



## Approaching Autism

1. Use a lower tone of voice
2. Lower siren volume and dim lights
3. Give plenty of space
4. Use simple and concrete sentences, avoid jargon/slang
5. Be patient and give time to the person to process and respond
6. Avoid touching unless absolutely necessary

## Autism Signs and Symptoms

### SENSITIVITY

- Bright Lights & Strobe/Flickering Lights
- Personal Space/Proximity
- Loud Sounds
- Smells

### SYMPTOMS

- Repetitive Behaviors (rocking, handflapping, spinning)
- Trouble with Social Cues (may avoid eye contact, not immediately respond to name, "stop", or other verbal cues)
- Communication Delays (difficulty using language, answering questions)
- Anxiety (may shut down or react with fight or flight)



**Xavier DeGroat**  
Autism Foundation



**OPINION**

# Putnam: Lansing man who was 'labeled the 'R' word' now fights for autism awareness

**Judy Putnam, Lansing State Journal** Published 6:00 a.m. ET Oct. 24, 2018 | Updated 8:58 a.m. ET Oct. 24, 2018



**LANSING - Who is Xavier DeGroat?**

He's a Lansing man with autism, who, at the age of 28, has already chatted with Bill Ford, Vice President Mike Pence, Gayle King, Greg Norman and the Dalai Lama. Those are just a few of the celebrities, politicians, business leaders and sports figures he knows.

*(Photo: Courtesy)*

I asked him how he met the Dalai Lama. "Nancy Pelosi," he answered matter-of-factly.

All this might be hard to believe except he can back it up with photos and social media posts.



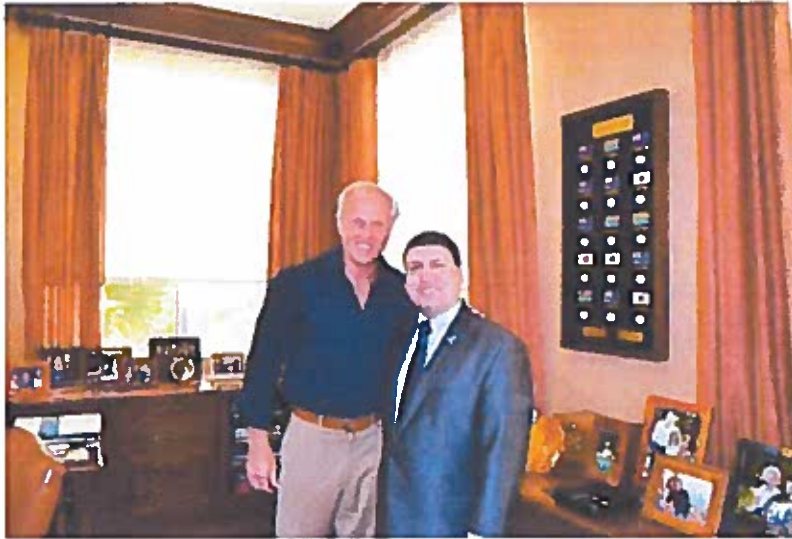
**Xavier DeGroat in an undated photo with Gayle King, co-anchor for "CBS This Morning," and editor-at-large for O, The Oprah Winfrey Magazine. (Photo: Courtesy)**

And he's about to drop a few more names: Michigan State University coaches Mark Dantonio, Tom Izzo and Jake Boss Jr. are the speakers at a Thursday lunch and fundraiser for the newly formed Xavier DeGroat Autism Foundation along with Lt. Gov. Brian Calley. It will be emceed by WLNS' Sheri Jones.

The event is at [Breslin Center's Hall of History, starting at 11:30 a.m. Thursday \(https://www.eventbrite.com/e/spartan-sports-support-xavier-degroat-autism-foundation-tickets-49974378712/amp\)](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/spartan-sports-support-xavier-degroat-autism-foundation-tickets-49974378712/amp). Lunch is provided. Tickets are available at the door. They are \$50 or \$100 for a photo opportunity with the coaches. DeGroat has sold more than half of the 200 tickets for the event already.

DeGroat was diagnosed with autism at the age of 4. As a child and teen he said he was bullied by other kids who called him names.

"The reason I started this foundation is because of the struggles I faced in high school. I was labeled the 'R' word," he said.

