

Navigating Aging with Autism: A Conversation with Amy Levitan

By Ashley Soebroto, journalism student, Boston University

Please tell me a little about yourself.

I'm a clinical social worker and I've been in the field for over 30 years. During my career, I have worked with individuals struggling with mental illness and I've worked with elders, but I've spent most of my career working with adults with developmental disabilities and autism. I started at the Lurie Center in 2023. Before that, I was at the Boston Higashi School, which is a residential school for students with autism.



What is your role at the Lurie Center?

I am part of the family support team, and I'm a clinical social worker there. I'm focusing on families who have individuals in their family who are about age 30 and over with autism. These tend to be families who are navigating issues related to growing older. We don't have all the answers, this is an evolving area, but we are working hard to assist families. In parallel, the Lurie Center is actively researching this area, learning about the issues that matter most to families. We know that is important in order to continue to give our families the best care possible.

What brought you to the work you do today?

I've always been interested in helping professions and in helping groups that are more vulnerable. After I had my eldest daughter, who has developmental disabilities, it became more personal. I gravitated towards issues related to developmental disabilities, and so it was sort of a natural path for me.

What does it mean for you to do the kind of work you do as a parent of a child with a developmental disability?

Her disabilities have shaped who I am both personally and professionally. I think that because of my daughter there's a part of me that can relate to the families with whom I work. I hope they feel empathy and compassion, because there's a level of understanding I have in what they bring into my office.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

I would say there are two things. I've always found the most rewarding part are the clients themselves. It's just meeting people and having relationships with them, even if I just meet them once. I always learn something from somebody, and so the best part of my job is meeting the families and the individuals. And the second part are my colleagues. I love working as part of a team. Again, I always learn something.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Well, I have five children in total, so in my spare time, I try and keep up with everything that they're doing. I read a lot and I have a dog, Louie. He's a goldendoodle. He's 10, and he's a very good boy. I live near a lot of trails, and we go on a lot of trail walks. So, I would say reading, taking care of my children, and my dog.

What types of books do you like to read?

I like to read books on social culture. I was a sociology major in college and I like urban sociology. I'm currently reading "Excluded" by Richard Kahlenberg, which is about how current housing policies contribute to class segregation.

What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Peppermint stick, for sure. No hesitation there.

Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Amy Levitan MSW, LICSW, CCBT is a licensed clinical social worker at the Lurie Center for Autism. She graduated from Simmons College with a BA in art and sociology and received her graduate degree in social work from Simmons School of Social Work. She also attended Boston University School of Management. Amy has a particular interest in transitions later in life for those with ASD and their families. She conducts individual work, therapeutic support groups and workshops for parents/caregivers and individuals. Current Lurie Center for Autism patients may request an appointment to meet with Amy by emailing luriecenter@mgb.org.

Coming soon from Amy!

Workshop: Aging Well with Autism: What You Need to Know

Parents and caregivers hate to think of a time when they will no longer be able to care for their loved one. They may wonder “Who will replace me? Can anyone possibly know all that I know about my child? How will my loved one handle my death? What changes in living situation, medical care, and emotional needs are coming down the pike? What can I do to prepare?” This single session virtual workshop for parents and caregivers of adults with autism over age 30 provides an overview of important considerations as you plan and resources to help you along the way.

Dates:

Offered 4 times per year in February, April, July, and November.

Workshop: Guardianship the 2nd Time Around

As a parent or guardian of an adult with ASD/ID/DD who is getting older, you may be worried about many things. First among them is often “who will make important decisions when I am gone”? We recognize that planning can be daunting, emotionally, and financially. This virtual workshop is for guardians of adults with autism who are considering changing their current guardianship status because they, themselves, are aging. Learn how to add a co-guardian, replace a primary guardian, and what to consider when thinking about a successor guardian. The process of petitioning for guardianship in Massachusetts will also be reviewed.

Dates:

Offered 4 times per year in March, June, September, and December

All workshops are held virtually and open to the public. Registration is required. Reserve your spot by contacting us at LurieCenter@mgb.org or 781-860-1700.