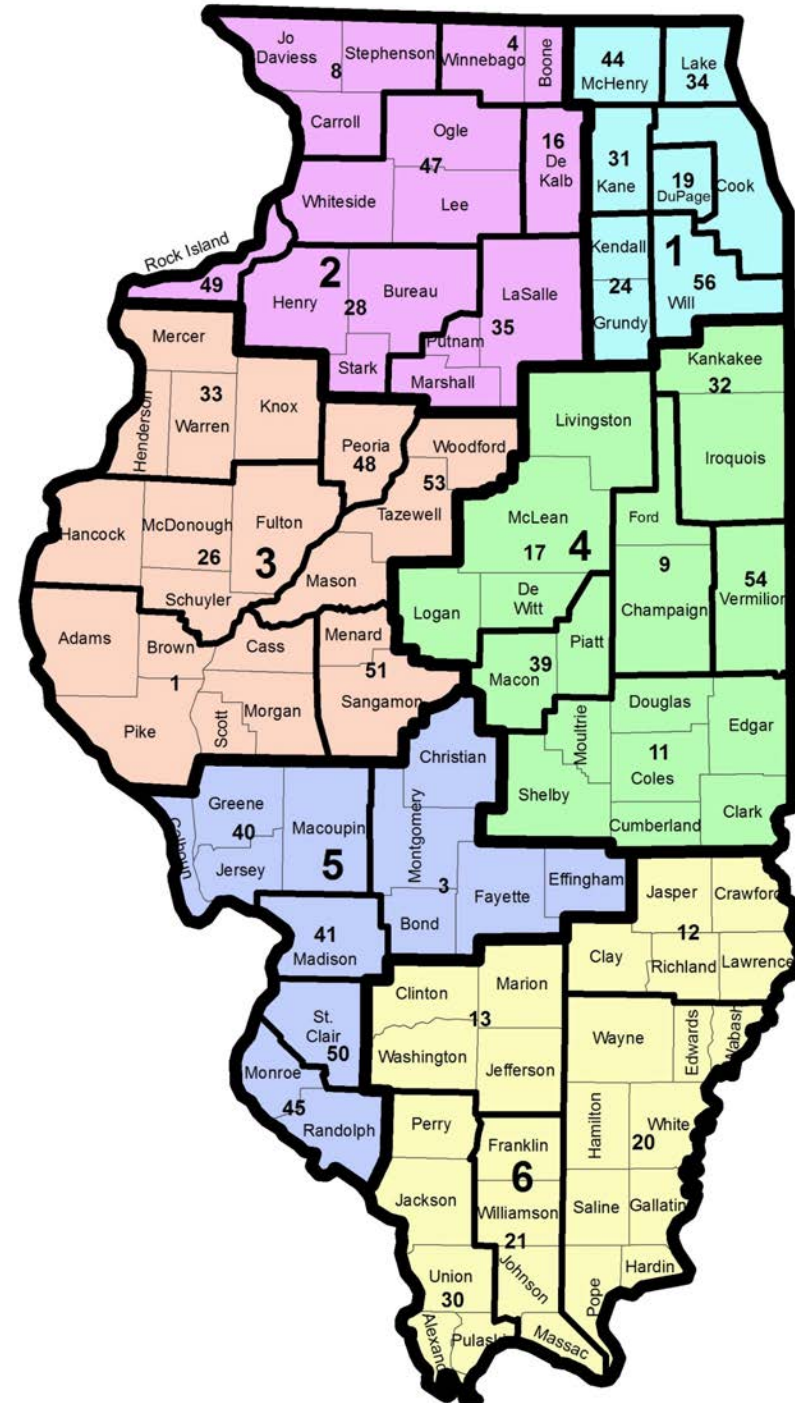
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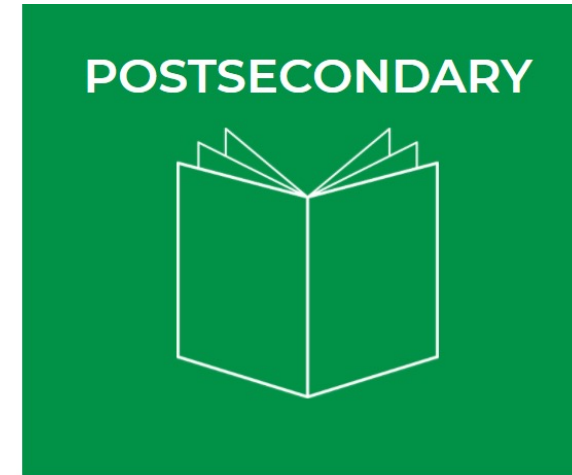
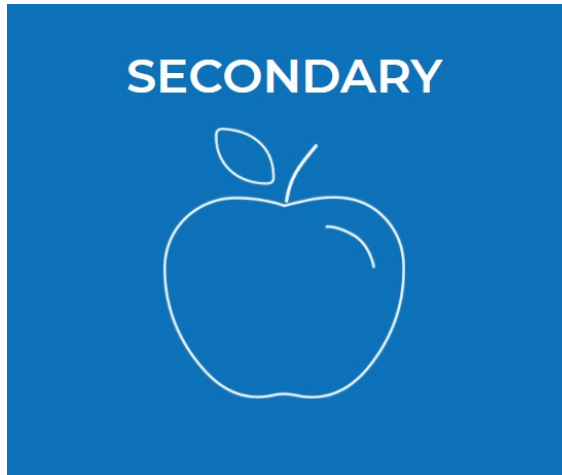


Which Region are you Located in?

