

**[An Urgent Call to Action: Tell NYU Child Study Center to Abandon Stereotypes Against People With Disabilities](#)**

**Category : Changing Perceptions of Autism and Disability**

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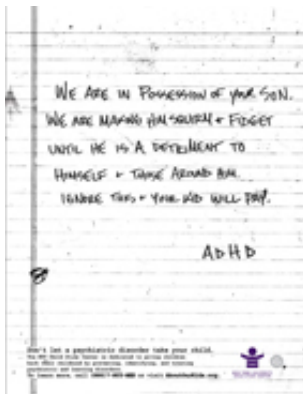
Date: Dec 7, 2007 5:41 PM

Subject: An Urgent Call to Action: Tell NYU Child Study Center to Abandon Stereotypes Against People With Disabilities

Hello all:

As many of you may already be aware, the NYU Child Study Center has recently launched a new advertising campaign entitled, "Ransom Notes", depicting the diagnoses of Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, ADHD, and several other conditions as kidnapers, holding children for ransom. This highly offensive ad campaign--which is set to launch on billboards, kiosks, print magazine and newspaper advertisements, and online--relies on some of the oldest and most offensive disability stereotypes to frighten parents into making use of the NYU Child Study Center's services. Below are several excerpts of the language used in NYU Child Study Center's "Ransom Notes" campaign. We've also attached pictures of the ads themselves:

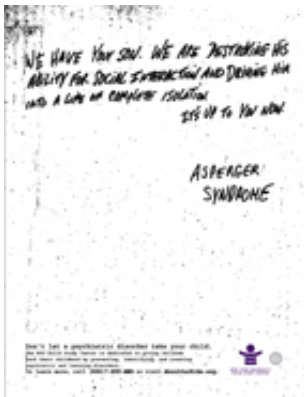
"\* We are in possession of your son. We are making him squirm and fidget until he is a detriment to himself and those around him. Ignore this and your kid will pay...ADHD."



"\* We have your son. We will make sure he will no longer be able to care for himself or interact socially as long as he lives. This is only the beginning...Autism."



"\* We have your son. We are destroying his ability for social interaction and driving him into a life of complete isolation. It's up to you now...Asperger's Syndrome."



This campaign, which is expecting over 700 million impressions over the next four months, is highly inaccurate and spreads classic stereotypes against individuals with disabilities. There are a number of problems with the advertising campaign:

- \* The ads stigmatize people with disabilities by suggesting that we are a 'detriment to ourselves and those around us.'
- \* The ads make people with disabilities feel shame and embarrassment.
- \* The ads contain inaccurate information: For example, while people with diagnoses of autism and Asperger's often have difficulty with some forms of social interaction, we are not incapable of it and can succeed and thrive on our own terms when supported, accepted and included for who we are.
- \* The ads suggest that our true selves have been "kidnapped" by terrible "diseases" and that we need urgent treatment to become normal again. This "stolen child" stereotype has been associated with horrible abuses against individuals with disabilities, ranging from social cruelty to beating, electric shock and even murder.
- \* The ads do not inspire parents to bring struggling children to professionals for diagnosis and appropriate treatment but instead just make parents terrified that their children are doomed and destined to have horrible, sad lives.

\* The ads convey an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the diagnoses they purport to represent; they fail to show the many strengths and abilities of the individuals with those diagnoses. They fail to show the opportunities for support, education and resources that the NYU Child Study Center should be offering to parents and individuals with disabilities.

It is extremely important that we let the NYU Child Study Center know that its language is unacceptable and encourage them to pull the campaign before it does irreparable damage to people with disabilities everywhere. As an organization of adults and youth on the autism spectrum, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network is working closely with self-advocates, parents, professionals, and other concerned citizens from throughout the disability community to implement an organized response. However, our time is short, and we need you to make your voice heard immediately. Below you will find contact information for the NYU Child Study Center, the director of the NYU Medical Center, and a number of businesses who have donated time, ad space, or other resources to the campaign. We've provided a sample template for your letters, but please feel free to substitute your own words and to call the Center and their supporters over the phone. If you use our template, please make sure to delete the sections you will not be using within the bold-bracketed items. Once again, the need for action on this is immediate, so please write and/or call now.

