
Autism expert offers free health & wellness coaching for New Jersey caregivers

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HAMILTON, N.J. — Every caregiver knows that parenting can be tough – amid the busyness of diaper changes, school pick up lines, and teen growing pains, it's easy to let self-care slip out of focus.

Caregivers of children with autism often face additional challenges: finding the right therapy and healthcare providers, negotiating Individualized Educational Programs, and managing challenging behavior. This day-to-day stress is compounded by worry about their child's future, financial strain due to treatment costs, and the isolation that can come with parenting a child with unique needs.

As they take care of others, parents need specialized support and encouragement to take care of themselves, too. That's why Autism New Jersey teamed up with Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ to provide health and wellness coaching groups for caregivers.

Launched in March 2024, more than 30 caregivers have participated in these virtual small groups, led by Amy Golden, Autism New Jersey's director of family wellness. Golden, a board certified behavior analyst and national board certified health and wellness coach, helped participants create personalized strategies to maintain their well-being.

"When parents take care of themselves, they are better equipped to support their family with patience, energy, and positivity," Golden said.

Over the course of six weeks, the groups discussed potential barriers to engaging in self-care and options for addressing those challenges. The caregivers learned how to break their goals into manageable, short-term action steps and implement specific strategies to create habits.

The participating parents reported finding camaraderie in the groups by connecting with caregivers who are facing similar challenges, and high satisfaction with the group's personalized curriculum. In an anonymous survey of 13 former participants, 12 said they were "likely" or "extremely likely" to recommend the support group to a friend.

"Some of these caregivers reported experiencing continuous trauma and found taking care of their own mental health extremely challenging while balancing their caregiving responsibilities," said Executive Director at Autism New Jersey Suzanne Buchanan. "These

coaching groups are our latest initiative to meet parents where they are and provide practical, realistic guidance. We are so thankful to the Horizon Foundation for supporting this program and for their commitment to the autism community.”

Due in part to the support of Horizon BCBSNJ, Golden has led eight small groups free of charge to participants.

Golden is forming new groups on a rolling basis and New Jersey-based parents or caregivers with kids with autism are invited to attend. Sign up at autismnj.org/health-and-wellness-coaching-sessions/.

Autism New Jersey provides expert guidance and support to individuals with autism and their families, as well as educators, health care providers, and policy experts. Call 800.4.AUTISM, [email a helpline specialist](mailto:helpline@autismnj.org), or find extensive resources online at autismnj.org.

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