



HCQU Northwest

Come Spend the day with US!

Now that the Winter is over, and the flowers are in bloom, it's the perfect time to be thinking about your Summer plans!

We'd love to get out and see all of you this year, so be sure to schedule your in-person training with the HCQU soon! Or, you can always come see us at the.....

HCQU Annual Event!

We are excited to have Molly Dies Dance Express team come join us again, as well as newcomers, Therapy Dogs United!

Lunch will be provided, games will be played, and prizes will be won! We can't wait to see all of your smiling faces.

Join us on Friday, June 12th at the Holy Redeemer in Warren PA for fun, food and friendship from 10am-2pm.

More info is on the registration form. If you have questions, please reach out to me.

Krista



Roseland Building

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Training Center

GETTING AROUND THE LEARNING CENTER

Key sections:

	Dashboard/Home	Learning in progress or not started
	My Learning	View and launch all courses you are enrolled in, or download your training history
	Live Learning	View only instructor-led courses you are enrolled in
	Catalog	View all the courses we offer
	Resources	Help guides, fact sheets, non-credit webinars, and other resources
	Search	Search for Courses , Catalog , or Resources
	Messages	View and send messages
	Portal jumper	Switch portals between Milestone HCQU Northwest and Milestone HCQU West

WEBINAR

Schedule

APRIL
2

Hyperviscosity

MAY
7

Cerebral Palsy

JUNE
4

PTSD

11:00AM

Helping Individuals with Disabilities Cope with Big Feelings

Big feelings — anger, sadness, anxiety, excitement, frustration — are part of being human. For individuals with disabilities, especially those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, communication differences, or sensory sensitivities, those emotions can sometimes feel overwhelming or difficult to express safely. Support is not about eliminating feelings; it is about building tools to manage them.

The first step in helping someone manage big feelings is validation. When someone is overwhelmed, they need to feel understood before they can learn a new skill. Simple, clear statements like “I see you’re upset” or “That looks really frustrating” help reduce shame and defensiveness. Validation does not mean accepting unsafe behavior — it means acknowledging the emotion underneath it.



Many individuals benefit from making feelings concrete and visible.

Visual supports, such as emotion charts, color-coded regulation zones, or a feelings thermometer, can make abstract concepts easier to understand. Pairing these with coping tools — such as deep breathing, movement breaks, sensory items, or a quiet space — gives individuals practical ways to calm their bodies.

It is important to teach coping skills during calm moments, not in the middle of a crisis. Practice builds familiarity. Over time, the body begins to recognize what calm feels like and how to return to it.

Co-regulation is also key. Many individuals need a steady, regulated adult to help them settle. A calm voice, predictable language, and patient presence can help someone “borrow” calm until they can manage independently.

Finally, remember that behavior is communication. Big feelings are often intensified by fatigue, hunger, sensory overload, changes in routine, or difficulty expressing needs. Looking beneath the behavior helps identify what support is truly needed.

The goal is not to stop big feelings. The goal is to help individuals feel safe, understood, and equipped with tools. With consistency and compassion, big feelings become more manageable — and confidence grows.

Amber Connor

Polypharmacy in adults with IDD



Clinical Risk and
Oversight

Polypharmacy is the concurrent use of five or more medications. This is highly prevalent among adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). In residential settings, it's not uncommon for individuals to be prescribed more than fifteen scheduled medications, often from multiple specialties. Multiple factors contribute to polypharmacy like higher rates for seizures, multiple psychiatric diagnoses, chronic comorbidities, behavioral management, fragmented specialty care, and limited medication reconciliation. Prescribing cascades are particularly concerning. A medication may be initiated to treat a side effect of another medication rather than addressing the original cause. This can cause a snowball effect, when treating multiple problems, and having to treat the side effects of the medications, from treating multiple problems and it becomes a vicious cycle. Polypharmacy also complicates diagnostic clarity. New symptoms can reflect drug effects rather than emerging medical conditions. The goal is not medication reduction at all costs. The goal is a therapeutic precision- ensuring each medication has a clear indication, measurable benefit, and acceptable risk profile. For example a client is given an antipsychotic that may contribute to weight gain and metabolic abnormalities. A lipid-lowering agent is added. Sedation develops, leading to stimulant initiation. Sleep disturbance follows, prompting hypnotic (sleeping pill) use. Over time, the regimen becomes layered and produces significant risk. Beyond counting medications: using the Drug Burden index (DBI) and Anticholinergic drug scale (ADS), can measure cumulative exposure and effects of multiple medications. Polypharmacy requires intentional oversight. Without it, risk quietly accumulates.

