

DEVELOPMENT AND BEYOND NEWSLETTER

A monthly newsletter by
The Autism Program at
Boston Medical Center
for families and individuals with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) &
other neurodevelopmental diagnoses

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Dear Friends & Families,

Happy July!

Summer is in full swing, bringing long days, warm weather, and plenty of opportunities to get out and explore. If you're looking for ways to stay cool and make the most of the season, be sure to check out our **A+++ Summer Fun** section. From accessible pools and spray decks across Massachusetts to water safety swim lessons and sensory-friendly activities—including movie screenings and museum events—there's something for everyone to enjoy!

July is also **Disability Pride Month**, a time to celebrate disability identity, community, culture, and leadership. The month commemorates the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and recognizes the ongoing work needed to ensure equity, access, and inclusion in everyday life. In this issue, you'll find information about Disability Pride Month 2026, along with upcoming celebrations, educational opportunities, support groups, as well as community resources.

We invite you to explore what speaks to you and your family, and we hope this month brings opportunities for connection, inclusion, celebration, and summer fun.

Warmly,

The Autism Program at
Boston Medical Center

August 5th, 2026



AUTISM ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Deepening Your Professional Competency

The Autism Program is a recognized leader in the healthcare landscape, providing support and resources to individuals and families across the lifespan. Our dynamic team of professionals specialize in early childhood development, school-based services, ABA, transition to adulthood, and adult systems.

We are thrilled to announce our upcoming virtual conference opportunity, **Autism Across the Lifespan: Deepening Your Professional Competency**, being held on August 5, 2026 from 9:30am to 3pm.

Please see our **flyer** and **agenda** included in this newsletter (page 7 & 8) for more information, and help spread this event by sharing with your community.

Join us today - click **[HERE](#)** to register & for more information!



autismprogram@bmc.org

Disability Pride Month

The World Works Better With Us

The Arc's National Council of Self-Advocates (NCSA), a disabled-led national council, has selected this year's theme of Disability Pride Month: **"The World Works Better With Us."** The theme highlights the essential contributions of people with disabilities and reinforces the idea that inclusion benefits everyone—not only disabled individuals, but society as a whole.

The impact of disability rights, advocacy, accessibility, and accommodations is often underestimated. Yet many innovations originally designed to remove barriers for people with disabilities have become everyday conveniences that improve life for countless others. As The Arc explains, "Disability-led advocacy and design have helped create changes many people rely on, like curb cuts, closed captioning, audiobooks, and voice dictation. **What began as access often becomes a better experience for everyone**—including caregivers pushing strollers, viewers who prefer captions, commuters listening to books, and anyone who uses voice-to-text while multitasking."



© 2002 Michael F. Giangreco. Illustration by Kevin Ruelle.
Peytral Publications, Inc. 952-949-0707 www.peytral.com.
Inspired by a public school student with disabilities.

The reality is straightforward: Clearing a path for people with disabilities clears the path for everyone. An inclusive perspective opens up more opportunities for all of us to thrive, without unnecessary questions or judgment.

At a time when disability communities are facing significant challenges—including threats to critical services and supports, barriers to accessing benefits, rising stigma and bullying, and persistent inequities that limit opportunities to thrive—Disability Pride Month carries added significance. While this month is an opportunity to celebrate disability identity, community, and civil rights achievements, it is also an important moment to raise awareness and take action. As major decisions continue to shape the future of Medicaid, special education, and disability civil rights protections, we are reminded that progress requires both celebration and advocacy. Visit The Arc website for a list of ways you can participate in the effort to advance equity for individuals with disabilities and their families:

<https://thearc.org/blog/why-and-how-to-celebrate-disability-pride-month/>

Celebrate Together

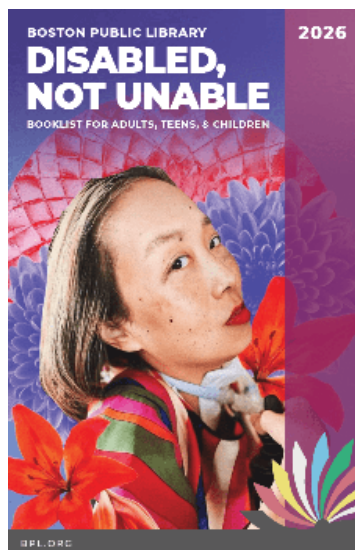
To celebrate Disability Pride Month, many towns and organizations are gathering to host flag raising ceremonies, disability resource fairs, community meet ups, advocacy forums, and other exciting events. We encourage you to look into local events by reaching out to your town directly or by searching online—public libraries are often a great source of information and connection!

