

# Horizons Newsletter

## Spring 2016

[www.autism-mi.org](http://www.autism-mi.org)

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

1976-2016

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Autism Society  
of  
Michigan



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## 9 Things Every Parent with an Anxious Child Should Try

As all the kids line up to go to school, your son, Timmy, turns to you and says, “I don’t want to take the bus. My stomach hurts. Please don’t make me go.” You cringe and think, “*Here we go again.*” What should be a simple morning routine explodes into a daunting challenge.

You look at Timmy and see genuine terror. You want to comfort him. You want to ease the excessive worry that’s become part and parcel of his everyday life. First, you try logic. “Timmy, we walk an extra four blocks to catch this bus because this driver has an accident-free driving record!” He doesn’t budge.

You provide reassurance. “I promise you’ll be OK. Timmy, look at me... you trust me, right?” Timmy nods. A few seconds later he whispers, “Please don’t make me go.”

You resort to anger: “Timothy Christopher, you will get on this bus *RIGHT NOW*, or there will be serious consequences. No iPad for one week!” He looks at you as if you’re making him walk the plank. He climbs onto the bus, defeated. You feel terrible.

If any of this sounds familiar, know you are not alone. Most parents would move mountains to ease their child’s pain. Parents of kids with anxiety would move planets and stars as well. It hurts to watch your child worry over situations that, frankly, don’t seem that scary. Here’s the thing: To your child’s mind, these situations are genuinely threatening. And even perceived threats can create a real nervous system response. We call this response *anxiety* and I know it well.

I'd spent the better part of my childhood covering up a persistent, overwhelming feeling of worry until, finally, in my early twenties, I decided to seek out a solution. What I've learned over the last two decades is that many people suffer from debilitating worry. In fact, 40 million American adults, as well as 1 in 8 children, suffer from anxiety. Many kids miss school, social activities and a good night's rest just from the worried thoughts in their head. Many parents suffer from frustration and a feeling of helplessness when they witness their child in this state day in, day out.

What I also learned is that while there is no one-size-fits-all solution for anxiety, there are a plethora of great research-based techniques that can help manage it — many of which are simple to learn. WAIT! Why didn't my parents know about this? Why didn't I know about it? Why don't they teach these skills in school?

I wish I could go back in time and teach the younger version of myself how to cope, but of course, that's not possible. What is possible is to try to reach as many kids and parents as possible with these coping skills. What is possible is to teach kids how to go beyond just surviving to really finding meaning, purpose and happiness in their lives. To this end, I created an anxiety relief program for kids called GoZen! Here are 9 ideas straight from that program that parents of anxious children can try right away:

### **1. Stop Reassuring Your Child**

Your child worries. You know there is nothing to worry about, so you say, "Trust me. There's nothing to worry about." Done and done, right? We all wish it were that simple. Why does your reassurance fall on deaf ears? It's actually not the ears causing the issue. Your anxious child desperately wants to listen to you, but the brain won't let it happen. During periods of anxiety, there is a rapid dump of chemicals and mental transitions executed in your body for survival. One by-product is that the prefrontal cortex — or more logical part of the brain — gets put on hold while the more automated emotional brain takes over. In other words, it is really hard for your child to think clearly, use logic or even remember how to complete basic tasks. What should you do instead of trying to rationalize the worry away? Try something I call the *FEEL method*:

- **Freeze** — pause and take some deep breaths with your child. Deep breathing can help reverse the nervous system response.
- **Empathize** — anxiety is scary. Your child wants to know that you get it.
- **Evaluate** — once your child is calm, it's time to figure out possible solutions.
- **Let Go** — Let go of your guilt; you are an amazing parent giving your child the tools to manage their worry.

### **2. Highlight Why Worrying is Good**

Remember, anxiety is tough enough without a child believing that "*Something is wrong with me.*" Many kids even develop anxiety about having anxiety. Teach your kids that worrying does, in fact, have a purpose.

When our ancestors were hunting and gathering food there was danger in the environment, and being worried helped them avoid attacks from the saber-toothed cat lurking in the bush. In modern times, we don't have a need to run from predators, but we are left with an evolutionary imprint that protects us: worry.

