

Autism Spectrum Disorder: NETWORK NEWS

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AUTISM IN CONTEXT WITH DR. PETER VERMEULEN

On **March 28, 2022**, The **Centre of Excellence for Autism** at the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) is hosting an interactive webinar with **Dr. Peter Vermeulen** on **Autism in Context**. Please **see the flyer** for more details about the full day webinar open to professionals, educators, and families.

Dr. Peter Vermeulen, MSc, PhD. started his career in the field of autism in 1987, working for the Vlaamse Vereniging Autisme (Flemish Autism Society) as a diagnostician and home trainer for families with autistic children. He later became the director of the home training center and gradually started to share his experiences via presentations and books. Peter has written more than 15 books, with translations available in more than 10 languages. His book *Autism as Context Blindness* won several prizes in the US. In 2019 Peter received the Passwerk Lifetime Achievement Award for his more than 30 years contribution to the autism community in Belgium.

Click here to see the flyer for more information about the full day event. Spots are limited! **Click here to register.**

This conference has been approved for six hours of credits from the Ordre des Psychologues du Quebec (OPQ).

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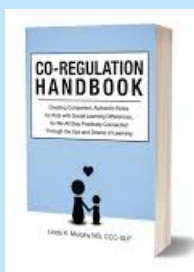
ASD & TRAUMA¹

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse and neglect are linked to long-lasting negative effects on health and well-being. Autistic individuals have a higher probability of experiencing one or more ACEs and are twice as likely to experience four or more ACEs relative to neurotypical peers. Importantly, traumatic early life experiences in the autistic population are linked to an exacerbation of core ASD symptomatology (i.e., social communication difficulties, rigidity) and to the development of subsequent mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder). In fact, ACEs are thought to be an important contributing factor to evidence that approximately 70% of individuals with ASD have a comorbid mental health disorder and up to 40% may have two or more. As schools are well-positioned to support childhood development and act as safety nets for at-risk youth, autistic students would benefit from trauma-informed practices as a complement to existing behavioural interventions aimed at supporting educational skill acquisition and functional autonomy. Trauma-informed teaching strategies tailored to the autistic student population may include fostering predictability and consistency (e.g., visual schedules that are adhered to), offering choices and opportunities for control, scheduling time in the day for an adult to show an interest in students' internal worlds and restricted interests, employing positive behaviour supports (i.e., antecedent strategies), and practicing *emotion coaching* in response to affective or behavioural dysregulation. In conclusion, mounting evidence that trauma and mental health issues co-exist with autism for a significant portion of this population necessitates a shift in our practices toward interventions aimed at nurturing student-teacher relationships and creating classrooms and schools that act as a secure base.



READ² ALL ABOUT IT

Many autistic students in both elementary and secondary schools are working towards managing their emotions. One of the best ways that educators can support the development of self-regulation is through consistent support and guidance. The role that educators play in modeling, coaching, and warmly accompanying students through their varied emotional states is known as *co-regulation*. In an effort to further describe and explore this role, Linda Murphy (2021), a licensed speech and language pathologist, authored the book, *The Co-Regulation Handbook*. This book provides a variety of practical strategies that educators can implement to foster positive connections between themselves and autistic children.



If you are interested in borrowing this book from the ASD Library, please reach out to Natalie Mongeau at nmongeau@lbpsb.qc.ca.



EMOTION COACHING

What is Emotion Coaching?

What is your first reaction when a child expresses extreme emotions?

- ▶ Are you inclined to jump into problem solving mode?
- ▶ Do you believe solving the issue will make the emotions go away?
- ▶ Or, do you find yourself trying to minimize the significance of the trigger, trying to get the child to understand that it's 'not a big deal', so that they'll stop feeling upset?
- ▶ What if, the key to helping a child manage their emotions, is to take **more** time to explore those distressing feelings?

Emotion Coaching is an intervention that attempts to strengthen a child's capacity to self-regulate by acknowledging, labeling, and validating their emotions **before** proposing solutions. Instead of dismissing, minimizing, or punishing a child's emotional outbursts, with Emotion Coaching we follow these steps:

- 1 Mindread, label, organize:**
Help the child to identify what they are feeling and then put words to feelings.
- 2 Empathize and validate:**
Assure the child that their emotions are valid and that you understand what they are feeling and why.
- 3 Set limits:**
Explain that while all emotions are valid, not all behaviours are acceptable.
- 4 Problem-solve:**
Explore solutions with the child, prompting them to use their own experiences and knowledge to figure out an appropriate response.
- 5 Coach a skill:**
Help a child explore other options if they struggle to come up with solutions on their own.