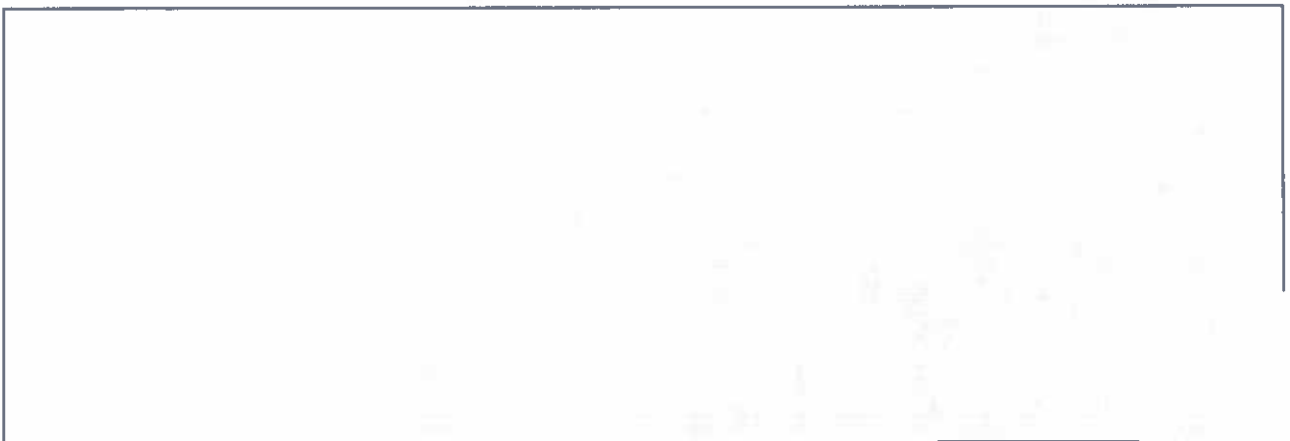


Xavier DeGroat, right, visits professional golfer Greg Norman in an undated photograph. DeGroat has a long list of celebrities he's met to discuss autism. (Photo Courtesy)

He said he's considered high-functioning on the autism spectrum. Autism is a broad range of conditions "characterized with challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication," according to Autism Speaks, an advocacy group.

DeGroat now wants to change the way people with autism are viewed by getting celebrities and well-known people to talk about autism. And he wants to advocate with a foundation that was started by someone with autism.

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One supporter is David Gregory, a lobbyist with Kelley Cawthorne, a prominent Lansing lobbying firm.

Gregory said he didn't set out to work on the cause of autism but DeGroat inspired him, impressing him with his ability to connect to powerful people.

"I'm a professional lobbyist. I couldn't get a meeting with most of these people," he said and shook his head. "I just said to myself I had to help him."

For the past few years, DeGroat has hung out at the state Capitol to speak to lawmakers and attend committee meetings. One effort he supported was to get on in encounters with police.

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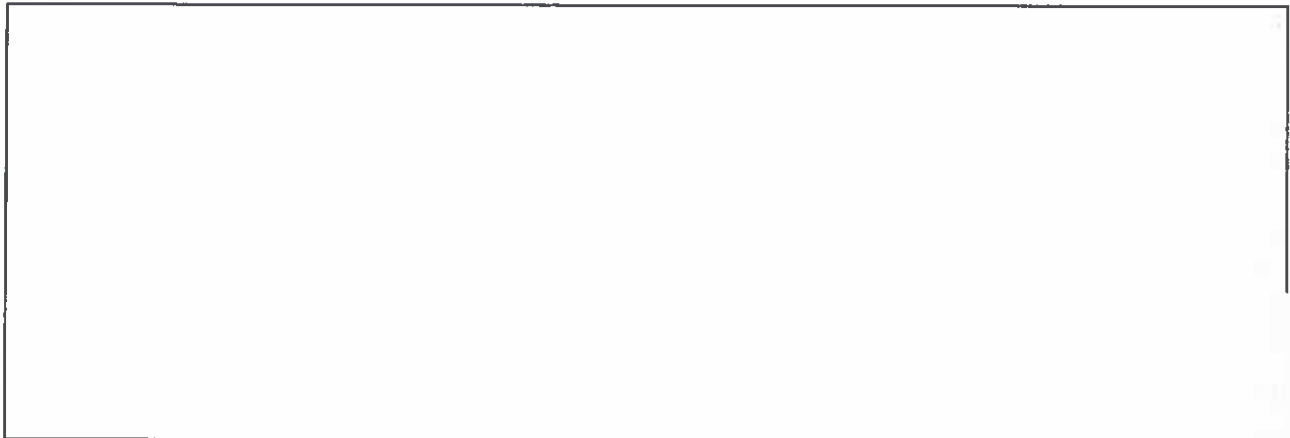
Xavier DeGroat of Lansing, right, in an undated photo with Gen. Colin Powell, a retired four-star general and former U.S. Secretary of State under President George W. Bush. (Photo: Courtesy)

Gregory helped finance a few advocacy trips for DeGroat before suggesting that DeGroat start a foundation for a more formal business structure that could attract tax-exempt donations.