Worry is a protection mechanism. Worry rings an alarm in our system and helps us survive danger. Teach your kids that worry is perfectly normal, it can help protect us, and *everyone* experiences it from time to time. Sometimes our system sets off false alarms, but this type of worry (anxiety) can be put in check with some simple techniques.

### 3. Bring Your Child's Worry to Life

As you probably know, ignoring anxiety doesn't help. But bringing worry to life and talking about it like a real person can. Create a worry character for your child. In GoZen we created Widdle the Worrier. Widdle personifies anxiety. Widdle lives in the old brain that is responsible for protecting us when we're in danger. Of course, sometimes Widdle gets a little out of control and when that happens, we have to talk some sense into Widdle. You can use this same idea with a stuffed animal or even role-playing at home.

Personifying worry or creating a character has multiple benefits. It can help demystify this scary physical response children experience when they worry. It can reactivate the logical brain, and it's a tool your children can use on their own at any time.

### 4. Teach Your Child to Be a Thought Detective

Remember, worry is the brain's way of protecting us from danger. To make sure we're really paying attention, the mind often exaggerates the object of the worry (e.g., mistaking a stick for a snake). You may have heard that teaching your children to think more positively could calm their worries. But the best remedy for distorted thinking is not positive thinking; it's accurate thinking. Try a method we call the 3Cs:

- **Catch your thoughts:** Imagine every thought you have floats above your head in a bubble (like what you see in comic strips). Now, catch one of the worried thoughts like "No one at school likes me."
- **Collect evidence:** Next, collect evidence to support or negate this thought. Teach your child not to make judgments about what to worry about based only on feelings. Feelings are not facts. (Supporting evidence: "I had a hard time finding someone to sit with at lunch yesterday." Negating evidence: "Sherry and I do homework together; she's a friend of mine.")
- **Challenge your thoughts:** The best (and most entertaining) way to do this is to teach your children to have a debate within themselves.

### 5. Allow Them to Worry

As you know, telling your children not to worry won't prevent them from doing so. If your children could simply shove their feelings away, they would. But allowing your children to worry openly, in limited doses, can be helpful. Create a daily ritual called "Worry Time" that lasts 10 to 15 minutes. During this ritual encourage your children to release all their worries in writing. You can make the activity fun by decorating a worry box. During worry time there are no rules on what constitutes a valid worry — anything goes. When the time is up, close the box and say good-bye to the worries for the day.

### 6. Help Them Go from What If to What Is

You may not know this, but humans are capable of time travel. In fact, mentally we spend a lot of time in the future. For someone experiencing anxiety, this type of mental time travel can exacerbate the worry. A typical time traveler asks what-if questions: "What if I can't open my locker and I miss class?" "What if Suzy doesn't talk to me today?" Research shows that coming back to the present can help alleviate this tendency. One effective method of doing this is to practice mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness brings a child from what if to what is. To do this, help your child simply focus on their breath for a few minutes.

## **7. Avoid Avoiding Everything that Causes Anxiety**

Do your children want to avoid social events, dogs, school, planes or basically any situation that causes anxiety? As a parent, do you help them do so? Of course! This is natural. The flight part of the flight-fight-freeze response urges your children to escape the threatening situation. Unfortunately, in the long run, avoidance makes anxiety worse.

So what's the alternative? Try a method we call laddering. Kids who are able to manage their worry break it down into manageable chunks. Laddering uses this chunking concept and gradual exposure to reach a goal.

Let's say your child is afraid of sitting on the swings in the park. Instead of avoiding this activity, create mini-goals to get closer to the bigger goal (e.g., go to the edge of the park, then walk into the park, go to the swings, and, finally, get on a swing). You can use each step until the exposure becomes too easy; that's when you know it's time to move to the next rung on the ladder.

## **8. Help Them Work Through a Checklist**

What do trained pilots do when they face an emergency? They don't wing it (no pun intended!); they refer to their emergency checklists. Even with years of training, every pilot works through a checklist because, when in danger, sometimes it's hard to think clearly.

When kids face anxiety they feel the same way. Why not create a checklist so they have a step-by-step method to calm down? What do you want them to do when they first feel anxiety coming on? If breathing helps them, then the first step is to pause and breathe. Next, they can evaluate the situation. In the end, you can create a hard copy checklist for your child to refer to when they feel anxious.

