



**Autism**ONTARIO

# Healthy Coping for Caregivers Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) Strategies

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# Agenda

- Why use ACT?
- How to ACT
- Ideas & exercises

# Disclaimers & statements

## General

- Opinions are of the presenters
- Make informed decisions

## Language

- Identity-first (e.g., autistic person)
- Person-first (e.g., person with autism)

## Professional

- Specific questions
- Additional resources

# Meet the speaker



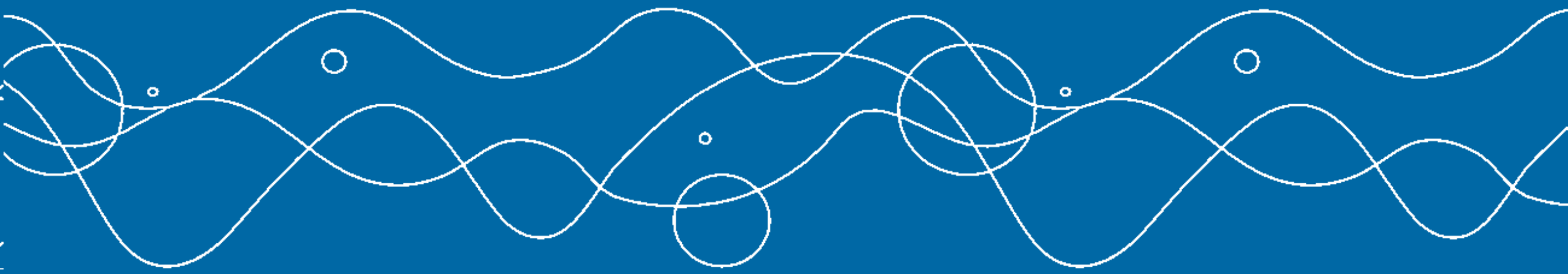
## Katy Albert

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*Mental Health Counsellor and Parent Coach, The Redpath Centre, and Anchored Families*

# Learning objectives

1. Recognize and stay connected to your core values.
2. Explore strategies for effectively responding to changes and challenges.
3. Learn practical techniques to manage rumination and worry.



# Why use Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)?

# Why use ACT?

ACT can help  
caregivers with

- Quality of life / psychological well-being
- Value based behaviours
- Increasing engagement & performance
- Prosocial behaviour
- Reducing burnout & stress

(Garcia, Y. et al, 2022; Pahnke et al, 2023)

# Why use ACT?

## **The goal of ACT is cognitive flexibility**

- How do I respond with flexibility to my thoughts, feelings and experiences so that...
  - **I can have a meaningful, joyful and fulfilling life?**
  - **I effectively navigate the situations before me?**



