

# Fall 2021 Newsletter

## *CARD Odenton Quarterly Newsletter*

*We're excited to share with you the quarterly newsletter—fall edition (September-October-November) of the Center for Autism and Related Disorders' Odenton team. Over the past few months, we've welcomed several new staff members, which has enabled us to provide more services on-site and via telehealth. We thank you for your collaboration and support as we continue to follow Infection Control guidelines to keep you, your child, your family and staff members safe when accessing services on-site. In this newsletter, read about resources to support you in engaging your child in play, pausing and reflecting on parenting and self-care, and our newest team members.*

- On pages 1–2, speech-language pathologist Hilary May shares strategies for engaging children in play through fun activities.
- On page 3, clinical social worker Catherine Debus shares valuable resources for reflecting on parenting and self-care.
- On pages 4–7, we spotlight our newest staff members.

We hope you enjoy the wonderful fall colors and continue to celebrate the many milestones your child is making.

Biji Philip, PhD, CCC-SLP  
Site Clinical Director



# Fall Fun

In this section, we want to offer a few ideas for festive activities and play that you can do with your child at this time of year. The first rule to follow in play is to **HAVE FUN!** If it seems like your child isn't having fun, or you aren't having fun, take a step back and try again in a few minutes.

Your child will have the most fun when you follow their lead. That means that as long as it's safe, anything goes—even if it's not the way you would have played with the toy. A nice way to follow their lead is to start by doing what your child is doing—no matter what they're doing.

Once you join their play, you can start using words associated with the toys you're playing with. Try to pick a few words or one sentence and say it over and over. For example, if your child is playing with blocks, you can say "block, up" each time they stack a block and "crash!" when the blocks fall down. Eventually, try to pause before saying one of the words and see what your child does to take their turn. You can cover up the tower to see if your child moves your hand, looks at you or says "up." Then start stacking and saying the same words again. If your child is pretending to make pizza, you can introduce some stuffed animals and repeatedly say, "Here's pizza for the dog, here's pizza for the tiger, and here's..." as you let your child decide and say whom to give pizza to next.



There are lots of toys to play with inside, but this time of year also offers so many opportunities to play outside! Some fun activities to try this fall are listed below. During these activities, try the following strategies:

- Use nouns, verbs, spatial terms (in, behind) and descriptive words to talk about the activity.
- Point out new things nearby and encourage your child to do the same.
- Practice showing, sharing and commenting about fall items with family members.
- Take pictures throughout each activity. After the activity, look at the pictures and talk about what you did together. Keep your language simple.

Here are some fun fall activities to try:

- Go apple-picking. Name the colors of the apples, take turns putting them in a basket or counting the apples.
- Go to a farm and explore food, animals or hayrides.
- Pick and carve a pumpkin. Your child can select pumpkins from a patch or the store—use words like “big,” “little,” “round” and “orange”! Your child can draw on the pumpkin, paint the pumpkin or watch as you carve their design.
- Play in the leaves! Rake them together, jump in them or collect them in bags.
- Prepare yummy fall foods like pie or turkey, and give your child tasks like stirring or putting ingredients in a bowl.
- Take a walk! Point out the leaves, pumpkins and any fun decorations.



**Hilary May, MS, CCC-SLP**  
Speech-Language Pathologist

# The Perfect Parent

In “The Passable Parenting Approach,” an article that appeared in *Psychology Today* in March 2021, author Jessica Combs Rohr, PhD, discusses the expectation that so many of us have of being a perfect parent, and the guilt we experience when we—inevitably—fall short. As I meet with parents, I am amazed by the resources they have been able to obtain for their child, especially during the pandemic. Yet so many parents feel so much distress over not being able to do more. They only see their shortcomings, not their achievements. They only remember the times they did not meet their child’s needs, not all the times they did. What does that model for children? Does that model that we need to be perfect? I do not think that is what most parents intend, because we all know that no one is perfect.

The article urges parents to focus on their relationship with their child, because relationships are (or should be) grounded in trust, not perfection. Trust allows room to make mistakes, admit imperfections and experience messy emotions. This is where growth and learning occur. So as we start the school year, please be kind to yourself and recognize that you are doing the best you can do in especially trying times. This is a much healthier approach for you and your child.