In Boston, major events include the **Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Day** at Copley Square Park (July 15th, 12PM to 2PM), and the **Disability Pride Celebration** at Museum of Science (July 25th, 10AM to 4PM). The ADA Day will feature a lunchtime event with disability resource fair, food, and fun; Disability Pride Celebration will showcase a day of live presentations, engaging programs, and community partner activities. Continue reading for a collection of events coming up—whether you are looking for fun gatherings, learning opportunities, or support groups, there is something for everyone!

Disabled, Not Unable



Boston Public Library released this year's *Disabled, Not Unable* Booklist which catalogs a list of recently published books for all ages about the diverse experiences of the disabled and neurodivergent community. Check out this incredible booklist for comprehensive, creative, and expansive perspectives—both fiction and non fiction—that can help you learn, relate, feel, and celebrate!



Autism Books By Autistic Authors

If you are like us and no amount of book recommendations are enough, we want to point your attention to the amazing [Autism Books By Autistic Authors Project](#)—an online, ongoing catalogue of books, both fiction and non fiction, that are written about and related to autism by Autistic authors. This page houses a broad range of specific topics such as masking, burnout, non-verbal autism, PDA, autism in women & girls, and so much more. It is also categorized by reading level. Find your book today!



Disability Pride Flag



This month, you may see the Disability Pride Flag in spaces and wonder what meaning and symbolism this flag holds.

The flag was created in 2021 by Ann Magill, an American disabled activist. The charcoal grey background holds five parallel stripes in red, gold, white, gold and green. The grey background represents the mourning for people who have died due to ableist violence, abuse, suicide, and illness; red stripe represents physical disabilities; gold stripe, neurodiversity; blue stripe, emotional and psychiatric disabilities; green stripe, sensory disabilities; and white stripe, undiagnosed and invisible disabilities. The diagonal orientation symbolizes "cutting across" the vertical walls and horizontal ceilings that keep disabled people disenfranchised.



7/9 Adult Mental Health First Aid

Training & Education

10AM to 4PM | LUK, Inc. with the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

Adult Mental Health First Aid (AMHFA) is a training course that teaches everyday people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges or crises in adults. In a free hybrid course of 2 hours of virtual pre-work and in-person course in Ayer, MA, you will learn various tools to offer initial support and connect someone to professional help if needed. This is for anyone in the community who wants to learn how to help at the moment. To register, email training@LUK.org.

Virtual event - registration is required.



7/16 Finding the Funny in Frustrating

Parent Support

7PM | Autism Navigation Solutions

If you are caregiver to someone with autism, living in constant “What do I do next?” mode, quietly wondering if you’re doing enough, carrying resilience like it’s part of your job description, or simply exhausted in ways most people don’t understand – this series may be for you. Join speaker Frank Campagna, father of a nonspeaking autistic son, founder of Autism Daddy and an Emmy-winning producer who shares honest insight on high-support needs parenting and navigating adult services.

Virtual event - registration is required. \$25 registration fee.



7/22 Youth Mental Health First Aid

Training & Education

7/22, 8/5, 8/11 | National Council for Mental Wellbeing

Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based training for adults who frequently interact with youth. Learners receive free comprehensive materials on how to recognize common signs of mental health concerns in adolescents, the language and skills to talk to youth about suicide, how to connect youth to care, and a list of community and national referral resources. Training is for anyone connected to Arlington and/or neighboring communities that support Arlington youth, age 18+.

Virtual event - registration is required.



7/28 The Mental Health IEP

Training & Education

5PM to 7PM | Parent & Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)

Build confidence for your next IEP meeting with tips specific to children and youth with mental health needs. Learn about school-based evaluations related to mental health, accommodations and modifications for students with mental health needs, and much more.

Virtual event - registration is required.



