



Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

You are invited to participate in the Department of Human Services' (DHS)

STATEWIDE POSITIVE APPROACHES & PRACTICES MEETING

Jointly hosted by

the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and

the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP).

This quarterly meeting aims to provide the most recent research and resources for people with mental health and behavioral challenges, intellectual disabilities, autism, and other developmental disabilities to live an everyday life.

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026

Time: 8:30 am – 10:30 am / 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Location: Online – Zoom Webinar

MORNING SESSION: The Foundation is Communication

SESSION DESCRIPTION: Communication is foundational. Having effective communication, both as the expressive communicator and the listener, shows respect and value of the other person. This session will include information surrounding the complexity and

importance of communication. Attendees will leave with strategies and tools to better support individuals.

- Describe at least 3 internal and 3 external factors that can impact communication effectiveness.
- Define at least 4 alternative means of communication besides spoken English.
- Identify three resources to support effective communication.

PRESENTERS:

Lea Sheffield, BSW, IMH-E® Infant Family Associate - Lea Sheffield (pronounced lee-a) manages the Special Populations Unit within the Office of Developmental Programs. Lea has over 20 years of experience in varying roles supporting individuals with disabilities. She is an endorsed Infant Mental Health Associate, a Lifecourse Ambassador, a Capacity Building Institute graduate, and has a degree in social work. She serves as a council member on the PA State Interagency Coordinating Council, the PA Developmental Disabilities Council, and the PA Advisory Council for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Lori Milcic, MAP, CI, CT, QMHI - Lori Milcic (pronounced mill-sick) serves the Office of Developmental Programs as the Deaf Services Coordinator. She holds a master's in psychology and is currently pursuing her PhD in developmental psychology with a focus

on language deprivation. Lori has diverse experiences serving the Deaf community for more than twenty years including working as a direct support professional, sign language interpreter, professor, and program director. Her expertise in nontraditional communication makes her a treasured resource in the commonwealth.

Alicia Torres - Alicia Torres serves the Office of Developmental Programs as the Communication Advisor. She holds a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice/Criminology. Alicia has many years of experience as a clinician in mental health and substance abuse outpatient treatment, a teacher in an autistic support classroom, a training and outreach coordinator, and a psychology/criminal justice program chair for a PA-based higher education institution. She has received a lifetime certification in Prison Ministry through the Witness International Criminal Justice Academy.

AFTERNOON SESSION: Sensory or Behavior? Diving into Sensory Processing

SESSION DESCRIPTION: This presentation is designed for individuals, caregivers, and staff to understand the needs of individuals who have sensory differences. These sensory challenges may present themselves as behaviors, however, may be due to difficulty processing incoming information. In this overview presentation, we will learn what sensory processing disorders are and learn some brief strategies to help

individuals regulate themselves. We will also go over why it is important to have an occupational therapist perform an evaluation and will give an overview of what an evaluation might look like.

PRESENTER:

Sarah Sawadski, OTR/L - Sarah Sawadski is an occupational therapist at Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network at their Health and Technology Campus in Allentown. Sarah has been a part of the Good Shepherd team since 2021 and is the Bridges Program Lead. When not at work, she enjoys snuggling on the couch with her baby boy and two labradoodles, going to the beach with her family, or skiing in Vermont with her husband.

AGENDA

8:30am - 8:35am	Welcome and Announcements
8:35am - 10:30am	The Foundation is Communication
10:30am - 1:00pm	BREAK
1:00pm - 2:55pm	Sensory or Behavior? Diving into Sensory Processing
2:55pm - 3:00pm	Survey and End of Day Reflection

[REGISTER HERE](#)

The Zoom link for joining the session will be sent to the email you used to register.

This link will be unique to your registration. Please do not share this link.

Questions? Email: **PATraining@columbusorg.com**

**Certificates of Attendance are not issued for
Statewide Positive Approaches & Practices Meetings**