1. Chicago
2. Northeast
3. Northwest
4. East Central
5. Southwest
6. Southeast



Which ATTA Stakeholder do you Represent?



Moderator Information

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Presenter Information

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- Lead Neuropsychologist
- Certified Brain Injury Specialist
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Outline

- **Why is Self-Care important for those on the autism spectrum?**
 1. Difficulty with emotional/behavioral regulation
 2. Difficulty with physical regulation
 3. Executive Function problems
- **Common Mental Health Strategies**
- **Alternative Strategies for Self-Care**
 1. Individuals
 2. Groups/Families

Regulation

- Emotional/Behavioral Regulation
 1. Externalizing Reactions (fight): meltdown, crying spells, outbursts, aggression, arguments
 2. Internalizing Reactions
 - Flight: escape, withdrawal, quitting, leaving
 - Freeze: shutting down, head on table, physically present but not mentally processing, staring spells
 - Dissociation/somatization: non-epileptic seizures, memory lapses, dizziness, headache, numbness, difficulty breathing
- Physical Regulation: sleep/wakefulness, energy, nutrition/hydration

Executive Function Difficulty

- Metacognition/Monitoring the Internal: “This is what I’m thinking. This is what I’m feeling. This is what I need.”
- Prioritization: B is most important right now, while T is least important.
- Sequencing and Pacing: I tackle these pieces and move toward this goal as opposed to being “all in” or “all out”
- Predicting Likely Outcomes: If I choose A, B is likely to happen (“But she wanted to go to the pep rally”)

Common Mental Health Strategies

- **Counseling:** What are you thinking and feeling, communicate interpersonally about your inner process, change your thinking pattern, consider other peoples' needs
- **Self-Advocate:** Identify your needs, Communicate your needs, Identify and Carry Out a Plan
- Use your thinking skills to regulate your emotions: “calm down”, talk yourself through things, practice
- Medication management

Alternative Strategies

- **Self-Knowledge: Assist with Gaining Self-Knowledge** (“You are really angry right now” or “I’m wondering if you feel...”)
- **Strategy Based Focus: Instead of “calm down”- help the individual learn how to calm down or become centered** (“I’m wondering if your system needs ...” or “You seem to do well when you...”). “What strategy would you like to use to feel better?”

Alternative Strategies

- **Sensory Inputs: Proprioception and Vestibular or other (clues from to-to behavioral patterns, trial and error, OT input). Bottom Up strategies rather than Top Down strategies.**
- **Scheduled Self-Care and Crisis Self-Care: “I didn’t see the crash coming.” What does my crash look like, what works for me? Scheduling breaks rather than as needed.**

Alternative Strategies

- **Group/Family Care – Taking Care of the Group**
 1. Individuals need unique things that change over time: “It looks like your body wants to spin and sing. My system needs quiet. How can we each get what we need.”
 2. **Number or Coded System: Avoid “how are you”**
 - Awareness of variation over time
 - What caused the variation?
 - Awareness that the internal state of others is different from yours

Alternative Strategies

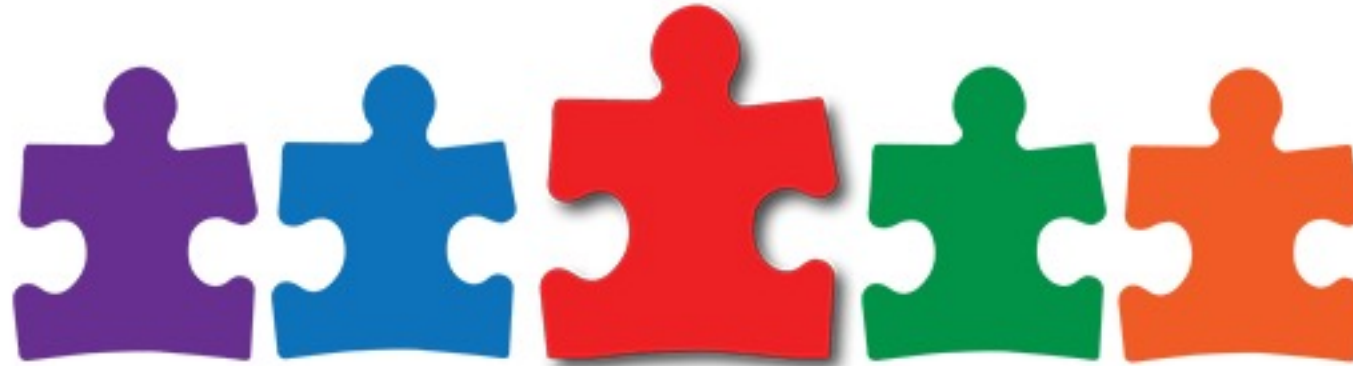
- Group Care

3. Schedule Times

- Huddle times to “book end” the day: check in with self and others
- Schedule debriefings after events

4. Use an Externalizing Image

- Did you feel like a volcano ready to burst when I interrupted you?
- I was feeling like Tigger, really jumpy and bouncy. And then I stepped on your toy and broke it. It was an accident.



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Thank you!

For more information visit <https://autismcollegeandcareer.com/>



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