## **9. Practice Self-Compassion**

Watching your child suffer from anxiety can be painful, frustrating, and confusing. There is not one parent that hasn't wondered at one time or another if they are the cause of their child's anxiety. Here's the thing, research shows that anxiety is often the result of multiple factors (i.e., genes, brain physiology, temperament, environmental factors, past traumatic events, etc.). Please keep in mind, you did not cause your child's anxiety, but you can help them overcome it.

Toward the goal of a healthier life for the whole family, practice self-compassion. Remember, you're not alone, and you're not to blame. It's time to let go of debilitating self-criticism and forgive yourself. Love yourself. You are your child's champion.

*Reprinted from: [www.gozen.com](http://www.gozen.com)*

The Autism Society of Michigan  
is Celebrating  
40 years of Making Human Connections  
1976-2016



*The History of the Autism Society of Michigan*

The Autism Society of Michigan (ASM) was founded 40 years ago by a group of 24 parents of children with autism who wanted to secure specialized educational, employment and community supports for their children. The goal of the founders was to start an organization that would provide information and support to families of children with autism and their educational and community providers. ASM's founders were the leaders in the area of special education services for children with autism in Michigan. Without their persistence, services for children with autism would not be where they are today. ASM began its existence under the name of the Michigan Society of Autistic Citizens (MSAC) and was changed in 1984 to reflect the Board of Directors desire to include all of the allies and supporters in the name, as well as to differentiate that our members with autism were people first as opposed to being "autistic citizens". The Autism Society of Michigan believes in children with autism being children first!

MSAC, later ASM, was founded as a state chapter and affiliate of the Autism Society of America to provide statewide leadership and received its 501(c)3 status in 1992. The Autism Society of Michigan was and still is one of only a few state chapters staffed with professionals who provide information, referral, support and advocacy to families of children with autism. ASM developed a library in 1978, which grew to include over 700 books and videos. ASM's library materials were sent members all over the world in need of information about autism, and in 1988, a librarian, a woman with autism, was hired to oversee the library and to provide information and referral services. Our librarian is still employed with ASM.

# The Autism Society of Michigan Annual 5k Run/Walk



For Autism Acceptance  
Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>

~Celebrating 40 Years of Making Human Connections~

Where: Hawk Island Park  
1601 E. Cavanagh, Lansing, MI

Registration/Sign-In: 8:00 a.m.  
5k Run Starts at: 9:00 a.m.  
5k Walk Starts at 10:00 a.m.

\$25.00 Adult  
\$10.00 Child  
\$10.00 Adult with ASD (coupon code~runwalk)  
\$5.00 Child with ASD (coupon code~superstar)  
Children 5 and under Free

**Register by April 25, 2016 for a guaranteed T~shirt**

\*Waivers must be signed by all participants prior to race

Register online at: <https://runsignup.com/Race/MI/Lansing/ASM5kforAutismAcceptance>

Or please call or email:



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**Results:** The 5k Run only will be professionally chip timed by Michigan Running Foundation, Inc.  
& results will be posted on Playmakers website

All proceeds and donations will go to ASM and will remain in Michigan to provide serves and support to our community.

# The filters I use before talking:



First thing that comes to mind.

I use my judgement to decide if my words need filtering.