# How to ACT



**A**

**AAccept your reactions  
and be present**

**C**

**CChoose a valued  
direction**

**T**

**Take action**

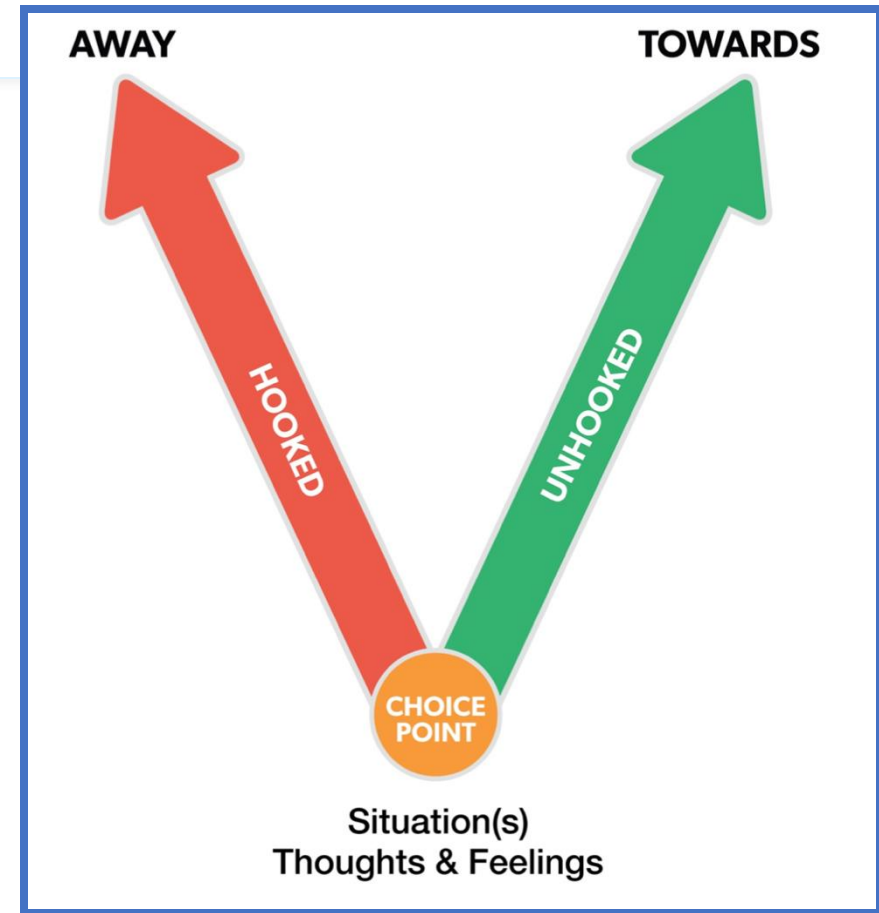
# The resilience formula - Russ Harris

When you are faced with hardship, challenge and problems, you have four options:

1. Leave
2. Stay and change what can be changed
3. Stay and accept what can't be changed and live by your values
4. Stay and give up and do stuff that makes it worse

# Values and committed action

- When we are hooked, overwhelmed and stuck in our thoughts and feelings we can ACT in ways that are:
  - ineffective, or
  - misaligned with who we want to be (our values).



(Harris, 2017)

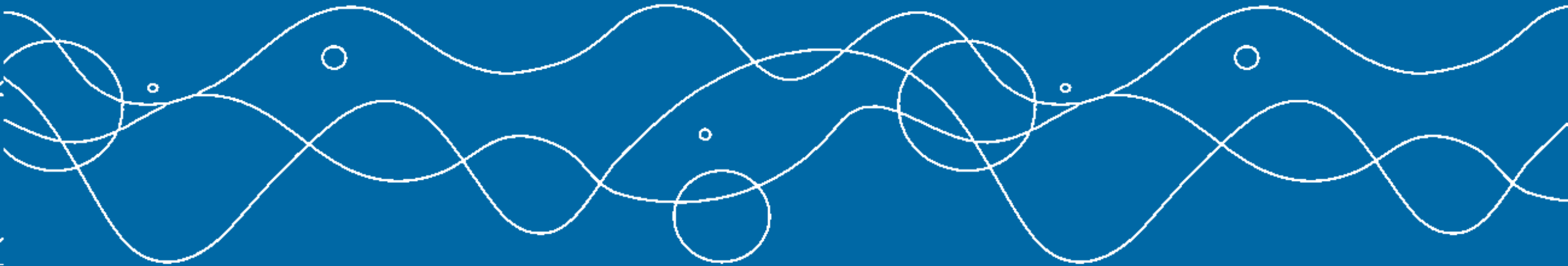
# Values and committed action

Be open to your feelings and take action based on your values.

- What are my values?
- Who do I want to be in this situation?
- How can I respond in a way that I will be proud of?
- What do I need to accept that is not in my control?
- What are my triggers?
  - expect vs. resist

