

Set the Stage for the Season: Advocacy & Tools for a Meaningful Holiday

VOICE Webinar Summary – November 17, 2025

Summary Overview

- **Introduction to Advocacy and Holiday Planning Tools:** Nathan Briggs opened the session by introducing the focus on advocacy and tools for a meaningful holiday, highlighting the expertise of Theresa Maier and Lisa Thompson from the Autism Society of Greater Akron, and setting the stage for a discussion on practical supports for families during the holiday season.
 - **Session Purpose and Structure:** Nathan Briggs explained that the session would explore advocacy and planning tools to help families have a meaningful holiday, emphasizing the importance of community and the unique approach for the final ASGA voice session of 2025.
 - **Participant Engagement:** Theresa Maier encouraged active participation, inviting attendees to ask questions, share experiences, and use QR codes to access digital copies of the tools discussed during the session.
- **Life Trajectory Tool for Holiday Planning:** Theresa Maier provided an in-depth explanation of the Life Trajectory Tool, illustrating its use for holiday planning with a focus on person-centered thinking, and engaged participants like Ashley and Kelly in applying the tool to real-life scenarios.
 - **Tool Overview and Purpose:** Theresa described the Life Trajectory Tool as a visual planning resource from the Charting the Life Course framework, designed to help individuals and families clarify their vision for the future, identify what is wanted and not wanted, and support advocacy and inclusion.
 - **Tool Structure and Application:** Theresa explained the tool's sections, including vision (what is wanted and not wanted) and experiences (what has helped or hindered in the past), and demonstrated how to fill out each part using both hypothetical and participant-provided examples.
 - **Real-Life Example and Group Discussion:** Ashley shared concerns about her daughter's reactions during family gatherings, which Theresa used to illustrate how the tool can address specific challenges, while Kelly contributed insights on the importance of quiet spaces for individuals during holidays.

- **Implementation Steps:** Theresa outlined actionable steps for using the tool: reviewing the plan together, sharing it with relevant people, putting supports in place, reflecting and adjusting after the event, and updating the plan for future occasions.
- **Questions and Best Practices:** Nathan asked about who should assemble and share the tool, to which Theresa recommended that immediate family or caretakers, with input from the individual when possible, should create the plan and share it with guests in advance to ensure everyone is prepared.
- **Wish List Tool for Caregiver Support:** Theresa Maier introduced the Wish List Tool as a means for caregivers to articulate their own needs during the holidays, providing practical examples and encouraging participants to consider actionable requests for support.
 - **Purpose and Benefits:** Theresa explained that the Wish List Tool helps caregivers express their needs, turning vague offers of help into specific, actionable requests, and ensuring that caregiver well-being is included in holiday planning.
 - **Examples of Use:** Theresa provided examples such as asking a family member to rake leaves, babysit, or help with grocery shopping, and highlighted the importance of planning these requests in advance to reduce stress.
 - **Participant Contributions:** Nathan and Theresa discussed additional wish list items, such as requesting good weather for travel or help with childcare during meals, reinforcing the tool's flexibility and relevance.
- **One Page Profile and Social Story Tools:** Lisa Thompson and Theresa Maier collaboratively presented the One Page Profile and Social Story tools, demonstrating their use in supporting individuals with Autism during the holidays and providing step-by-step guidance for creating and sharing these resources.
 - **One Page Profile Overview:** Theresa and Lisa described the One Page Profile as a concise document capturing what people like and admire about the individual, what is important to them, and how best to support them, using Ethan's story as an example.
 - **Application for Holiday Gatherings:** Lisa explained that sharing the One Page Profile with hosts and family members can help ensure appropriate

supports are in place, such as quiet spaces or preferred foods, and foster understanding of the individual's needs.

- **Social Story Creation:** Theresa outlined the steps for creating a Social Story: identifying the activity, using clear language and visuals, describing steps in order, keeping the tone positive, and reviewing the story together before the event.
- **Example Social Story:** Theresa provided a sample holiday social story, detailing how it can prepare individuals for family gatherings, address potential stressors, and reinforce positive expectations and coping strategies.
- **Upcoming Events and Community Resources:** Nathan Briggs concluded the session by highlighting upcoming ASGA events, ongoing advocacy efforts, educational opportunities, and available resources, inviting participants to stay engaged and utilize the organization's support services.
 - **Holiday and Community Events:** Nathan announced events such as the Adapted North Pole Adventures and Santa appearances, encouraging participants to register and join the community for celebrations in December.
 - **Advocacy and Education Initiatives:** Nathan shared plans for future advocacy sessions and educational webinars, including Supporting Positive Behavior and Parent Cafes, and emphasized the importance of ongoing community involvement.
 - **Resource Guides and Support Channels:** Nathan promoted the online diagnosis guides for children and adults, the Coffee, Tea and Autism Facebook group, and the ASGA helpline, encouraging participants to access these resources for information and support.

Resources: <https://autismakron.org/webinars/set-the-stage-for-the-season/>