**Intention** Am I saying this to hurt the other person?

**Choice** Is this something that needs to be said?

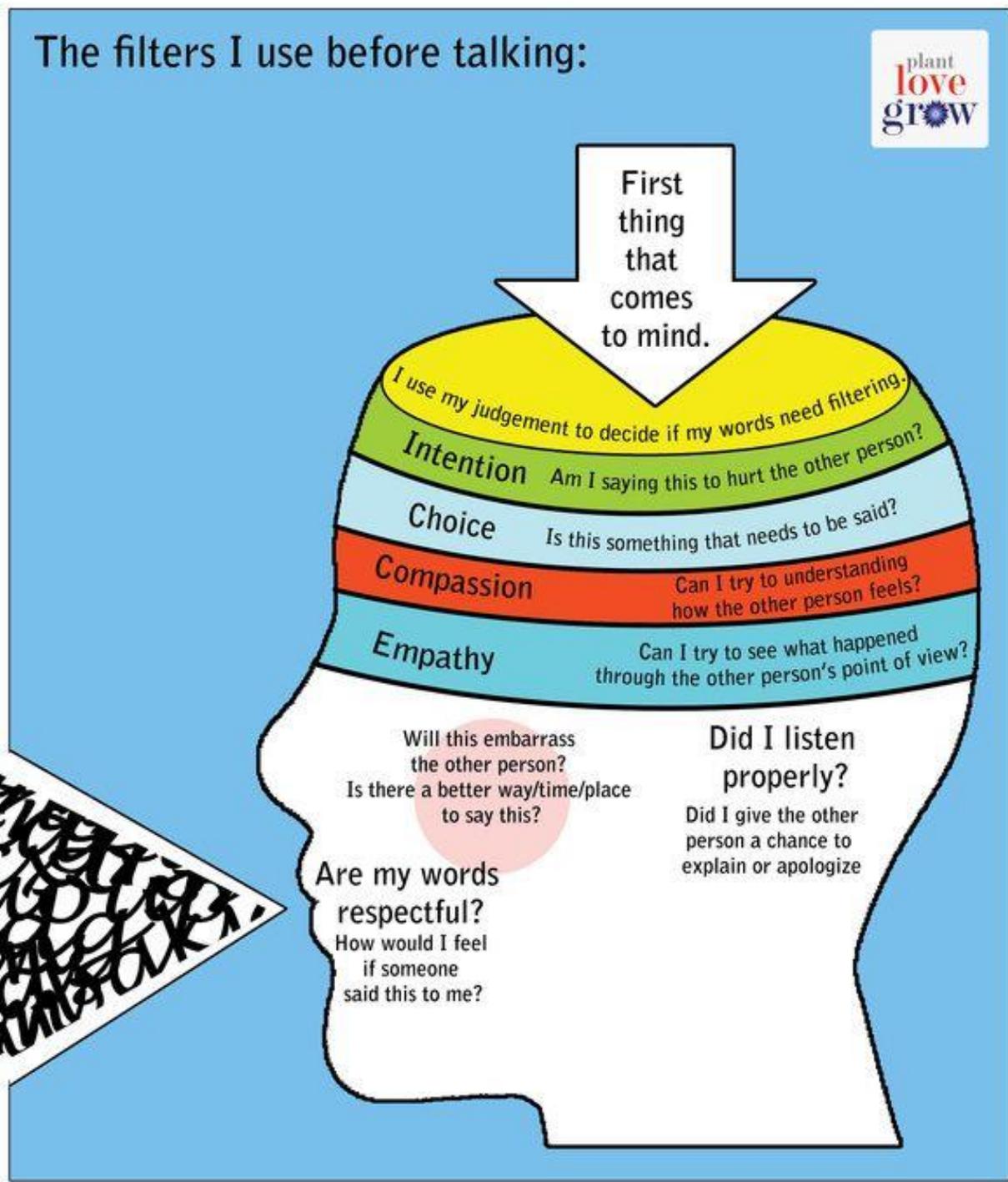
**Compassion** Can I try to understanding how the other person feels?

**Empathy** Can I try to see what happened through the other person's point of view?

Will this embarrass the other person?  
Is there a better way/time/place to say this?

