



Aliya Rahim's Interview with Dr. Jonathan Weiss

Aliya Rahim, a former member of the Together for Autism committee, interviewed researcher Dr. Jonathan Weiss, to help us understand the importance of ongoing research.

Q: Why should parents consider participating in research?

A: Parents are the real experts as the direct experience they have with their child affords them so much valuable information that they can share with researchers. Research is a great way to make a BIG difference, whether it is about interventions, assessments, or shaping policy in our province. Parental participation in research helps everyone get closer to the answer of the really important question: How can we help our children?

Q: What questions should parents ask about research?

A: Parents should ask themselves several questions in relation to this research:
What does this research mean to me and my child?
What is the next step for this research?
Is this something my child and I should be involved in?
What are the implications of the findings for other people with autism?

Q: Why should teachers participate/ be interested in research?

A: One of the main goals of research is to help inform best practices of children with autism. Good research can really help us teach children with autism best and help guide us to where we should put our future efforts. **It can inform policy and practice by answering questions based on careful and deliberate methods of inquiry.**

Q: Why should schools participate in the Together for Autism (TFA)?

A: We have come a long way in building awareness about autism. Participating in the TFA campaign is an excellent way of continuing to facilitate awareness and foster collaborative relationships with students, teachers, parents, and professionals in our communities.

Together for Autism is also a great way to help build capacity in our province, by helping to support students who are being trained to work as researchers and clinicians, which can make a big difference in the future.

Q: Why do you think parents should support the TFA?

A: We increasingly see children and adults with autism in our communities. It is important for educators and parents to work together to make our schools and our communities welcoming and inclusive places. Participating in the TFA campaign is an easy way of contributing to that goal.

Q: How Has the TFA grant helped your research?

A: It helped give me my start by helping to fund my dissertation. Without the Toonies for Autism and the TFA supporting grant research – my research training would not have been completed in the time that it had been. With this grant, I was able to dedicate my time to the research, which has ultimately led to larger projects and a research career.

Q: How can we apply your research to children with autism/ and or their families?

A: The research that was supported by TFA was focused on perception in children with autism. Because of TFA, we are one step closer to developing an early screening tool for autism based on how young children process faces and voices. The future goal is to screen children at risk before autism further develops, possibly at the first year of life. As we know from previous research, early intervention for children with autism is extremely important.

Q: We are trying to teach elementary school children about autism research in Canada, as a research how do you feel about this?

A: I think that it is an excellent idea to encourage young people to learn about autism research. That would help this generation to grow up with the knowledge of autism. They would be the first generation who truly has the opportunity to understand and experience full inclusion. This is definitely the most important time to teach them about autism. Also the best way to teach kids about autism is with their own words.

Q: Why did you become interested in this field?

A: When I was a teenager I was involved with the Special Olympics as a coach and I met some very special people with autism. I also had the fortune of working as a residential care worker with a remarkable young man with autism, and these early experiences have stayed with me. Since then, I knew I wanted to make a difference for people with autism and their families.