

April 2017

PARENT NEWSLETTER

From the Autism Spectrum Disorder Department at Easterseals Joliet Region

Visit our [website](#) or find us on [Facebook](#)

What's Going On At Easterseals....

Autism Awareness Month

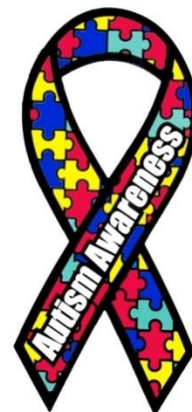
April is Autism Awareness Month and every year Easterseals always offers additional programs and events to highlight this very important month. Awareness events provide an opportunity to bring attention to a cause. While individuals and families living with Autism would very accurately argue that Autism isn't a cause – it is just a part of their day to day life, the reality is that awareness attracts much needed resources and provides education to those that haven't been touched by Autism in their life. Over the past few years families have seen cuts to state and federal programs, delayed payment of funds that has caused a loss in service providers, and a very real lack of access to desperately needed services. Through awareness events we can shine a light on Autism to explain the need for resources, educate everyone about the amazing individuals affected by Autism and to provide support for the community of families, friends and helpers.

During awareness month we offer these events in addition to our regular programs:

- Annual Awareness Open House
- Grandparent and Extended Family Workshop
- Showing of Dr. Temple Grandin's DVD Training "Autism and Aspergers"
- Autism Awareness Items for Sale
- Free awareness stickers and pamphlets
- Additional community outreach and education through presentations and blogs

Annual Awareness Open House

This year's open house will be on **Wednesday April 12th from 12:00 to 6:00**. This event is a super fun, interactive day for kids and families. We will host a variety of drop in groups including an obstacle course and rock climbing wall, a developmental play group, language activities with our speech pathologists, a parent-child craft station, a demo on how to make visual task strips, and more! We will have a summer resource fair with information on recreational activities, camps and other community resources with a



focus on summer. The Joliet Library will be hosting a story time and the Will County Sheriff's Department will be providing free child safety IDs for every child! Free developmental and autism screenings will be available throughout the day. Plus refreshments, professional networking and fun giveaways to raise awareness for Autism Awareness Month and The Week of the Young Child. Call 815-927-5465 for more information and see the flyer attached to the newsletter email. We hope to see everyone there!

Grandparent & Extended Family Autism Workshop

Are you a Grandparent, Aunt, Uncle or friend to a child with Autism? If so, you might have a lot of questions. On **Thursday April 27th from 5:30 – 7:30** Easterseals will be hosting a Grandparent and Extended Family Workshop, where Autism professionals will present basic information about Autism, give tips on how to support your loved ones and answer all of your questions. The cost is \$10 per family, paid at the workshop. Registration is required. To register or with questions, call Valerie at 815-927-5465.



Family Fun Days at Brookfield Zoo

This is an amazing program that has been running several years as a collaboration between Brookfield Zoo and Easterseals Joliet Region. Every Saturday from **April 22nd through May 20th from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.** families that have a child with Autism ages 6 to 8 years old can join the Brookfield and Easterseals staff for an interactive, therapeutic experience. Activities will include things like animal yoga, live animal interactions and crafts with the support of zoo staff, occupational therapists and volunteers. Parking and admission is free, and families are welcome to stay after the program and enjoy the zoo for the rest of the day. All family members, including siblings of all ages, are welcome to attend! You must register by April 15th by emailing zooforall@czs.org You can also call Kristin at 815-651-2025 with any questions.



Chat with a Therapist

Each month Easter Seals features a topic of interest on our [Facebook page](#). This is a great opportunity for parents and community members to log on and get information, ask questions and connect with Easter Seals' staff and clients. The therapist is available for a scheduled hour where they will provide some basic information, but will mostly focus on answering questions. You can leave questions ahead of time if you aren't able to log on during the scheduled chat session, or go back and read what was said after the chat session is over.

This month Chat with a Therapist will focus on Autism in recognition of Autism Awareness Month. Our Autism Program Coordinator Valerie Lentz, LCSW will be hosting a chat on **Wednesday April 26th from 10:00 – 11:00** to talk about what Autism is and how we can all join together to spread awareness and acceptance. Log on to join the conversation!

Music Play Group (age birth to 5)

Using music to promote social interaction, social imitation and language

Come join the fun! Researchers and parents everywhere agree that music has an amazing affect on development in young children. Music promotes language, social interaction, imitation, memory, cognition, movement and sensory regulation. It can be especially helpful for children with

developmental delays that benefit from repetition and different teaching approaches. During our music play group we will tap into all of your different senses to promote learning, while also facilitating social emotional development. Group will be led by social workers from our outpatient and Early Intervention treatment program. They will choose songs that target specific skill areas, they will provide a variety of sensory and movement activities to complement the songs, they will facilitate parent-child and peer interactions to enhance social skills and will have weekly handouts with activities you can carry over at home. Children from birth to five years old of all ability levels are welcome in our group with their parent or caregiver. Siblings are welcome to attend as well, as long as they are in the birth to five age range. All songs and activities will be modeled and adapted for different ages and abilities.



Group meets **every Friday from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m., starting on Friday February 10th through Friday April 28th (12 weeks)** and the cost is \$10 per class per family. Attendance is not required at each class, families are welcome to come whenever it works in their schedule, but you must be registered to attend. Contact us today to register your child at 815-927-5465.

