Hello! Welcome or welcome back to the NIU Autism Caregiver Group monthly newsletter! We are so excited that you are joining us for the March edition of our newsletter, and we hope that you stay connected and involved with us! Our theme this month is bugs! We also have a wide variety of resources for this month, we are including three links to webinars. Two of the webinars are scheduled to happen live, and one is recorded to watch at any time your schedule allows.

**Featured Resources**

Our first featured resource is from the Autism Research Institute. They are having a webinar on **Wednesday, March 31st at 12pm CST**. This webinar is titled “Peer Experiences and Behavioral Challenges” and will discuss the connection between peer experiences and behavioral challenges during adolescence individuals with autism might experience. [Click here for the link to register!](#)

Our next resource is a recorded webinar from the Autism Science Foundation. This webinar is titled “From Mindfulness to Mindfulness”. This webinar is **available to watch at any time**, as it was previously recorded. It focuses on mindfulness and gratitude during the ongoing pandemic. [Click here to watch!](#)

Our final resource is an upcoming webinar on **Thursday, April 1st at 12pm CST** from the Organization for Autism Research. It titled “Health and Health Care in Autistic Children and Adults.” This webinar will discuss “Specific concerns around health care among transition-aged youth, limited availability of adult health care providers, and disparities in service...” [Click here to register!](#)

**What’s inside?**

- Involvement Opportunities
- Coffee Chat Information
- Resources for Families
- Exercise Video Links
- Book Read Alouds
- Crafts

Check out our website: [go.niu.edu/ASDcaregiver](http://go.niu.edu/ASDcaregiver)
**Caregiver Coffee Chat**

The NIU Autism Caregiver Group is virtual this year! If you would like to join our Caregiver Coffee Chat, please RSVP by emailing Allison Gladfelter at agladfelter@niu.edu to receive the private Zoom link. Our March Caregiver Coffee Chat will be on **Monday, March 22nd, from 9:00 - 10:00am.** For more information about our group, please visit our website. **Dial-In Information**

Email Allison Gladfelter at agladfelter@niu.edu to receive the private Zoom meeting link.

**Pen Pal Program**

If your child(ren) would like to have a pen pal with a student from the NIU communicative disorders student association (undergraduate speech pathology and audiology students) to exchange letters in the mail, please send an email to Dr. Gladfelter (agladfelter@niu.edu) to get paired with a student! Be sure to send how many kids will be writing, their names, and ages. We are also beginning to offer pen pals for Spanish speakers! If you are interested in learning more details, please email Dr. Gladfelter (agladfelter@niu.edu).

**Exercise Activities**

- Cosmic Kids Bug Themed Yoga
- Bug ‘n Roll Dance Along Video
- Preschool Learn to Dance: Bugs and Crawly Things

**Other Fun Bug Videos**

- Sci Show Kids: Inspect an Insect
- Peppa Pig: Frogs and Worms and Butterflies
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar Animated Film

**Book Read Alouds**

- The Buggliest Bug
- Pete the Cat and the Cool Caterpillar
- Hank’s Big Day: The Story of a Bug

**Joke:**

What kind of bow can’t be tied?

* A Rainbow!

**March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month**

In 1987, President Reagan declared March as “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.” The idea was stemmed from the need for America to destigmatize developmental disabilities and provide opportunities and encouragement for those who have a developmental disability. For more information about the background of developmental disabilities awareness month, read here, at the Special Needs Alliance.

**NIU Autism Caregiver Group Website:** go.niu.edu/ASDcaregiver
Materials:

- Home-made playdough or store-bought play dough
- Variety of small plastic bugs

Ingredients for home-made playdough:

- 3 ½ cups of flour
- 3 Tbsp. Cream of Tartar
- 3 Tbsp. of vegetable oil
- One extra Tbsp. of vegetable oil
- Brown food coloring
- 2 cups of boiling water

Instructions for home-made playdough:

1. In a large bowl, mix together the flour, cream of tartar, salt, 3 tablespoons of oil, and the food coloring.
2. Add in the boiling water and mix well until all combined.
3. Add the one extra tablespoon of oil and knead the playdough for 1-2 minutes.

Instructions for bug fossil activity:

- Press out small pieces of the home-made or store-bought playdough and press different bugs into it to make your own fossils!
Fingerprint Bug Jar

Materials:

- Bug Jar Printable
- Paint or ink pads
- Pens or sharpies

Instructions:

- Print out the bug jar printable.
- Dip finger in paint or ink pad and add fingerprints to bug jar.
- Once the fingerprints are dry, turn them into bugs by drawing on legs, wings, eyes, spots, stripes, etc.
- You can make your fingerprint bugs look like real bugs or imaginary bugs!
Fingerprint Bugs

www.messylittlemonster.com
The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Materials:
- White painting paper
- Paint (lime green, forest green, red)
- 3 Sponges
- Paper plate
- Scissors
- Glue
- Black pipe cleaners
- Black marker or crayon
- Googly eyes

Instructions:
- Cut circles out of your sponges to use for painting
- Squeeze paints onto a paper plate.
- Dip the circle-shaped sponges into the paint and stamp them onto the paper to create a caterpillar.
- Use the black marker or crayon to draw legs at the bottom of the circles.
- Cut off small pieces of black pipe cleaner and glue onto caterpillar.
- Add googly eyes to caterpillar. (Construction paper could also be used in place of googly eyes.)