Lisa Eckman, RN

SERVICES & SUPPORTS THROUGHOUT THE LIFESPAN SERIES



We invite you to join us for our Special Speaker Series of 2026. This year, we will present overviews of various services and supports available throughout the lifespan of those we support. Join us on the third Wednesday of the month at 9:30 am from March through November (except for July & August, so you won't miss anything by going on vacation).

Learn more about each topic and ask questions of our expert speakers. Most webinars are only an hour long!

MARCH
19

**EARLY
INTERVENTION**

TABATHA JOHNSON

APRIL
15

ADVOCACY

TAMMY HAWK

MAY
20

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
TESTING**

AMBER CONNOR

JUNE
17

**SUPPORTING
COMMUNICATION WHEN
TRANSITIONING INTO ADULT
SERVICES**

ALORI MILCIC

Spring Time with the PCRCC

Spring is often associated with renewal, growth, and fresh beginnings. For families caring for children with complex medical needs, transitions between seasons can bring both hope and new challenges. At the Pediatric Complex Care Resource Center (PCCRC), spring is a time to gently refocus on connection and support—meeting families exactly where they are.

Families supported by PCCRC juggle many roles: caregiver, advocate, coordinator, and often medical expert. As the days get longer and routines begin to shift, we encourage families to think about small, manageable steps rather than sweeping changes. Growth does not have to be dramatic to be meaningful.

PCCRC coaches work alongside families to:

- Check in on current needs and stressors
- Support care coordination and communication
- Help families identify priorities that feel achievable
- Offer encouragement, validation, and connection to resources.



Spring can be a reminder that progress happens gradually. Some days may feel full of momentum; others may call for rest and recalibration. Both are part of the journey.

Spring Activities for Families

As the seasons change, families may be looking for simple ways to enjoy spring together. Here are some activities that are designed to be flexible, sensory-friendly, and easily adapted to meet a wide range of abilities and energy levels.

Nature Noticing: Sit near a window, porch, or outdoor space and notice signs of spring—birds, clouds, budding trees, or rain. This can be done from a wheelchair, stroller, bed, or favorite chair.

Container or Indoor Gardening: Plant herbs, flowers, or vegetables in small pots or containers. This allows families to participate at their own pace and modify needed, and you get to watch them grow!

Spring Sensory Play: Explore textures and sounds such as water play, bubbles, pinwheels, soft grass, or nature-themed sensory bins like leaves, pinecones, or rocks

Short Outdoor Time: Even a few minutes outside can be meaningful. A brief walk, time on a blanket, or simply fresh air can offer connection without pressure. Cloud watching can be fun, see how many shapes or animals you can see in the clouds!

Creative Expression: Paint flowers, color spring scenes, take photos of nature, or create art using leaves, paper, or recycled materials, make footprints on paper to mark how much your child has grown

Music and Movement: Listen to spring-themed music and incorporate gentle movement, stretching, or rhythm using hands, feet, or assistive devices.



Families are encouraged to choose activities that feel doable, not draining. Participation can look different for every child and every family, flexibility is key. Remember the sunscreen if you're going outside to enjoy the sun!

PCCRC remains committed to walking beside families through every season, offering guidance, compassion, and steady support as they continue to grow, adapt, and thrive.

If you are a caregiver or provider supporting a child with complex medical needs and could benefit from additional guidance or connection, PCCRC is here to help. Families are encouraged to reach out for support, ask questions, or request a referral at any time. You do not have to navigate this journey alone.