**Did I listen properly?**  
Did I give the other person a chance to explain or apologize

**Are my words respectful?**  
How would I feel if someone said this to me?

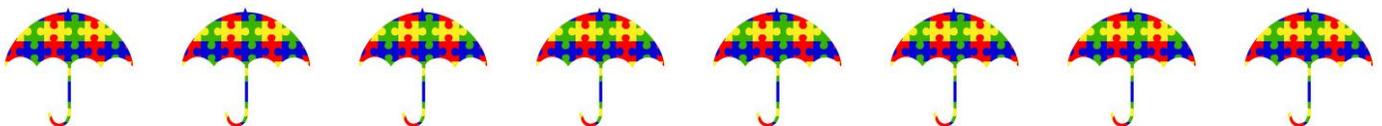


# April is Autism Awareness Month

## IDEAS FOR RAISING AUTISM AWARENESS

Here are some suggested activities you can do to raise awareness and acceptance of Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- Donate a children's book about autism to your local or school library.
- Write an article about National Autism Awareness month or how autism has impacted your life; share it with your PTA or faith community newsletter or your community newspaper.
- Send your school board representative, state representative and/or senator information about National Autism Awareness Month and how autism affects your life.
- Create a bulletin board at your school, faith community, or place of work to raise awareness about autism. Themes could include the warning signs of autism, the strengths of people with autism or famous people with autism.
- Form a team for the 5K Run/Walk for Autism Acceptance (May 14) and invite friends and neighbors to join you! Visit [www.autism-mi.org](http://www.autism-mi.org) to register.
- Host a movie night for friends, family, church members, youth groups or kids to watch a story about autism; great choices might be: Temple Grandin, Autism Is a World, Autism, the Musical or Mozart and the Whale
- Come up with a "FACT A DAY" about autism and share with your child's school to be a part of the daily announcements during National Autism Awareness Month
- Consider having your business or school do "dress down days" or "hat days" where participants make a donation and can then dress down or wear a hat to raise donations and awareness for autism.
- Make autism puzzle piece cookies or cupcakes; take into your school or local first responders; include a little printed information about autism.
- Change your Facebook profile picture to the autism awareness ribbon for April. Put on the Puzzle! The Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon is the most recognized symbol of the autism community in the world. Wear and/or display the autism ribbon this April.
- Download the general information packet from our website, [www.autism.mi.org](http://www.autism.mi.org), and share it with family, friends, teachers and other supporters.
- Support the Autism Society of Michigan by becoming a member or make a donation. All donations stay in Michigan to support those on the spectrum and their families.
- Train school staff (bus drivers, lunch & recess staff, security, general education staff, etc.) on characteristics of ASD



## PRODUCT REVIEW: LuminAID Pack Lite Spectra

(<http://www.LuminAID.com>)

Also available on Amazon for less than \$25!!

By: Anne Carpenter

I recently got a present from my friends; we were eating at Weber's Inn in Ann Arbor when my friend Jill handed me a pretty little gift bag. I looked inside and behold! It was something that I had wanted! The LuminAID Pack Lite Spectra color-changing solar lantern was in a much smaller package than I had expected and it was flat and compact with a description and instructions on the box. I opened it up and found the plug to inflate it with; it inflated fully but it was tricky to pinch the nozzle shut to plug it, but I did and it was like a bag with a handle.

After pressing the button for the first time you are greeted with a bright red glow, then press it again to cycle through orange, a lighter orange like a campfire, green, light blue, blue, purple, white and then, a gorgeous sequence of changing colors! This makes it fun for finding your way in the dark while camping or taking an evening swim in the pool (in Florida that is!) This is a unique lantern as it only charges through sunlight or very bright light and when charging a red LED is lit. I was impressed by the very sensitive nature of the solar panel and the charging; the light was lit even under a very bright light or in diffuse natural daylight. After 7 hours or more of charging, the lights are very bright and one can choose a color than can light one's way. All the colors are very bright and this also has an adjustable handle so that one can hang it from a tree branch or carry it to the bus stop on a dark, winter evening. This can be especially useful and fun for adults and teens with ASD who need an extra visual "kick" and who would like to avoid a nasty fall or bump when getting up during the night to use the bathroom.

A real winner-this would make a fabulous gift for someone who enjoys visual input. The company that made this unique product, along with their other products, started this company to help survivors of that horrific earthquake in Haiti five years ago. They realized that another vital resource that people needed was light. The victims needed to find their way in the dark amid the rubble and destruction. This was a brilliant and ingenious way to solve a major problem and this can also solve the problem of waiting for a bus at a dark bus stop!



TITLE: Raising Our Son with Autism: A Family's 40-Year Journey

AUTHOR: Tsai, Merling C., MD and Tsai, Luke Y, MD

SUBJECT AREA: Autism-Parent Narrative

PUBLISHER: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

PUBLICATION DATE: 2015

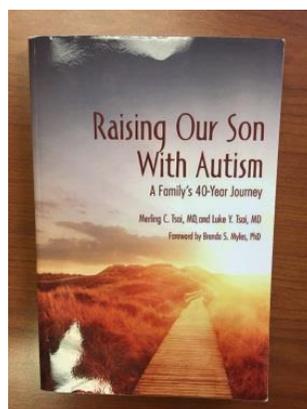
NUMBER OF PAGES: 179

There have been many, many books written by parents about their sons or daughters with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Many of these books focus on ways to help their loved one “recover” from what is seen as a terrible liability and stumbling block to a happy and successful life. Luke and Merling Tsai, both former psychiatrists, have written another book about autism. This is a narrative about raising a son with so-called “Lower-Functioning” autism which is a more severe form of ASD that includes significant impairments in communication, socialization and navigating the complexities of life. The Tsai’s son, Stephen, has been significantly affected by autism and his parents share their story of raising their son for 40 years.

