



SPECTRUM STRONG

APRIL

2026

A NOTE FROM THE SPECTRUM STRONG TEAM

March was an amazing month for Spectrum Strong Autism Parent Network. We have seen significant growth in many areas whether it be people attending our events, families signing-up to be on our mailing list, engagement through our social media sites or individuals reaching out through email about specific questions or needs for resources. This is what Spectrum Strong is all about - connection, community and empowerment and to never feel like you are alone in this journey. We have so many amazing things planned in the future for you and your families - thank you for supporting us and for being part of the Spectrum Strong Community.



Important Phone Numbers:
St Croix County Intake:
715-246-8260

Minnesota:
disabilityhubmn.org



Spectrum Strong recently hosted a parent workshop that brought together families from both Wisconsin and Minnesota for an evening of connection, learning, and support. With representatives from St. Croix County (WI) and the state of Minnesota in attendance, families had the opportunity to ask questions, gain clarity, and better understand how to access services that can support their child and family.

One of the most valuable parts of the evening was breaking down the intake process—something many families find overwhelming when first starting out. We discussed what happens after making that initial phone call to your county. Families can expect to share information about their child's strengths, needs, and daily experiences. This process helps determine eligibility and ensures that supports are tailored to each individual. While it can feel intimidating, taking that first step opens the door to meaningful resources.

We also explored the Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Waiver, including the wide range of supports it may cover. Depending on individual needs, the waiver can help fund services such as respite care, therapeutic supports, skill-building programs, adaptive equipment, and more. The flexibility of the CLTS Waiver allows families to pursue supports that help their child thrive in ways that are meaningful to them.

An important theme throughout the workshop was the value of honesty and vulnerability during the process. When speaking with county representatives, it can be difficult to share the full picture of your child's needs or your family's challenges. However, being open about both strengths and areas of need ensures that families are connected with the most appropriate level of support. This is not about labeling—it's about accessing the tools and resources that help your child succeed.

We also discussed the difference between the CLTS Waiver and the Katie Beckett Program, two supports that are often confused. While both can provide access to services, they serve different purposes. The Katie Beckett Program helps children with disabilities qualify for Medicaid based on their own needs rather than family income, opening the door to healthcare coverage. The CLTS Waiver, on the other hand, focuses more broadly on long-term supports and services that promote independence, inclusion, and quality of life.

Another key topic was guardianship and the transition to adulthood. As children approach age 18, families may begin considering whether guardianship is appropriate. We reviewed the general process, timelines, and considerations involved, emphasizing that this decision is highly individual. Families are encouraged to explore all options, including alternatives to guardianship, to determine what best supports their young adult's autonomy and well-being.

Having representatives from both Wisconsin and Minnesota created a unique opportunity for families to receive state-specific guidance while also recognizing shared experiences across systems. No matter where families are located, the goal remains the same: ensuring children and individuals have access to the supports they need to thrive.

We are so grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to such a meaningful conversation. At Spectrum Strong, we remain committed to creating spaces where families feel informed, supported, and empowered.

Upcoming Events

SATURDAY APRIL 18:
STEPS TO ACCEPTANCE
5K FUN RUN/WALK

TUESDAY, JUNE 16
PARENT WORKSHOP

SUNDAY, JULY 19
FAMILY MUSIC DAY
CAMP WITH DYNAMIC
MUSIC THERAPY

AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH: MOVING BEYOND AWARENESS

April is widely recognized as Autism Acceptance Month—a time not only to increase understanding, but to actively build inclusion, respect, and belonging for autistic individuals. For many families, this month can bring both celebration and confusion. You may see different symbols, colors, and language being used—and wonder what it all means. Let's break it down in a way that centers respect, research, and lived experience.

Awareness vs. Acceptance: Understanding the Two Perspectives

Historically, April was known as Autism Awareness Month, a movement largely led by parent-driven and medical organizations. Awareness campaigns often focused on identifying autism and highlighting challenges. Over time, many autistic self-advocates began calling for a shift toward acceptance instead of awareness.