Dawn Collins, Pediatric Coach

Decrease Stress with this One Word!

Have you ever agreed to contribute time, money, or both to a community project, or attend a social gathering, or watch the neighbor's pets, and later on (or even immediately) regretted it? As time goes on, we can become angry with ourselves over making a commitment, and even end up losing sleep over it. If we're honest with ourselves, most of us have done this more often than we care to admit.

There's a price we pay for "people-pleasing" and failing to set boundaries. If we constantly say yes, especially when we really don't want to, we can become resentful toward other people. We can become burned out. We can feel like we don't have any control. Worst of all, we can lose our sense of self-respect.

Learning this one word can help. Can you guess what the word is? Spoiler alert: the word is No!

Learning to say no can be very difficult at first. We don't want to disappoint people. We want them to like us. We certainly don't want to be considered selfish! But establishing personal boundaries isn't always selfish; it's necessary for our emotional health. We cannot be any good to anyone else if we have spread ourselves too thin. Believe it or not, people will respect you more if they notice that you set limits.



It is possible to be assertive without being disagreeable or abrasive. Saying something like, "Thank you for the offer, but I can't commit to that right now," is firm, but it's also respectful. You don't need to explain yourself with some fake excuse, and you certainly don't need that person's permission to decline the request. Saying no when you really would rather not is being honest and up-front with people. There is plenty more in-depth information available online about how to be assertive, along with particular examples, but I wanted to share this little bit with you, because it has helped me. And no, I don't stay up all night after turning down a request wondering if that person isn't going to like me.

Learning to say no can certainly reduce stress and build self-confidence. When you set clear boundaries, you gain more control over your life. For those who really struggle with being assertive, consulting a therapist may help.

Tim Juliano, RN

Psychotropic Medications part 1: Actions and Interactions

The word “psychotropic” stems from *psycho*, relating to the mind or psyche and *tropic*, which means “pertaining to or influencing.” Psychotropic medications, then, are used to treat people with mental health conditions.

Psychotropic medications work by influencing neurotransmitters in the brain, which are chemicals that facilitate communication between brain cells (neurons) and, by extension, different areas of the brain. Our mood, our thoughts, our motivation, sleep, hunger – everything we do and experience happens because of neurotransmitters. There are several neurotransmitters upon which psychotropic medication may work:

Serotonin stabilizes our mood and helps us feel calm. It can also impact appetite and sleep. Depression, anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and chronic pain are all associated with low levels of Serotonin.

Dopamine controls our reward system. It is associated with pleasure and motivation and also with movement. Low levels of Dopamine are seen in depression, a lack of motivation, and ADHD. Schizophrenia and addiction are more often associated with high or dysregulated levels.

Norepinephrine (noradrenaline) is vital for our fight-or-flight response; it plays a role in alertness, attention, and arousal. Imbalances can drive anxiety, stress-related disorders, and ADHD.

GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid) is the other side of the coin of Norepinephrine in that it is inhibitory – it reduces anxiety and promotes relaxation. Panic, anxiety, and insomnia often result from low levels of GABA.

There are several different classes of psychotropic medications, which impact one or more of these neurotransmitters in various ways. The five main types of psychotropic medications are anti-depressants, anti-anxiety (anxiolytics), stimulants, anti-psychotics (neuroleptics), and mood stabilizers. There are multiple distinct medications in each class, each working slightly differently. While each of these classes typically affect a specific neurotransmitter (for example, anti-depressants predominantly affect Serotonin), not all medications fit that mold. Some work on different neurotransmitters and some work on more than one.

Psychotropic medications typically increase or decrease the availability of neurotransmitters in one of several ways. Some block reuptake, meaning that they interfere with the neuron’s ability to reabsorb unused neurotransmitter, so that more is available for longer to do what it is intended to do. Some medications, known as “agonists,” mimic a neurotransmitter, triggering the desired neuronal reaction. “Antagonists” block the mechanism by which a neurotransmitter triggers neurons.

