

McPartland Lab

SPRING NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear friends of the McPartland Lab,

Welcome to the Spring Edition of our Newsletter. The warming weather brings many outdoor autism awareness events. As the photos above illustrate, we make it a priority to be out in the community. We will hope to see many of you there!

In this issue, you will meet two of the research fellows who work on our research projects. You'll receive some sage advice from Dr. Alan Gerber about managing children's use of electronic devices. During the spring and summer, there are so many better alternatives! We'll describe the EVOLVE study, a new research opportunity in the lab, and we'll highlight Bloom Where Planted, an organization providing services that may be of value to many of you. Lastly, we will offer some suggestions for activities at this time of year.

Keep an eye out for our next issue, when we'll be reporting back from the International Society for Autism Research meeting in Australia!

Best wishes,
Jamie McPartland

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MEET THE LAB!

SHREYA KANNAN

Introduce yourself! What is your role at Yale?

My name is Shreya, and I am a Sparrow Fellow in the lab! I grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and later moved to Los Angeles, California. I graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2023 with a B.S. in Cognitive Science. My favorite part of this job is working with and learning from the clinicians and research scientists. Outside of work, I love going to the beach, concerts, and trying new foods!

What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?

Before joining the lab, I was a member of the Multisensory Processing Lab at UCLA where we studied how memory and language are impacted by learning using audio, visual, and/or text information. In college, I was a peer mental health mentor, where I really enjoyed getting to know other undergraduates and helping them through the post-COVID transition to college life. I also worked at the Beautiful Minds Center for Autism as an ABA therapist, where I supported autistic kids in learning about and practicing social skills relevant to their circumstances and environment.

What made you interested in working in this field?

I became interested in this field while working as an ABA therapist. Spending so much one-on-one time with the kids I worked with gave me a chance to bond with them, and also the chance to understand the challenges they face at school, whether it be with their peers, schoolwork, or feeling like they can ask for the help that they may need.



LAUREN ROBINSON

Introduce yourself! What's your role at Yale?

Hi everyone! My name is Lauren, and I am a Sparrow Fellow. I grew up in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and graduated from New York University with a B.A. in Psychology. My favorite part of my job is helping to create a positive research environment for neurodivergent youth and their families! Outside of work, I enjoy playing volleyball, guitar, and reading.

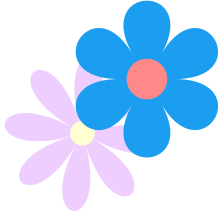
What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?

Before joining the McPartland Lab, I worked with Dr. Francisco X. Castellanos as a research associate at NYU's Child Study Center. During my time there, I assisted in research that aimed to detect brain changes following a 6-week intervention in children with ADHD. During my time there, I also worked on a clinical trial designed to assess the usage and optimal dosage of cannabidiol (CBD) as a potential treatment for core autism symptoms. These experiences in neuroscience furthered my passion for the field and ultimately led me to the McPartland Lab.

What made you interested in working in this field?

I initially became interested in this field through my experiences growing up with autistic individuals. Volunteering as a volleyball coach through Special Olympics New York during college deepened my understanding of neurodiversity. At NYU's Child Study Center, my direct work with autistic children helped me gain insight into how individuals on the spectrum experience the world and solidified my goal of becoming a clinical child psychologist!





MANAGING SCREEN TIME

BY DR. ALAN GERBER



One of the biggest challenges of parenting these days is managing screen time for children. While technology offers numerous benefits, including social connection and increased responsibility, excessive screen time can also pose difficulties for parents. Research suggests that greater screen time is related to anxiety, depression, and behavioral difficulties in children. Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance that fosters healthy development and well-being for your child.

Studies show that autistic youth tend to engage in greater use of screen time than non-autistic peers. Therefore, managing screen time for autistic children requires a tailored approach that considers their individual needs, developmental stage, and family dynamics. Here are some practical tips for parents to navigate managing their child's screen time.

- **Establish Clear Boundaries:** Create clear guidelines around screen time, taking into account the child's age and developmental level. Set limits on the duration and timing of screen use, ensuring that it does not interfere with essential activities such as meals, sleep, or schoolwork. For example, try to restrict exposure to screen time up to an hour before bedtime. Consistency is key, so establish a daily routine that incorporates both screen and non-screen activities.
- **Prioritize Quality Content:** Choose screen content that is not only age-appropriate but also aligns with the child's interests and learning objectives. Look for educational programs, interactive games, and creative apps that can engage their attention and foster skill development. Encourage screen time activities that promote interaction with caregivers and family members, enhancing social connection and communication skills.
- **Monitor and Adjust:** Regularly monitor your child's screen time habits and adjust guidelines as needed. Some strategies for regulating screen time include being consistent, setting rules and a schedule, and using apps to monitor screen time. Be mindful of any changes in behavior or mood that may indicate excessive screen use or exposure to inappropriate content. Use monitoring software or visual supports to track screen time and facilitate discussions with your child about responsible technology use. Involve all caregivers in the process to ensure consistency and support.