Thank you all for your efforts and please feel free to pass along this message to other individuals and groups. We will keep you informed, and we ask that you please e-mail any responses you receive to [info@autisticadvocacy.org](mailto:info@autisticadvocacy.org) so we can coordinate our response to this offensive advertising campaign.

Best,  
Ari Ne'eman  
The Autistic Self Advocacy Network, President  
<http://www.autisticadvocacy.org>  
[info@autisticadvocacy.org](mailto:info@autisticadvocacy.org)  
732.763.5530

Sample Letter Template:

Dear [Dr. Koplewicz/Van Wagner Communications/BBDO]:

I am writing to express concern about the NYU Child Study Center's recent "Ransom Notes" campaign. Your statements about people on the autism spectrum and with other disabilities are inaccurate and offensive to me as [an individual with a disability/as a family member of an individual with a disability/as someone interested in seeing respect for individuals with disabilities] and as a concerned citizen. I urge you to pull the advertising campaign immediately from all venues, ranging from billboards and kiosks to print and online advertisements, and to take steps to ensure that the self-advocate community of adults with disabilities is consulted prior to future public relations efforts.

The NYU Child Study Center's reputation with parents, professionals and individuals with disabilities suffers as a result of the inaccuracies and negative stereotypes promoted in the "Ransom Notes" campaign. These ads will not encourage parents to bring their children to your center, or any center. Rather, these ads will make parents afraid and ashamed of their children, resulting in more children going without helpful services and interventions. These ads are also a slap in the face to both the many youth and adults who survive and thrive with the diagnoses being so inaccurately described and to the many self-advocates, parents and professionals who have worked hard to change the public image of these disabilities so that youth and adults with disabilities can be fully included and

accepted in school, at home, at work and in the community at large. I urge you to apologize to the disability community and to take immediate action to remove the offensive material from the public eye.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,  
[Fill in Name Here]

Contact Information:

NYU Child Study Center:  
Dr. Harold S. Koplewicz  
Phone: 212-263-6205  
Fax: 212.263.0990  
Dr. Koplewicz's E-mail: [Harold.Koplewicz@nyumc.org](mailto:Harold.Koplewicz@nyumc.org)  
Communications Department:  
Beth Rowan, Director of Communications  
212.404.3757  
[Beth.Rowan@nyumc.org](mailto:Beth.Rowan@nyumc.org)  
NYU Child Study Center  
577 First Avenue  
New York, NY 10016

This is the NYU Child Study Center website: <http://www.aboutourkids.org/>

In addition, please take the time to copy Michael Statfeld Recanati at [mrecanati@aol.com](mailto:mrecanati@aol.com) and Ira Statfeld Recanati at [istatfeld@aol.com](mailto:istatfeld@aol.com) on your e-mails to the NYU Child Study Center. The Recanatis are the donors responsible for the creation of the NYU Asperger Institute. You may also want to contact Dr. Robert Grossman, Director of the NYU Medical Center, which has control over the NYU Child Study Center. He can be reached at 212.263.3269 and by e-mail at [Robert.grossman@nyumc.org](mailto:Robert.grossman@nyumc.org)

The Recanatis and Dr. Grossman are NOT responsible for the offensive advertising in the "Ransom Notes" campaign but they are in a position to stop it. As such, if you choose to write to them directly, we encourage you to be cordial and polite in explaining our concerns and encourage them to place pressure on the NYU Child Study Center to pull the "Ransom Notes" campaign.

BBDO New York:  
BBDO New York designed and contributed the advertising for the NYU Child Study Center's "Ransom Notes" campaign. Please contact them to express your displeasure and explain why these advertisements are so offensive to individuals with disabilities.

John Osborn  
President and CEO of BBDO New York  
BBDO New York  
1285 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10019  
(212) 459-5000

John Osborn's e-mail: [john.osborn@bbdo.com](mailto:john.osborn@bbdo.com)  
Press Relations at BBDO: [laurie.ben-haim@bbdo.com](mailto:laurie.ben-haim@bbdo.com)

Van Wagner Communications, LLC:

Van Wagner Communications, LLC has donated significant billboard and kiosk space to the NYU "Ransom Notes" campaign. Please write and call to their New York office to explain to them why these advertisements are so offensive to individuals with disabilities and to urge them to withdraw their support.

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47-50 Van Dam Street  
Long Island City, NY 11101

Van Wagner has another address and phone number here:

(212) 699-8400 phone  
(212) 986-0927 fax  
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