

# Center for Autism & Related Disorders



Center for Autism and Related Disorders  
at Kennedy Krieger Institute

September 2021

## Director's Corner

### A Note From Rebecca Landa, PhD, CCC-SLP

Hello, everyone,

The CARD newsletter team has established a way to keep you connected to us without adding to email fatigue! Our newsletters will be distributed four times a year. Two newsletters will be brief and theme-based, like this one, and will come in the spring and fall. The other two will be more full-bodied, providing updates of CARD events and activities, and will be shared in early summer and near the end of the calendar year.

The theme of this newsletter is back-to-school. As we enter the new school year, we seize the opportunity to reflect. What does school mean to your family, your children or you, as a parent or education professional? What are your priorities? How do you define success? What will a typical school night look like? Taking a few moments to reflect on these things can help pave a path for greater organization, communication and satisfaction.

One key ingredient to a successful school year is communication, which is essential to achieving parents' and teachers' shared goal of positive school experiences for students. When parents convey information about students' strengths, interests, sensitivities, and needs, teachers are better able to plan. Teacher communication about expectations and what is happening at school helps parents support their children's success. Parent-teacher communication makes it possible to establish a few key mutual goals and align on how to achieve those goals. Communication takes time, but it pays off ten-fold in the end!

I wish you a happy transition from summer to autumn!

My very best,  
Rebecca Landa, PhD, CCC-SLP  
Founder and Executive Director,  
Center for Autism and Related Disorders  
Vice President,  
Kennedy Krieger Institute



## Stay Connected With CARD this Fall!

Professionals may earn ASHA, occupational therapy, social work, psychology, counselor, and therapist CEUs by viewing **on-demand trainings** from CARD's Spring Training Series webinars **until October 6**. Certifications are sent on a monthly basis. Visit [KennedyKriegerCARD.Eventbrite.com](https://www.kennedykrieger.org/CARD/Eventbrite.com) to register.

Family and community members may visit [KennedyKrieger.org/CARDWebinars](https://www.kennedykrieger.org/CARDWebinars) to view all trainings free of charge.

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SPARK at CARD and Pathfinders for Autism have teamed up in 2021 for a **series of virtual webinars**. We hope you'll join us for our next webinar on **Monday, November 8, at 1:30 p.m.** with Roma Vasa, MD, one of CARD's psychiatrists. More information about the webinar is available [here](#). Learn more about SPARK [here](#).

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**CARD Conference 2021 Update**  
After careful consideration, **CARD's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Autism Conference**, which had been slated to be held in person this October, will be postponed as we **transform our program into a virtual event**. The good news is we will continue to offer virtual learning opportunities while we make this transition. More information is coming soon!



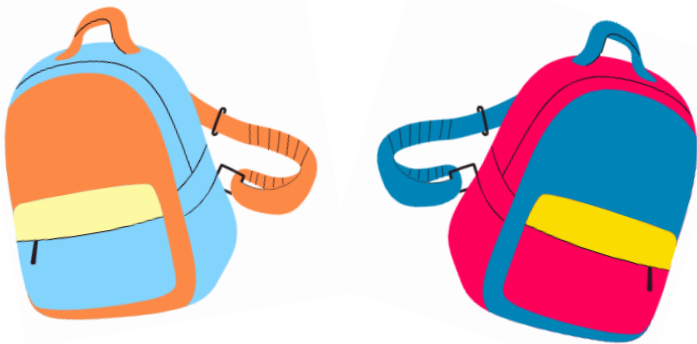
# Back-to-School 2021

## A Time of Excitement and Uncertainty

By Amy Keefer, PhD

This year, the return to school will be like no other. Due to COVID-19 restrictions over the past 18 months, many students have had limited opportunity for social interaction, reduced structure and routine, and fewer academic demands. Although the prospect of returning to school and a more typical daily life may produce feelings of excitement for some children, others may feel anxious and uncertain.

Young students may not remember what a “typical” school day is like, especially since some may have only ever attended school virtually. Older students may have grown accustomed to their current routines and may feel intimidated by the challenge of negotiating new schedules, unknown expectations and unfamiliar social situations. Some children may also be aware of ongoing concerns about the pandemic, and may be experiencing uncertainty regarding their safety and the future.



How children respond to uncertainty varies. Some children, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are more likely to have strong, emotional reactions to uncertainty. Others are unaffected. However, this year, even children who typically navigate uncertain situations with ease may experience some anxiety due to the significant disruption and chronic uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important that parents remain mindful of their child’s emotions, particularly as the opening of school grows closer. If parents notice that their child may be experiencing anxiety and uncertainty, several strategies may help.

One strategy is to increase the child’s certainty about this transition. Caregivers can schedule a tour of the school, meet teachers, and/or play on the school playground or sports fields with their children before the first day of classes. Practicing daily routines, such as getting ready for the bus, and establishing sleeping and eating patterns that correspond with the child’s school schedule in the weeks leading up to the first day of school may also be helpful.



Many children also benefit from learning emotional management strategies such as simple relaxation exercises, like deep breathing, that can be used to reduce overall anxiety and manage stress.



Parents of children who can talk about their thoughts and emotions are encouraged to acknowledge the uncertainty their child may be feeling using simple, easy-to-understand language. Parents should validate their child’s feelings and can suggest short, helpful thoughts such as, “This is hard, but you can handle it.” Or, “This will get easier. Just hang in there.”

Most children will respond well to these supports and will adjust to their new school routines. However, if parents notice that anxiety and uncertainty are causing ongoing problems for their child, they are encouraged to seek the help of a licensed mental health provider.