

# Free Training to Support Maine Caregivers Raising Nonverbal Children including those with Autism



Facilitator will share lived experience raising a nonverbal child who utilizes augmentative and alternative communication devices

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**Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2021, AUGUSTA, Maine / For Immediate Release** – On the evening of Tuesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> from 5pm – 7pm the G.E.A.R. Parent Network, a program of Crisis & Counseling Centers, will host a free virtual training for parents and community partners (educators, providers, and other professionals) titled “Understanding Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)”.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)<sup>i</sup> explains that, “Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may have difficulty developing language skills and understanding what others say to them. They also often have difficulty communications nonverbally, such as through hand gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.”

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is a specific type of assistive technology that can benefit nonverbal people including people with **autism** of all ages by promoting independence, expanding communication, and increasing social interactions. G.E.A.R. staff will help attendees learn what AAC is, what the benefits are and who can assess what might be the best type of system or devices for the child or person.

Next Tuesday’s training will be facilitated by two G.E.A.R. Parent Network staff, Diane Bouffard and Sarah Judge.



*Diane Bouffard, CFPS, Regional Family Support Coordinator*

“I want to try and make their life easier than what I went through. I don’t want them to have to jump through the hoops that I went through to get services if I can help families not do that then that’s a win for me,” shares Diane Bouffard, a nationally Certified Family Peer Specialist who regionally supports Maine families in Franklin, Kennebec, and Somerset counties on why she shares her story with families like hers.

Judge, a Family Peer Specialist who is currently raising a non-verbal child, that utilizes AAC to communicate shares why this training and the supports G.E.A.R. Parent Network provides to families is so important to her, “I get to be the person I needed back on day one with my ten-year-old. I get to help somebody get out from under the big clouds and show them how to do it right for your kids.”



*Sarah Judge, Family Peer Specialist*

Parents and community partners interested in registering to join this free training can register online at, <https://gearparentnetwork.org/events/> or by calling (800) 264-9224.

**About the G.E.A.R. Parent Network:** The G.E.A.R. Parent Network, a program of Crisis & Counseling Centers, is the place where **G**aining **E**mpowerment **A**llows **R**esults. G.E.A.R. Parent Network is totally run by parents for parents providing 1:1 long term parent support, educational workshops, system navigation, information, support groups and advocacy for parents of children with emotional and behavioral health concerns. Through parent-to-parent sharing of experiences and knowledge, G.E.A.R. Parent Network empowers parents of children with behavioral health needs to build on their family’s strengths and to advocate for their family’s needs. Learn more online at, <https://gearparentnetwork.org/>

For more information please contact Amber Kruk at (207) 557-0534 or by email at [AKruk@CrisisAndCounseling.org](mailto:AKruk@CrisisAndCounseling.org).

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/autism-spectrum-disorder-communication-problems-children#3>