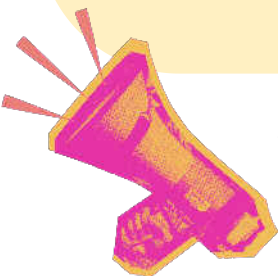
7/28 Path to Healing

Support Group

3:30PM | Building Partnerships Initiative

Path to Healing is a virtual peer group led by sexual assault survivors with disabilities. The Peer Support Leaders educate other survivors on self-care tips, coping skills, and self-advocacy skills to support the survivors on their healing journey. All groups are free and open to survivors with disabilities. If you are interested in attending or know of someone that would be interested, please contact SAR.PSN@mass.gov for more information.

Virtual event - registration is required.



Seeking Recruitment!

Suzanna Curtis is a graduate student and PhD candidate at UC Berkeley and SFSU, and is conducting a study to **better understand what thriving, wellbeing, and contentment looks like in autistic adults**. She is hoping to better understand what factors lead to autistic thriving.



Who? Autistic adults (ages 18+)

What? Engage in a 30 minute interview over Zoom to chat about areas in your life that you feel are going well. No huge accomplishments or achievements are necessary-anything that you would like to share that is important to you and brings satisfaction or content!

How? If interested, please email Suzanna Curtis at sscurtis@berkeley.edu for more information.

AUTISM a c r o s s

THE LIFESPAN:

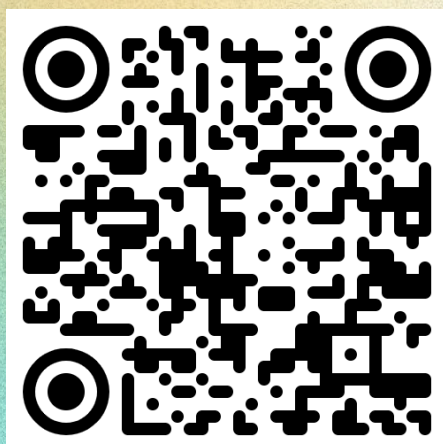
Deepening Your
Professional Competency
A Virtual Conference

COST:

\$250 – Professional Registration
\$50 – Discounted Rate for
Boston Medical Center Staff

REGISTRATION:

Scan QR code below or click
[HERE](#) to register



August 5th 2026



9:30 AM to 3 PM

Join the Autism Program at Boston Medical Center for a full day of learning, collaboration, and lived expertise. This virtual conference will bring together multidisciplinary voices to strengthen autism affirming practices and improve care pathways for autistic individuals, their families, and care providers through resources and practical strategies.

CEU will be provided. For further details on select sessions, please see agenda.

Questions? autismprogram@bmc.org

A G E N D A

9:30 - 10:00	Creating Autism Friendly Practices for Your Clients Alex Friedman, MPH Program Manager	● +
10:00 - 10:30	Supporting Families After an ASD Diagnosis: Caregiver Perspective and Community Resources Elizabeth Ferriero & Hillary Hollis Autism Program Co-Leads	● +
10:30 - 10:45	Break	
10:45 - 11:15	Supporting Positive Behavior Change in the Medical Setting Jacqueline McKendry, BCBA Behavior Specialist	● + ●
11:15 - 11:45	Addressing Language Barriers in ASD Care Juju Ha Autism Resource Specialist	● +
11:45 - 12:30	Lunch & Talent Show	
12:30 - 1:00	The Next Step: Supporting and Empowering Transition-Age Youth and Their Families Katie Bristol, MA Transition Specialist	● +
1:00 - 1:30	Steps Towards Independence: How to Promote Successful Transfer of Care for Autistic Adults Katie Shields Adult Autism Resource Specialist	● +
1:30 - 1:45	Break	
1:45 - 2:15	Autism Today: A Multidisciplinary Conversation on Diagnosis and Follow-Up Care Shari Krauss, MA, MPH Program Director	● +
2:15 - 2:45	Lived Experiences: Panel Discussion with Autistic Individuals	● +
2:45 - 3:00	Q&A and Open Discussion	● +

CEUs Offered Per Session:



Social Work



Nursing



BACB ACE CE



HOW TO: HAVE AN

A+++ **Adaptive, Accessible, and Affordable** SUMMER!

Are you ready to enjoy this beautiful weather while finding ways to stay cool? Continue reading to check out local events and programs geared towards individuals with ASD and other disabilities.