Why the shift?

- Awareness says: "Autism exists."
- Acceptance says: "Autistic people belong, just as they are."

Acceptance emphasizes:

- Inclusion in schools and communities
- Respect for neurodiversity
- Listening to autistic voices
- Supporting accommodations rather than trying to "fix" individuals

Both perspectives still exist today, and families may encounter messaging from each.

Symbols and Colors: What Do They Mean?

The Puzzle Piece (Traditional Symbol).

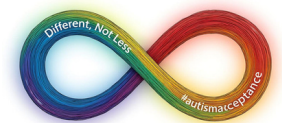
- Often associated with older awareness campaigns
- Frequently paired with the color blue (e.g., "Light It Up Blue")
- Originally intended to represent complexity or mystery



Why are some moving away from it? Many autistic individuals feel the puzzle piece suggests they are "missing something" or need to be "solved."

The Infinity Symbol (Neurodiversity Symbol).

- Represents diversity and infinite variation in human minds
- Often shown in rainbow (neurodiversity broadly) or gold (autism-specific, from Au on the periodic table)



Why it's embraced: It reflects acceptance, pride, and the idea that there is no single "right" way to think or be.

Language Matters: Person-First vs. Identity-First

You may hear both of these:

- Person-first language: "person with autism"
- Identity-first language: "autistic person"

Many autistic advocates view autism as an integral part of who they are—not something separate from them.

Saying "autistic person":

- Aligns with other identity-based language (e.g., "Deaf person")
- Recognizes autism as a valid neurotype
- Reflects preferences expressed in multiple research studies of autistic adults

What's most important? Respect individual preference. Some people and families still prefer person-first language—and that choice should be honored.



AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH: MOVING BEYOND AWARENESS

Myth vs. Fact

Here are a few research-based points families can share:

Myth: Autism is caused by vaccines

Fact: Extensive research has found no link between vaccines and autism.

Myth: Autistic people lack empathy

Fact: Many autistic individuals experience deep empathy but may express it differently.

Myth: All autistic people are the same

Fact: Autism is a spectrum with wide variation in strengths, needs, communication styles, and support levels.

Myth: Autism only affects children

Fact: Autistic children grow into autistic adults. Lifespan supports and inclusion matter.

Myth: Autistic individuals don't want friends or connection

Fact: Many autistic people want meaningful relationships but may connect in different ways.

Resource Books for Families, Schools, and Communities

Here are some widely respected, research-informed, and neuro-affirming resources:

For Parents & Caregivers

- NeuroTribes by Steve Silberman
- Uniquely Human by Barry M. Prizant
- The Explosive Child by Ross W. Greene
- Sincerely, Your Autistic Child by Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

For Educators & Professionals

- The Reason I Jump by Naoki Higashida
- Neurodiversity in the Classroom by Thomas Armstrong
- All Cats Are on the Autism Spectrum by Kathy Hoopmann

For Kids & Siblings

- A Friend for Henry by Jenn Bailey
- My Brother Charlie by Holly Robinson Peete
- Different, Not Less (young reader adaptations and similar titles highlighting strengths)
- Little Lindsey Series (Gets a Haircut, Picky Eater, Goes to Therapy, Makes a Friend) by Lindsey Moreland

Moving Forward: What Acceptance Looks Like

Autism Acceptance Month is not just about information—it's about action. Autism Acceptance can look like:

- Creating sensory-friendly spaces
- Using inclusive language
- Supporting communication in all forms (spoken, AAC, etc.)
- Valuing strengths alongside support needs
- Listening to autistic voices and lived experiences

For families, acceptance also means giving yourself permission to learn, grow, and shift perspectives over time. Autism Acceptance Month invites all of us—families, educators, and communities—to move beyond simply noticing differences and toward truly valuing them because when we embrace neurodiversity, we don't just support autistic individuals—we create more compassionate, flexible, and inclusive spaces for everyone.

