

The pandemic's affect on students with disabilities

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Cornerstone Behavioral Services offers in-home services to students with autism, ranging from pre-school children to adult learners. It has been offering all of its services virtually through the pandemic.
COURTESY CORNERSTONE BEHAVIORAL SERVICES

By [Brian Stieglitz](#)

Since schools have shifted to remote learning due to the coronavirus pandemic, students with disabilities have been facing their own challenges when it comes to accessing education and related services.

Students with disabilities have an Individualized Education Plan coordinated with their school that entitles them to special education and instruction. During the pandemic, schools have had to adjust the IEPs provided to their students. But without an apt alternative, such students are at risk of behavioral regressions, said Nicole Iannarone, the founder of Cornerstone Behavioral Services.

“Many families don’t have access to in-home services,” she added. “There has been a lot of inconsistency and schools should be implementing IEPs to the fullest capacity.”

Iannarone’s agency offers in-home services to students with autism, ranging from pre-school children to adult learners. Iannarone is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst who has been working in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis since 2010. She lives in Wantagh and services families throughout Nassau County.

Through the pandemic, she has been providing all of her services virtually and sitting with students for one-hour sessions.

“The biggest challenge for them is the break in their routine and structure,” she said of her students. To compensate, she has had to be “overly generous” with their schedule and add additional time for movement breaks and cleaning up. She stressed that students should not have free, open access to items in their homes because they wouldn’t have such access in a classroom setting.

Iannarone added that she sets “simple and specific goals” to work with students and goes “back to the basics” when it comes to virtual learning through Telehealth.

In starting Cornerstone Behavioral Services, Iannarone said, her goal was to “work one-on-one with [learners] and stay personal with their families.” Through the adjustments she has had to take due to the coronavirus, she said, “parents are the reason we have been so successful.”

Iannarone has specialized in treating challenging behaviors and helping learners develop language skills. When she was a graduate student, she conducted research on food selectivity and refusal. Over the years, she has treated many learners with their challenges involving food.

Cornerstone Behavioral Services is comprised of Bachelor’s-level behavior therapists, registered behavior technicians and board certified behavior analysts. Iannarone said that she hopes to gradually transition her agency back into the homes of her students around Phase II, which began Wednesday on Long Island.