- **Encourage Alternative Activities:** Balance screen time with a variety of non-screen-based activities that promote physical activity, social interaction, and creativity. Encourage outdoor play, hobbies, and family outings to ensure that your child's opportunities for real-world exploration are not replaced by screen time. Identify the specific non-screen time activities your child enjoys and support them in engaging in these activities. Non-screen-based activities that include family members can be particularly important.

By following these tips and principles, parents can effectively manage their children's screen time in a way that promotes their overall well-being, development, and digital citizenship skills. It's essential to approach screen time management with flexibility, empathy, and a focus on fostering positive relationships with technology and the world around them.

Visit [this link](#) for more resources!



EXCITING LAB EVENTS

On April 4th, we attended **Autism Science Foundation's Day of Learning!** Researchers and autism stakeholders from around the country came together to share research findings and discuss the issues that matter most to families. On April 7th, Dr. McPartland gave a lecture about the benefits of autism research at the Autism Awareness Forum.



STUDY SPOTLIGHT

EVOLVE STUDY

BY DR. JASON GRIFFIN

What is the EVOLVE study?

EVOLVE, or Ecologically Valid Observation of Looking and Visual Engagement, aims to understand how autistic people engage in “real world” social situations like a conversation with another person. For the past 20 years, autism researchers have learned a lot about how autistic and non-autistic children view the social world, but nearly all of this research uses images or videos of faces and social things in lab settings. In other words, scientists have a good idea of how autistic children look at pictures of faces on a computer screen, but scientists have not studied how autistic children engage with social information in the real world.

What is the goal of this study?

The primary goal of this study is to understand how characteristics (e.g., brain measures; autism symptoms) of autistic and non-autistic people predict social behavior in conversations with real people.

What will a typical study visit look like?

This is a short study, lasting about 30 minutes. Participants will come into the laboratory, put on a set of cool high-tech glasses 🕶️, chat with some people in the lab, and that’s it! Participants will be compensated \$25.

Who is eligible to participate?

People who have completed any part of the ABC-CT study and are between the age of 6-12.

**Interested participants can contact Bela
at 203-737-3439 or autism@yale.edu.**



IN THE COMMUNITY

BLOOM WHERE PLANTED

Bloom Where Planted was founded in Spring of 2023 by Amy Lopez. Amy took her years of experience working with various populations of people as a certified therapeutic horseback riding Instructor and as an environmental educator and naturalist in a park setting to create her own traveling program based on therapeutic horticulture. With the goal of making connecting with plants and nature more accessible to all people, even if getting outdoors is not an easy option, Bloom Where Planted brings plants and natural materials inside; working with the senses to facilitate nature-based creative exploration and learning.

Who Benefits from Plants and Nature Programs?

Bloom Where Planted customizes and adapts programs based on the audience of the program. The programs are most popular with day programs, memory care centers, and neurodiverse and disabled children and adults. The beauty of plant and nature programs are that they are suitable to any person no matter their age or ability.

Why A Plant and Nature Program?

Time spent in nature improves mood and lowers stress; increases curiosity and critical thinking; improves confidence and self-esteem; and increases feelings of being grounded and connected. The beneficial value of working with and around plants and nature has been well studied and documented. Just being able to view nature has been shown to improve health. Recognizing that there are various reasons why someone may struggle to spend time outdoors, Bloom Where Planted offers creative ways to engage people with nature.

Bloom Where Planted Programs

Visiting programs are unique in that every participant leaves each program with something to take home like a plant or a finished project. Each program is unique and relates to a plant or nature theme. All needed materials are provided, and you don't need to have a garden space as programs are completed while seated at a table. Programs are one hour long unless a group finds a shorter time works best for them. Programs focus on three main things: they are sensory based, education based, and activity based. Typically programs start with an element of learning and sensory exploration of natural or plant material followed by a hands-on activity. Nature inspires creativity, and working with natural materials encourages people to be more grounded and present in the moment.

Bloom Where Planted is excited to also be able to offer adaptive farm programs this year on their new flower farm space in Bristol, CT. There are many skills that can be honed in the supportive accessible walkways of farm gardens. Bloom Where Planted's Farm Programs involve hands-on activities working directly with plants, flowers, herbs, and soil. Participants spend time in the garden learning about and connecting to nature and growing with the plants around them. Participants are ensured they are able to participate to the best of their ability and interest through adaptive tools, activities, and instruction. Weekly programs are available in four week sessions as well as one-time programs and events.

For more information, visit www.bloomplanted.com or contact them at programs@bloomplanted.com.

SPRING ACTIVITIES



Visit Lake Compounce Amusement and Water Park

Lake Compounce has a range of rides, games, and entertainment that make it a fun time for everyone in the family.

Watch a Movie at a Nearby Drive-in Movie Theater

Enjoy the warm weather while catching an outdoor movie at the Remarkable Drive-in in Westport or the Southington Drive-in in Plantsville.

Pick Some Fresh Fruit at Bishop's Orchard

Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, peaches, and pears are all available for "pick-your-own" during the summer at Bishop's.

Stop by Buttonwood Farm

Enjoy some delicious ice cream made on the farm and check out the beautiful sunflower field. You can even pick your own sunflowers in the designated cutting field!



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