A person sitting on a table

Description automatically generated**Natalie Croteau received funding from the Organization for Autism Research for her research entitled “*A Comparison of Caregiver or Mediator Implementation to Teach Both Urination and Bowel Movement Skills*.”**

Natalie Croteau, a third-year doctoral student in the Applied Behavior Analysis Online Department grant-funded project, will address some areas in the toileting literature that require further investigation with the goal of impacting the lives of individuals with Autism as well as their families.

Toileting skills are a developmental milestone important for all children to achieve, typically by the age of 4. However, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often experience challenges in acquiring this milestone. For many caregivers, particularly those with special needs, teaching toileting is a challenge resulting in delay implementing this skill due to these challenges and uncertainty. Unfortunately, when toilet training is initiated later, it generally takes longer for the learner to develop independence—compounded by the social stigma associated with a lack of autonomy with toileting skills beyond the typical age of acquiring these skills. Natalie’s research aims to assess the effectiveness of a toilet training package designed to teach daytime dryness to children with ASD. Additionally, she will compare outcomes and efficiency in implementing the skill across two groups of participants in different environments: caregivers in their home and behavior technicians in centers. Participants will include two sets of child-adult dyads with children with ASD, first between the ages of 2.5 and 8, along with their caregivers. Second with three to four children with ASD, between the ages of 2.5 and 8, who are receiving applied behavior analysis (ABA) services in a center-based program, paired with their behavior technicians. The toilet training package to be assessed comprises five components: diaper removal, requesting, scheduled bathroom visits, sitting on the toilet, and consequences. The comparison between groups aims to identify the effectiveness of caregivers as mediators. Dependent variable measures include correct implementation steps of the toilet training procedure by caregiver and behavior technician, proper urination and defecation in the toilet, and the number of sessions required to meet mastery criteria of 180-minutes for daytime dryness. Natalie hypothesizes that the toilet training package will teach children both urination and defecation voids in the toilet. Toileting skills developed will potentially have long term effects by providing a foundation for further independence with self-care skills, as well as increased opportunities for participation in social activities.

Natalie will lead the investigation with her dissertation chair’s support, Dr. Griffith. Support will also be provided for this research endeavor from other faculty team members from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.