Summer Safety

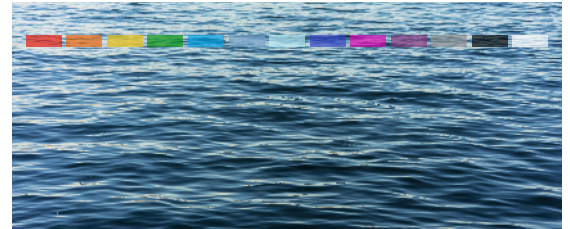
Summer is made for splashing, floating, and cooling off—whether you're at the pool, the beach, or a neighborhood spray deck. It's easy to slip on your sunglasses, relax, and enjoy the water. But before the fun begins, it's essential to pause and think about safety.

Research shows that children with ASD are 160 to nearly 200 times more likely to experience accidental drowning than their neurotypical peers. That statistic is a powerful reminder of how important it is to stay alert and prepared around water.

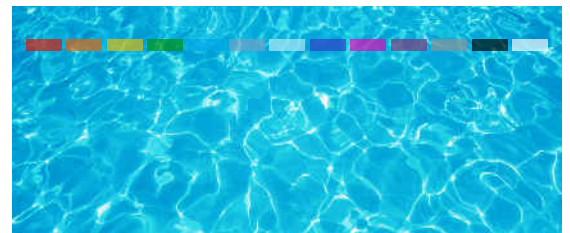
This summer, let's commit to creating safe, joyful experiences for everyone with right precautions and responsibility. The following resources can be helpful for any family planning a beach or pool day!

Choosing the right color for your child's swim suit can help make identifying your child easier while watching them swim. It can also be helpful in the case of a potential submersion. Image below illustrates how different colors may display in water.

In the Lake

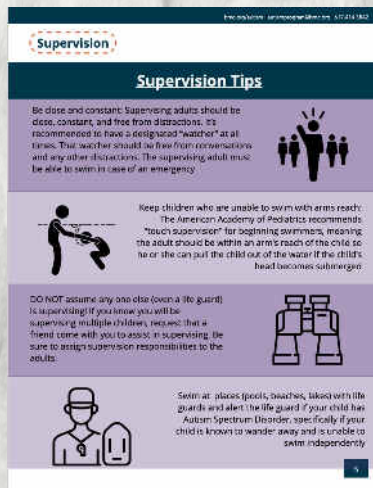


In the Pool



<https://www.stepintowim.org/news-resources/step-into-swim-blog/swimsuit-colors/>

Water Safety Guide



Our Water Safety Guide, created by the Autism Program at Boston Medical Center is a great place to start. We have compiled a list of helpful tips, facts, strategies, and resources to help make sure that your pool or beach day can be as safe as possible.

From commonly overlooked details such as **swim suit colors** to practical resources such as **local swimming lesson** options, every page includes valuable information to make sure that you are prepared for safety.



The National Autism Association also has a helpful page on water safety and drowning prevention for families. Check out this page for important statistics, inclusive water safety recommendations, and practical strategies to discussing water safety with your child.



Adaptive Swim Lessons

*"Drowning is one of the leading causes of death for children ages 1–4, and research shows that some children, such as those with autism, are particularly drawn to water and face an even higher risk. **This means that swimming is more than just a fun activity—it is a life-saving skill.** Yet the children who would benefit most from swim instruction **often face barriers in traditional swim environments.**"*

- City of Boston

If your family has the opportunity to do so, we highly encourage that all families consider looking into local adaptive swim lessons for your child. Prevention is one of the best ways to decrease potential safety risks in the water. Learning how to swim is also an excellent way to engage in aerobic exercise and develop muscle and coordination skills!

How To Find One

Often times, your town or city's youth center and/or recreation department may offer adaptive swim lessons for young swimmers. It can also be called "Sensory swim times". Lessons are modified to meet each student's needs and strengths, and involve collaborating with families to understand each student's learning profile, goals, comfort levels, and preferred communication strategies.

Boston Center for Youth and Families offers sensory swim lessons for youth across multiple locations, such as Roxbury, West Roxbury, and Dorchester. They are also currently offering Adaptive Swim Times, which offer families a safe, fun, and inclusive opportunity to swim together (without instructions). Visit their website for more information.

Boys and Girls Club and **YMCA** also offer seasonal swim lessons with a membership. There are numerous locations across the state—please contact your local organization directly for more information.