# Values and committed action

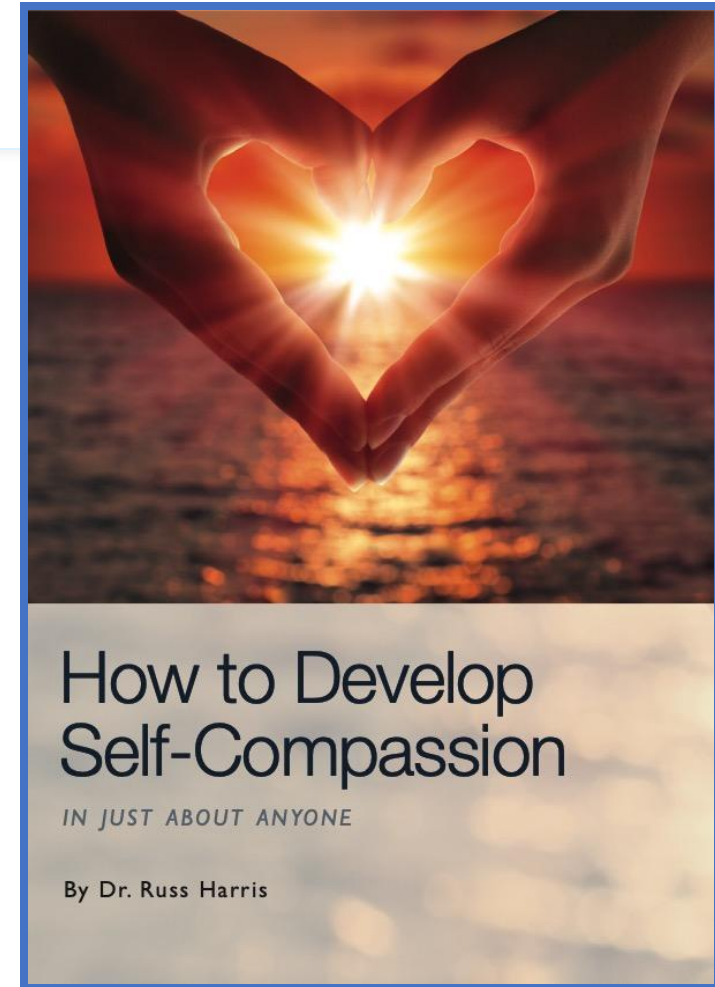
- Reflect:
  - How did I do?
  - What got in the way?
  - Am I proud of how I handled this even though it was so challenging
- Practice self-compassion



# Ideas & exercises

# Self-compassion

- Treating yourself kindly while you have difficult or painful:
  - experiences
  - emotions, and
  - thoughts



# Self-compassion

- Acknowledging how challenging or painful the situation is.
- Letting go of self-judgment.
- Being kind to yourself.
- Accepting and making space for your feelings.
- Validate your feelings.
- Connectedness – You are **NOT** alone.