Psychotropic medications are not the only influencers of neurotransmitters. Other medications, including over-the-counter medications and other psychotropics, as well as substances of abuse, all have the potential to interact with psychotropic medications. Interaction effects include intensified side effects like sedation, reduced effectiveness of the medication by altering drug levels, speeding up the body’s metabolism, and causing dangerous increases in blood pressure and heart rate.

One of the most dangerous interaction effects is Serotonin Syndrome. Serotonin Syndrome is typically caused by an increased dose of a medication that affects Serotonin (ex. anti-depressant) or, most often, by a combination of medications that impact Serotonin levels. Symptoms usually occur within several hours of the increased dose or added medication. Mild symptoms include agitation and restlessness, insomnia, confusion, dilated pupils, rapid heart rate and increased blood pressure, muscle rigidity/twitching/loss of coordination, heavy sweating, diarrhea, headache, and shivering/goose bumps. These symptoms warrant a call to the prescriber or maybe even a trip to the ER. **Severe Serotonin Syndrome is evidenced by high fever, tremors, irregular heartbeat, seizures, and unconsciousness. It can lead to death, so emergency treatment is required!**

Summer Camps for Children with Disabilities

Believe it or not, summer is fast approaching, and now is the time to look into summer options for your child! **Programs can fill quickly**, and **scholarship** applications may have early deadlines/limited funds.

Finding safe, fun summer camp programs for children with disabilities can be challenging, so here are some resources to help:



PA Autism's Camp Finder: links to multiple resources for finding disability-friendly camps; does NOT only have resources for children with autism; paaautism.org/resource/camp-resource-online-summer-directory/

Warren, PA residents: Kids and Sibs, on Facebook (Dewittville, NY); "Summer Camps" on [Onyahsa.org](https://www.onyahsa.org/); "Kids and Sibs two-day camp is offered to youth with **developmental disabilities and their siblings** through a collaboration with local agencies led by Prevention Works and [YMCA] Camp Onyahsa." Thurs. 8/20 and Fri. 8/21/26; **free two-day day camp** for qualifying children; registration required. Children do not have to have a sibling to attend; for those entering 1st grade+. Held at YMCA Camp Onyahsa in Dewittville, NY.

Kane, PA area: Camp JJ, on Facebook; "Camp JJ is a non-profit, completely volunteer and donation based organization that offers a summer camp experience to children who have special needs."

Altoona area: Sense-ational Endeavors, Penn State Altoona, part of their Kids College program, for children with **sensory issues/autism**. Offered for multiple years including 2025; 2026 information is not yet available on their website as of mid-March 2026. See [Altoona.psu.edu](https://altoona.psu.edu) for information.

Traditional camps: Children with disabilities can often participate in traditional summer camp programs, such as those offered through local **YMCAs/YWCAs/city or county parks programs**. Parents should contact specific programs to discuss their child's ability to attend, and what they would need to participate safely—for example, a support person (ex. Parent, HHA) attending with the child.

Extended school year programs: many districts offer summer learning programs for children with disabilities. Check with your **local school district/IU** (Intermediate Unit). pau.org/Find-an-IU2/

QR Codes for Resources					
PA Autism’s Camp Finder	Kids and Sibs		Camp JJ	Penn State Altoona-- Summer academics	IU Directory
					

Our **pediatric coaches** can support clients of the **Pediatric Complex Care Resource Center**, which supports PA families with medically complex children (ages birth-20, on Medical Assistance, who qualify for in-home shift care services), with finding summer options for their children. Contact PCCRCnorthwest@milestonepa.org for more information.

**Milestone HCQU/PCCRC NW does not endorse any particular summer camp or program; this article is for educational purposes only.*

Alyssa Raimondo-Swanson, Pediatric Coach

Letter from the Director

As I type this letter the sun is shining and I am anxious for the end of the work day when I can go outside to do some spring cleaning. Picking up branches and fixing snow plow damage may not be fun but it is a task to do before I need the lawnmower in another month. Taking care of my lawn is also a way to take care of myself. Getting my body moving may cause a few aches and pains but I sleep very well afterwards. Please get outside whenever possible and move somehow. Enjoy some spring flowers that are starting to pop up, because the mud is starting to dry out and we have more sunny days to get some fresh air. I have even already played in a very cold stream to catch a few salamanders and crabs for my grandchildren to admire (until the crab pinched my grandson). Nature has a lot of things to keep us entertained so please find something near you.