While the firm helped him file the paperwork, setting up the foundation has been left to DeGroat.

Gregory said he told DeGroat he needed to recruit four other board members for the foundation. Within a week or so, DeGroat came up with four well-regarded Lansing names: Gregory Eaton, owner of Gregory's Soul Food; Kellie Dean, president of Dean Transportation; Rick Popp, retired Ford Motor Co. executive; and Charles Moore, owner of a Lansing accounting firm.

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"We can't keep up with Xavier. He is talking so much and doing so much we can't keep up with him," Gregory said.

DeGroat, a 2009 graduate of Grand Ledge High School who now lives in Lansing, said his first connection was former Mayor Virg Bernero, who introduced him to Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, who has a daughter with autism.

Calley's connection led him to meet Dan Marino, former Miami Dolphins' quarterback who also has a child with autism.

The networking grew from there.

"I had the potential to be persistent and consistent with phone calling people," DeGroat said.

Bernero, who first met him about five years ago, agrees.

"He could teach networking. His networking capability is unbelievable," he said.

Bernero said DeGroat just showed up at his office. He's persistent. Bernero made him an intern.

"He reminds us all we've all got our pluses and minuses, our talents and liabilities. It's what you do with the talents" that counts, he said.

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# For those with autism and other disabilities, new law could prevent miscommunication with police

"The officer will know prior to approaching the vehicle that this person might have a challenge speaking with him," says Jennifer Allen, whose son is the namesake of the Samuel Allen Law.

BY KRISTEN CABRERA AND LAURA RICE, TEXAS STANDARD AUG. 29, 2019 1 PM

Four empty rectangular boxes, likely for social media sharing or tracking.



A Dallas police car on patrol. © Cooper Neill for The Texas Tribune

Getting pulled over by a police officer can be unsettling for anyone. But it can be especially stressful for someone with a communication issue.

Not being able to answer an officer's question could put that person at risk if the officer misinterprets the person's behavior.

But a new Texas law going into effect Sept. 1, called the Samuel Allen Law, could help prevent that miscommunication. It's named after a young man who has Asperger's syndrome — an autism spectrum disorder — and who has campaigned for special identification on state driver's licenses.

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“Everything single thing that us neurotypicals take for granted takes a little longer for somebody with autism,” Allen says.

As she thought about how to help him, she also realized that there are many others like him who need support.

The law aims to protect people with communication challenges, including autism spectrum disorder, deafness and more, Allen says.

“All of those challenges, they’re all lumped into the same: The title is ‘A Communication Impediment With a Peace Officer,’” she says.

A person who brings a doctor’s note to the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles will then have a code associated with his or her license plate number. That code will appear for an officer when he or she looks it up during a traffic stop.

“The officer will know prior to approaching the vehicle that this person might have a challenge speaking with him,” Allen says.

This procedure could be helpful to officers, too; they often face uncertainty during traffic stops. Allen says police chiefs in San Antonio and Houston endorsed the bill, as well as the head of the Highway Patrol Division of the Department of Public Safety.

“Law enforcement all across Texas embraced this,” Allen says.



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And she says implementing the change was pretty simple.

"All it took was a coder and a law to go into effect, that DMV could put this in the system," Allen says.

She also says the database approach is better than issuing a special card for people with communication difficulties. An officer could misinterpret drivers' actions when they reach for a card or try to explain that they're getting their card.

"The officer doesn't know if he's getting a gun," Allen says. "That's where communication can go so wrong, and often wind up in handcuffs and sometimes even death."

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The law is a low-cost solution to preventing miscommunication with peace officers, Allen says. And she's preparing to share her plan with lawmakers in other states.

"Texas is a trailblazer," she says.

*Caroline Covington contributed to this story, which originally appeared on Texas Standard.*

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