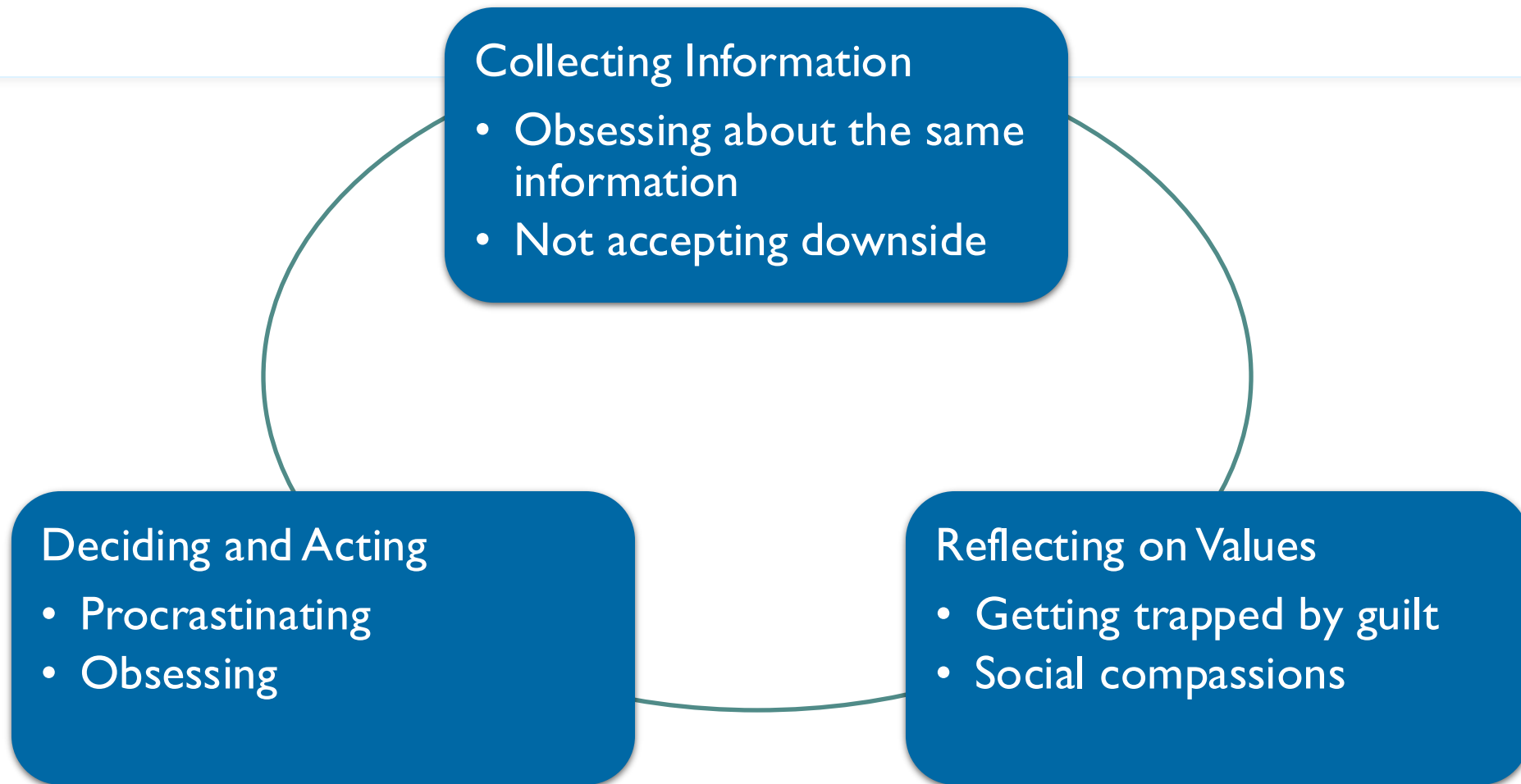


# Being open and present

- Climbing mountains
- Don't suffer twice

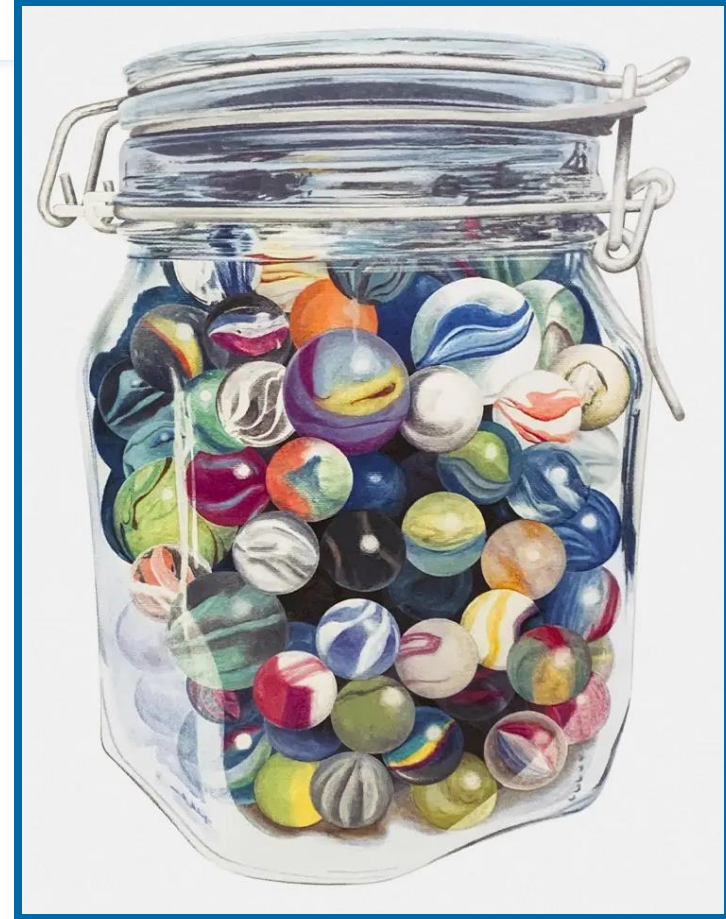


# Closing the circle



# Adding joy

- Your life as a jar of marbles



# The power of **AND**

- Two things can be true...