## Tips for being a passable parent:

- Acknowledge what you **are** doing for your child.
- Focus on those things that are within your control.
- Admit your own mistakes, make amends and move on.
- Do something that makes you smile—listen to a favorite song, admire the beauty of nature, savor your first sip of coffee or tea in the morning.



**Catherine Debus, LCSW-C**  
Clinical Social Worker

# Staff Spotlight Corner



**Emily McGee, MS, CF-SLP**, is a speech-language pathologist and clinical fellow with two years of pediatric experience working primarily with children with neurological, developmental and musculoskeletal disorders. Emily received her bachelor's degree in communicative sciences and disorders (CSD) from The Pennsylvania State University and her master's degree in CSD from New York University. This past June, Emily accepted a position as a clinical fellow at CARD Odenton and began her career in speech-language pathology. During her time at CARD, she has worked in the Achievements program and in Connecting Language Using Books (CLUB).

Emily trained extensively in augmentative and alternative communication at NYU Langone during her master's practicum. She is looking forward to continuing to work with children with complex communication needs and gaining more experience in functional communication. Emily is passionate about providing patient-centered care by supporting and advocating for children's individual needs. Emily believes strongly in family education and engagement to encourage generalization of skills in other environments.

Emily recently moved to Baltimore from the suburbs of Philadelphia. In her spare time, Emily enjoys spending time with her family and friends, watching Philly sports teams and Penn State Football. She loves reading, running, hiking and being outdoors.

# Staff Spotlight Corner



**Gracie Vendetti** has been a therapeutic assistant at CARD Odenton since June 2021. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in family and human services at Towson University. Before joining the CARD team, Gracie worked with children in a variety of settings, including tutoring, providing child care as a nanny, and her internship with Kennedy Krieger Institute's PACT program in Windsor Mill during her senior year of college.

Gracie has always had a passion for working with children with disabilities and is excited to begin her career here at CARD. In the classroom, she works to support speech-language pathologists by collecting progress data, creating therapeutic materials, and assisting with parent communication and training.

In her spare time, Gracie appreciates spending time with friends and family. She loves boating, swimming and just about anything that involves being on the water. Gracie lives in Montgomery County, Maryland, and plans to move closer to the water as soon as possible.

# Staff Spotlight Corner



**Rachel Blaustein, MS, CCC-SLP**, is a speech-language pathologist who completed her graduate student externship and clinical fellowship at CARD Odenton. She is now a nationally certified and licensed speech-language pathologist with experience primarily working with children with autism spectrum disorder and related disorders. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in speech-language pathology and audiology, with a minor in family studies and human services, from Towson University, and her Master of Science degree in speech-language pathology from Loyola University Maryland.

During Rachel's time at CARD, she has been active in the Achievements program and training in clinic programs and evaluations. She is passionate about providing naturalistic, functional, individualized and engaging speech-language therapy involving caregiver collaboration to facilitate and enhance language, social and play skills. She is also passionate about using and implementing augmentative and alternative communication and is eager to begin training in the Functional Communication Clinic.

Outside of the work environment, Rachel enjoys spending time with her family and friends, exploring new places and restaurants, and baking.

# Staff Spotlight Corner



**Wilette Riparip, MA, CF-SLP**, is a speech-language pathologist and clinical fellow at CARD Odenton. She received her bachelor's degree in hearing and speech science from the University of Maryland, then worked for a year as a therapeutic assistant at CARD Odenton, during which time her interest in working with children with developmental, neurological and intellectual disabilities grew. In May 2021, Wilette received her master's degree from the George Washington University. Her clinical rotation consisted of evaluating and providing treatment for motor speech disorders, neurological disorders, literacy, voice and accent modification. She completed her externship in pediatric private practice settings in Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia.

Wilette is currently working in the Achievements program at CARD as well as training in evaluations and Jump Start. She is excited to meet new families as she completes her clinical fellowship year at CARD. She is continuing to grow her skills in providing neurodiversity-affirming approaches. Wilette also believes in providing patient- and family-centered care to support each individualized need.

Wilette grew up in Maryland and enjoys rooting for the Baltimore Orioles and Baltimore Ravens. When not working, she spends time with family and friends, trying new restaurants around D.C., and reading books!