Other organizations that you can look into include:

- **JCC Greater Boston**
- **Adaptive Sports New England**
- **Sunsational Swim School**
- **Goldfish Swim School**
- **Easterseals Massachusetts**



BCYF AQUATICS PRESENTS

ADAPTIVE SWIM TIME

A safe, fun, inclusive environment for families to swim together.

BCYF MARSHALL	BCYF MASON
SATURDAYS 2:15 PM - 3:00 PM 35 WESTVILLE STREET DORCHESTER, MA 02124	TUESDAYS 5:00 PM - 5:45 PM 159 NORFOLKS AVENUE ROXBURY, MA 02119

BCYF DRAPER
THURSDAYS 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
SATURDAYS 9:15 AM - 10:15 AM
5275 WASHINGTON STREET
WEST ROXBURY, MA 02132

Boston residency and BCYF membership required for participation
Effective January 2026

CITY OF BOSTON | Boston Center for Youth and Families | Boston Recreation Department

If you are a resident of **Worcester**, you should also check out their free water safety swim lessons this summer. The YMCA of Central MA has teamed up with the City of Worcester to provide **free water safety swim lessons** across Worcester. This course will teach basic and essential water safety, drowning prevention skills, and to be more comfortable and confident in & around water.

<https://www.ymcaofcm.org/news/worcester-free-water-safety-swim-lessons/>

Many towns across MA offer similar opportunities—reach out to your town's Recreation Department to check their program offerings!

Accessible Beaches, Pools, and Spray Decks across MA

Visit pages below for a list:

- **Beaches & Beach Wheelchairs**
- **Pools & Spray Decks**

Adaptive, Accessible, and Affordable

A+++ Events to Look Forward To

SPORTS & ACTIVITY

MA Department of Conservation & Recreation

Summer 2026 offers many fun adaptive programs offered by DCR, including canoeing, kayaking, and cycling. Participating towns include Natick, Hopkinton, Stoneham, Goshen, Cambridge, Great Barrington, Concord, East Boston, Worcester, Waltham, many others. Visit the website for a complete list of programs and locations.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/adaptive-program-schedule>

Adaptive Sports Clinic @ Somerville

Somerville is hosting an Adaptive Sports Clinic designed to empower children with disabilities by providing them with a fun, supportive, and adaptive environment to learn and enjoy various sports. The program promotes physical activity, social interaction, skill development, and confidence-building through inclusive play. This program is free to join and offers two different sections based on age groups.

<https://somervillema.myrec.com/info/activities/default.aspx>

iCan Bike

Interested in learning how to ride a bike? Join our iCan Bike program designed for people with disabilities aged 8+! Hosted by multiple towns across MA (i.e., Somerville, Quincy, Cambridge, Groton, Hingham) in partnership with iCan Shine, this program aims to help folks become a lifelong independent rider. Multiple sections are available and will maintain a small-group learning style—please visit website for more information about each program offered.

- [Somerville](#)
- [Quincy](#)
- [Cambridge](#)
- [Burlington](#)
- [Groton](#)
- [Hingham](#)

SENSORY FRIENDLY

Evening at Discovery Museum (Acton, MA)

July 18th, 5PM to 8PM

Enjoy a special free evening for children and adults with disabilities or sensory sensitivities, including those that are deaf, blind, or autistic. Experience an accessible and universally designed Discovery Museum and Discovery Woods while exploring interactive exhibits and participating in hands-on activities! Advance registration is required. Social Story available.

<https://www.discoveryacton.org/visit/especially-me>

Sensory-Friendly Mornings at the Old State House (Boston, MA)

July 23rd

Enjoy special early open hours designed for visitors of all ages who benefit from a quieter, more supportive museum experience! With adjustments to lighting and sound, limited attendance, and hands-on activities, these mornings are ideal for people with sensory needs or those managing autoimmune or chronic illnesses, offering a welcoming way to explore Boston's revolutionary past! Admission is FREE for all visitors ages 18 and under. Adult tickets are \$5. Reservation is required.

<https://revolutionaryspaces.thundertix.com/events/249019>

FIND LOCAL ADAPTIVE EVENTS

SPED Child and Teen

SPED Child and Teen is an excellent website that updates events for families with special needs & disabilities. Check it out today!



The Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum & Springfield Science Museum (Springfield, MA)

The Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum and Springfield Science Museum will open early on select Sundays throughout the year, with some exhibits modified, to provide an opportunity for people with a range of differing abilities to experience what these Museums have to offer. Trained staff and volunteers will be on hand to answer any questions you have and, if necessary, direct you to a quiet space that provides a chance to cool down and take a break. Sensory-friendly crafts for all ages will be available in the Cat's Corner. Registration is required via website.

<https://springfieldmuseums.org/series/sensory-friendly-sunday/>

Sensory-Friendly Evening at the New England Botanical Garden (Boylston, MA)

July 21st, 6PM to 8PM

In partnership with the Autism Resource Center, The New England Botanical Garden invites individuals and families seeking a low-sensory, less crowded environment for a night of fun, exploration, and relaxation. Explore the gardens after hours and enjoy art projects, scavenger hunts, sensory stations, and more hands-on activities for all ages. Register in advance today for FREE tickets!

<https://nebg.org/sensory-friendly-evening/>

Beach:Accessibility Day (East Boston, MA)

August 1st, 11AM to 3PM

Celebrate summer in Boston at the beach! This family-friendly event is accessible, free, and open to the public. Pack your towel, sunscreen, beach umbrella, and sandals and join the Triangle, Inc. community for a fun day in the sun. Kayaks will be available from 11AM to 2PM. Register today – the first 100 people to register will get a free lunch!

<https://triangle-inc.org/beach-day/>

ARTS & MOVIES

O'neil Cinemas (Littleton, MA)

O'neil Cinemas offers regular sensory-friendly viewings of select movies, providing an inclusive space for families affected by autism and other disabilities. In a sensory-friendly viewing, you can watch movies on the big screen with no loud noises and higher house lights for better visibility. All sensory-friendly shows are at 10AM.

- 7/11 - Minions & Monsters, Minions 3
- 7/18 - Moana
- 8/22 - Paw Patrol: The Dino Movie
- 8/29 - The Magic Far Away Tree

<https://oneilcinemas.com/littleton/sensory-friendly>

Paper Art (Northampton, MA)

July 18th, 11:30AM to 12:30PM

This workshop is designed specifically for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities + their caregivers. Participants will design and create abstract geometric art using paper. The project is broken down into easy to follow steps, directions are given verbally and visually, individual attention is given throughout, and appropriate pacing supports individual needs. \$35 registration fee required.

<https://www.nohoarts.org/paper-art>

Levitate Music & Arts Festival (Marshfield, MA)

July 18th to 19th

The team at Autism Rocks, in partnership with the Levitate Music Festival, are offering Autism Rocks Sensory Chill Zone. This space will offer a calm, welcoming space for individuals with sensory needs and their families to take a break and regulate before heading back to enjoy the festival. Sensory bags will also be available to borrow for the day, including noise-canceling headphones and other comfort tools.

<https://levitatemusicfestival.com/>

DEVELOPMENT AND BEYOND NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 95: July 7th, 2026



Resources

The Autism Program is continues to support families in many ways both inside and outside of Boston Medical Center. Check out our website to learn more about the services, supports and programs we offer including our Autism Friendly Hospital Initiative, Teens Engaged as Mentors (TEAM) program, and our training offerings. We also have a huge resource library where you can access free information on a variety of topics such as safety, behavioral support, transition to adulthood, insurance and more!



www.bmc.org/autism

[@BMCAutismProgram](https://twitter.com/BMCAutismProgram)

autismprogram@bmc.org

Clinic

Our DBP clinicians are available for developmental evaluations, assessments and follow up. To connect with the clinical team, please call 617-414-4841 and follow the prompts for Developmental Pediatrics.

Marilyn Augustyn, MD

Arathi Reddy, DO

Rachel Amgott, NP

Christina Lazdowsky, NP

Mei Elansary, MD

Audrey Christiansen, MD

Sarah Canale, MD

Mary Ellen Killion, NP

Arielle Spellun, MD

Bridget Poznanski, PhD

About this newsletter...



Development and Beyond is brought to you by the Autism Program at Boston Medical Center, a family support program of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics. Join our mailing list for future newsletters, community resources and more - just scan the QR code to the right!