This is a book with a difference; it is told from a deeply Christian perspective with each chapter starting with Scripture verses that reflect the theme of that particular chapter. The authors describe in loving detail Stephen’s journey from birth to childhood to adulthood and their constant support as they teach him necessary life skills. His schooling was inclusive with typically developing students. Instead of using tried and true treatment approaches, they came up with resourceful ways to teach him in a natural setting-their own home. While they have tried communication methods such as Facilitated Communication with Stephen, they have not been successful and he remains essentially nonverbal with very limited communication skills.

Nevertheless, with constant love, faith in God, patience and resourcefulness, Stephen gradually learned to cook, dress himself, use the toilet and use the bus to get to and from his job at the library in town. He is very gentle soul without bitterness or guile and he is viewed as a precious gift from God. He teaches patience and love and every time I see him, he has a calming effect as he seems so serene. Though it is hard to know just exactly how he is feeling or what he is thinking at any given time, I am struck by his calm and pleasant nature and am impressed by how he has somehow managed to rise to his challenges and live a happy, peaceful life

Stephen has traveled the world with his family and he pays taxes and helps with expenses. He helps with laundry and house cleaning. As I read each chapter, I wept with joy at the sheer faith in God his parents have and at how he has managed to be far more capable than anyone has ever imagined! I am so gratified that Luke and Merling Tsai emphasize the positive, rather than the gloom and doom so often seen when it comes to raising a loved one with more severe autism. Stephen is happy, has a strong spiritual orientation and an all-abiding faith in God and is kind and loving. This is what matters the most and because of that, he is much more highly evolved than was ever dreamed of!!



## Special Thanks To:

### In Honor of Leo & Jane White-Flanagan:

Kathleen Mare Unti  
Bill & Kathy White

### In Honor of Robert Bazy:

Francis Gongola  
Christina Gongola  
Darlene & Robert Gendjar  
Jesse Holmes  
Nazieh Makled  
Sobhi Sater  
Pamela Strong  
Robert & Summer Turfe  
Fouad & Andrea Awada-Zeaiter

### In Memory of Frank LeSeuvre:

Karen & Garey Merchant

### In Memory of Gerald Sikorski:

Barbara & Jill Jackman

### In Memory of Larence Smith:

Susan Verberkmoes

### General Donations:

Ally Financial, Inc.  
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Beatrice Caldwell  
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Kean's Detroit Yacht Harbor, Inc.  
Ivan & Kocana Lonar  
Donald MacGregor  
Natalie Pasicznyk  
Greg, Lisa & Conner Rentschler  
Special Tree, Ltd.  
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### Those Who Donated Through:

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Network for Good  
TRUiST

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Heart of West Michigan United Way  
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United Way of Greater Kansas City  
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United Way of the Lakeshore  
United Way of Metropolitan Chicago  
United Way of Monroe County  
United Way of Northwest MI  
United Way of Southeastern Michigan  
United Way Suncoast  
United Way of Washtenaw County  
Van Buren County United Way

### Membership Renewals:

Richard Bazy  
Cindy Dady  
Elyse Anne Dickerson  
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Helen Lipinski  
Ivan & Kocana Lonar  
Jennifer Manninen  
Mary Mulder  
Gwyn & Lennie Schwerdtfeger  
Sensory Systems Clinic  
Robert & Sylvia Stevens  
Jana Thompkins  
Luann Totton  
Theodoros & Maria Vlachos

### New Members:

Robert Bazy  
Beatrice Caldwell  
Sherry Dagenais  
Doreen & Timothy Perry  
Greg, Lisa, & Conner Rentschler

### In-Kind Donations:

AAPC Publishing  
Future Horizons  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
Woodbine House



# On the Road with ASM

★ January 30<sup>th</sup> - Flint, MI

*Parent Empowerment Workshop*

★ February 11<sup>th</sup> - Lansing, MI

*Autism Alliance of MI Conference*

★ February 16<sup>th</sup> - Detroit, MI

*Detroit Boat Show/Autism Awareness*