As always drink water and if outside remember to put on sunscreen to help prevent sunburns. Insects will soon join us so please be aware of them outside. There will be a mix of warm and cold days before summertime arrives (and for me gardening season). If you or the individuals that you work with would like trainings on any topic just email Krista at kfitzsimmons@milestonepa.org to submit a request. We can do trainings virtually, in-person, or you can take classes online via our LMS at <https://northwesthcqu.learnupon.com/>, so keep your requests coming to us. Stay safe and keep on moving.

Darryl



30-DAY CHALLENGE

WHOLE HOUSE		BATHROOMS	
DAY 1	Declutter upstairs ☐	DAY 17	Dust the light fixtures ☐
DAY 2	Declutter main level ☐	DAY 18	Declutter and clean all surfaces ☐
DAY 3	Declutter basement ☐	DAY 19	Empty and clean cabinets and drawers ☐
KITCHEN		DAY 20	Declutter and clean the linen closet ☐
DAY 4	Clean and clear pantry ☐	DAY 21	Vacuum floors, baseboards and vents ☐
DAY 5	Cupboards: empty, get rid of unused items, and clean ☐	DAY 22	Wash floors and baseboards ☐
DAY 6	Drawers: empty, get rid of unused items, and clean ☐	DAY 23	Catch up on any uncompleted tasks ☐
DAY 7	Clean and clear the kitchen counters ☐	BEDROOMS	
DAY 8	Clean the oven and small appliances ☐	DAY 24	Dusting thoroughly: lighting, surfaces, & ceiling fans ☐
DAY 9	Catch up on any uncompleted tasks ☐	DAY 25	Wash all bedding ☐
LIVING ROOM		DAY 26	Clean out dresser drawers & nightstands ☐
DAY 10	Dust vents, corners, and baseboards ☐	DAY 27	Vacuum baseboards and dust ceiling corners ☐
DAY 11	Declutter and clean storage areas ☐	DAY 28	Clean under beds and behind furniture ☐
DAY 12	Clean light fixtures and ceiling fans ☐	DAY 29	Dust/clean window covering ☐
DAY 13	Clean mirrors and windows ☐	DAY 30	Catch up on any uncompleted tasks ☐
DAY 14	Clean surfaces and clean ☐		
DAY 15	Vacuum furniture ☐		
DAY 16	Catch up on any uncompleted tasks ☐		

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UNLEASH YOUR SUPERPOWERS WITH THE HCQU

Dancing with Molly Dies Dance Express

Therapy Dogs

Crafts

Games

**Lunch will be provided and
so much more!**

FRIDAY JUNE 12TH

10AM- 2PM

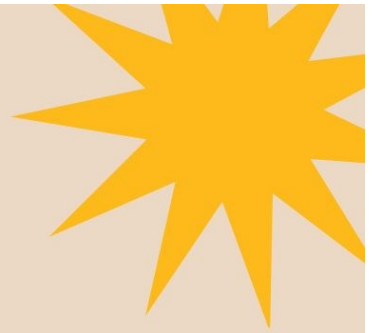
HOLY REDEEMER

11 RUSSELL ST. WARREN PA



**PLEASE REGISTER BY EMAIL
KFITZSIMMONS@MILESTONEPA.ORG
OR BY PHONE 814-728-9400**

Registration Form
Super Hero Day with the HCQU
June 12th, 2026



Agency Name _____
Address _____
Phone # _____

Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual
Name _____	Staff	Individual

RSVP by June 5th, 2026

**Lunch will be provided. If you are on a special diet, please provide your own lunch.
Please be prepared for ANY weather conditions.
Registration forms may be copied.**

**Please send Registration forms to:
KFITZSIMMONS@MILESTONEPA.ORG
Milestone HCQU Northwest
247 Hospital Drive
Warren, PA 16365**