**I love my child  
AND I feel resentful**

**I am proud of how I am  
supporting my child  
AND I feel stressed**

Gratitude does not replace pain

# Hands as feelings

1. Imagine your hands are intense feelings or unhelpful stories/thoughts.
2. Place your hands over your eyes.
3. What can you see?
4. Place your hands in your lap. What can you see now?

# Hands as feelings

Your values

What matters to you

The kind of person you want to be

Effective solutions

Reality

# Takeaway

As we experience hardship and challenges, we can reduce our suffering by:

- Being kind to ourselves
- Connecting to others
- Allowing values to guide our actions
- Being present and open to both joy and pain

## Contact us

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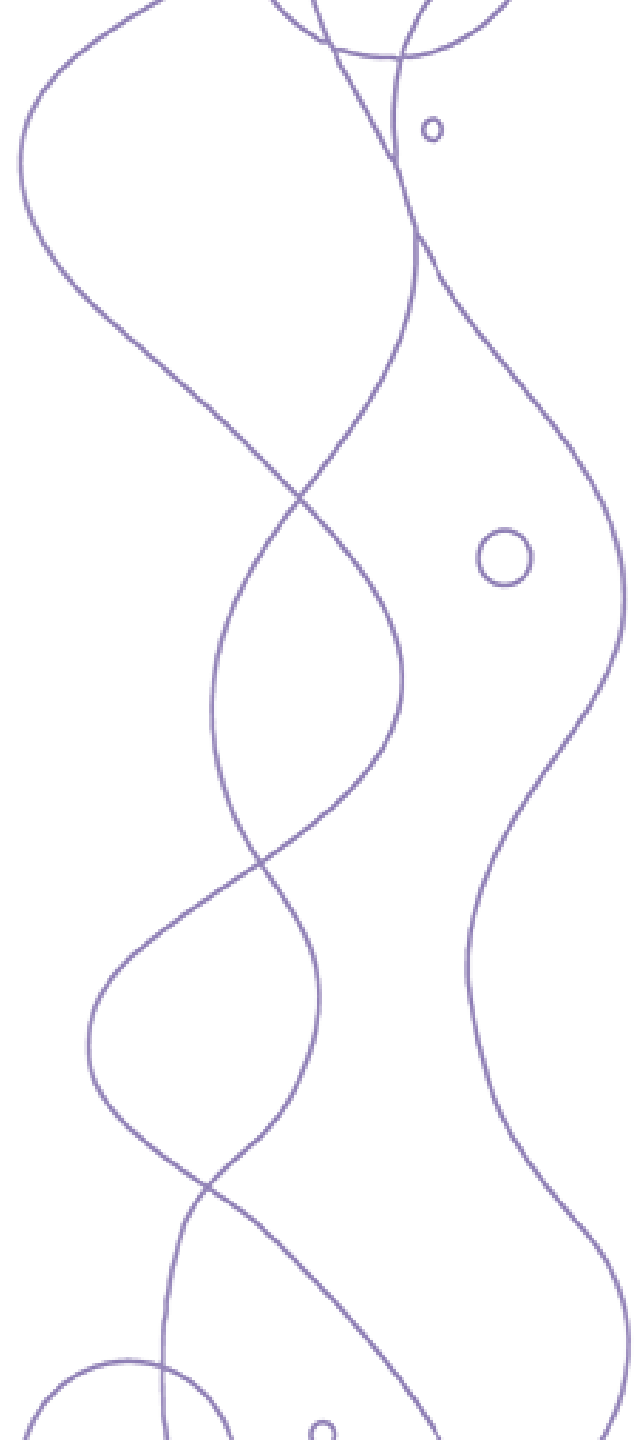
 linkedin.com/company/autism-Ontario

 youtube.com/user/autismontario

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## References

- Blackledge J, Hayes S (2006) Using Acceptance and Commitment Training In the Support of Parents of Children Diagnosed with Autism, *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, 28:1, 1-18, DOI: 10.1300/J019v28n01\_01
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