What would this look like in practice?

Scenario:

A child's piece of artwork was ruined by spilled paint, the child reacts by screaming and throwing their paintbrush on the floor.

Instead of saying:

“We can’t throw a paintbrush on the floor! If something is wrong, come ask for help!”

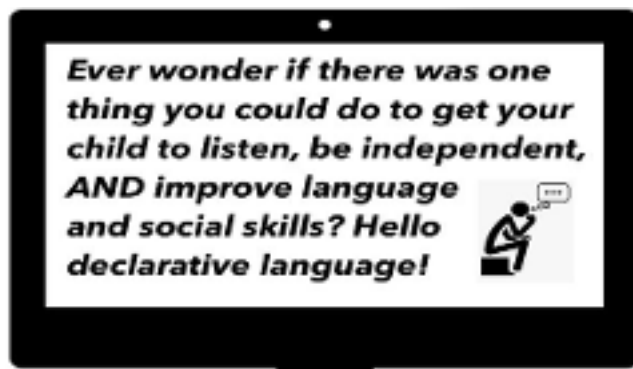


“Oh no, it seems like something is wrong. Are you feeling angry that your painting was ruined? Are you feeling sad? You worked really hard on it, I would feel sad too if my painting was ruined. It’s okay to feel upset about that, but throwing your paintbrush on the floor isn’t okay. Can you think of something else you can try? Maybe you can ask for another paper or some extra time to make another painting?”

Want to learn more? Check out these additional resources:

- *Emotion Coaching and the Highly Sensitive Child* by Rachel Samson, M.Psych, found at: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/emotion-coaching-and-the-highly-sensitive-child/>
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish
- *Emotion Coaching*, by Emotion Coaching UK, found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KJa32r07xk>

COMMUNICATION CORNER



DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

is when we make **comments and observations** about our environment to bring the child’s attention to what’s important, instead of making demands/asking questions which can activate a stress response that often looks like “problem behaviours”.

Linda Murphy is a Speech and Language Pathologist, RDI® consultant and the author of the book *Declarative Language Handbook: Using a Thoughtful Language Style to Help Kids with Social Learning Challenges Feel Competent, Connected and Understood*.

This book was written with parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals in mind so that they can be better guide the growth and development of individuals who have social learning challenges. She helps the reader understand that *what we say and how we say it matters* and offers an alternative way to communicate in everyday situations.



Visit Linda Murphy’s website at <https://www.lindakmurphy.com/author> for more information on this and other topics.

ASD TEAM MEMBERS

JACALYN ARMSTRONG

Consultant for Inclusive Education

PATRICIA ASSOUD

Consultant for Autism (On leave)

DR. ANDREW BENNETT

Coordinator/Psychologist

JENNIFER BOOTH

Consultant for Autism (On leave)

PATTY CLORAN

Coordinator/Consultant for Autism

KATIE COHENE, PhD

Coordinator/Consultant for Autism

DATEVIG ETYEMEZIAN

Consultant for Autism

SABRINA GABRIELE

Consultant for Autism (On leave)

JADE LAWSANE

Consultant for Autism

ILANA LOGGIA

Consultant for Autism (On leave)

NATALIE MONGEAU

Consultant for Autism

HELENE PACKMAN

Speech & Language Pathologist

DR. AMIRA RAHMAN

Psychologist (On leave)

KIM SEGAL

Consultant for Autism

EITHNE SHEERAN

Consultant for Autism



BEHAVIOUR TIP³

There are many different causes of trauma, and how trauma impacts someone with autism can be profound. Regardless of the situation one thing remains; when a child is dysregulated, it is harder to listen, comprehend, and cope. To help a traumatized child learn, think, and reflect, Dr. Bruce Perry, a neuroscientist in the field of trauma, recommends that we intervene in a simple sequence by using the 3R's.

1 **REGULATE:** We must help the child to regulate and calm their fight/flight/freeze responses by using soothing but limited language, providing a safe space to go, stepping back and allowing them time to process. Remember that using a loud voice or over-talking can cause the student to become even more dysregulated.

2 **RELATE:** We must relate and connect with the child by being authentic, sensitive and genuine. A dysregulated child is more responsive to a calm, sensitive dialogue, and when their feelings are acknowledged and validated.

3 **REASON:** We must support the child to reflect and learn, and assist them in becoming self-assured individuals by teaching them: a) the language of emotions, b) strategies for self-regulation, and c) to identify and seek their safe places and safe people.

If you take the time to co-regulate your student, you will improve your relationship with them and ultimately help them reason better.



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