Parents Raising Children with ASDs

Our parent support group continues to meet the **second Wednesday of every month from 6:00 – 7:30**. This program is a wonderful way to meet other parents, get information and get connected to resources in your community. This month we will meet on **Wednesday, April 12th** and as always, childcare will be provided for those who sign up ahead of time by Easter Seals staff. Both the group and childcare are free of charge. Please call Laura with any questions or to register for childcare at 815-927-5466.

Grupo de Apoyo Para Padres de Familias que Hablan Espanol

(Support Group for Spanish Speaking Parents)

This is a very well attended parent support group for families that have children with Autism and would like to meet other parents, get information and stay connected to community resources. The group is led by a social worker from our Autism Department and a translator from our parent education program. Group meets **the first Friday of every month from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. This month we will meet on Friday April 7th and next month on Friday May 5th**. This group is open to all parents, and children are welcome to attend with their parents. Please contact Blanca with questions at 815-927-5494.

Free Developmental Screenings

Easterseals offers multiple ways for parents to complete a developmental screening for their child. Parents and caregivers can complete a free online screening tool on the Easterseals website which you

can find here: <http://www.easterseals.com/mtffc/> If you would prefer for your child to be screened in person by an Easterseals' staff member, drop by to our Barney location on the second Friday of every month from 9:00 to noon, no appointment required! We will have several staff on hand to complete developmental screenings for children age birth to 5 years old, and Autism screenings for children age 18 months to 18 years old. They will be able to recommend to you whether your child is in need of a full evaluation, and explain how you can set up that process through either Easterseals or other community programs that are available. Contact Karrie if you have any questions about our screenings at 815-927-5471.

Events Supporting Easterseals Joliet Region

Portillo's for Good Fundraising Event

On **Monday April 10th from 5:00 – 8:00** enjoy a family dinner at Portillo's in Shorewood to help raise money for Easterseals Joliet Region. Show [this flyer](#) at the Portillo's located at Brook Forest Ave in Shorewood (in front of Target on Rte 59) and they will donate 20% of the profits from your order directly to Easterseals Joliet Region.

41st Annual Corvette Show and GM Parts Swap

On **Sunday April 30th from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.** Hawk Chevrolet of Joliet will be hosting their annual car show and will be donating all of the spectator entry fees to Easterseals Joliet Region! There will be cars to view, DJ, food and demonstrations. Guest entry fee is \$5 per person, with kids 12 and under being free. Follow [this link](#) to their flyer for more information.

GFWC Commemorates Autism Awareness Month

The General Federation of Women's Clubs is an international women's organization dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteer service. Collectively, they are Living the Volunteer Spirit. Many local chapters have been active in donating and volunteering at Easterseals. This month our program coordinator, Valerie Lentz, was invited to contribute as a guest blogger on their website to commemorate Autism Awareness Month. Follow the link below to read Valerie's post and to learn more about GFWC. <http://www.gfwc.org/news-publications/blog/>

What's Going On In Your Community...

Workshops & Resource Fairs

Autism Awareness 5K Run/Walk & Community Family Fair

On **Saturday, April 22nd**, Joliet Public Schools District 86 will host a 5K Run/1 Mile Walk to provide awareness and support to those with Autism. The Run/Walk will take place at the Joliet Memorial Stadium, on 3000 W. Jefferson Street in Joliet. The community fair will take place in the Multi-Purpose Center. The cost of the run is \$15 and includes a t-shirt and gift bag. Registration begins at

8am and start time is at 9am. **Registration is open** but gift bags and t-shirts are limited so sign up for your spot soon! For more information, call (815) 740-3196.

“No One Can Stop Me” Abilities Expo

On **Saturday April 22nd** the Plainfield Township Abilities Committee will host its 7th Annual Abilities Expo at Plainfield Central High School. This expo takes place **from 10am-2pm**, will have over 60 exhibitors and service providers, demonstrations, sensory story time, food for sale and more! The event is FREE and open to the public. If you have any questions you can contact Marie Adams at marie-adams@mckesson.com or 815-577-8380.

Autism and Related Disorders Course FREE

Yale University has a seminar on Autism and Related Disorders on iTunes FREE to listen to. The course covers diagnosis and assessment, etiology and treatment of children, adolescents and adults with autism and related disorders of socialization. Don't have time to take a course on Autism? Listen to lectures on your daily commute or while getting ready! Once again, these are FREE to download on iTunes! For more information, go to <https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/autism-and-related-disorders/id495056283?enlh=7&mt=10&ls=1>

Assistive Technology Grant for Children from Will-Grundy Center for Independent Living

The Will-Grundy Center for Independent Living has grants available to help purchase an assistive technology device for children (up to age 23) with disabilities, up to \$500. A letter is required from a medical physician, or a physical, occupational, or speech therapist that explains how the device will benefit the child. The parent or guardian needs to volunteer five hours OR give a donation of \$50 to help support the Assistive Technology for Children Program. The volunteer hours or donation will need to be completed before the device is ordered. Devices are limited to one per family. For more information, contact Debbie Tarrant at (815) 729-0162, or email her at debbie@wgcil.org. You can also contact Missy, Program Director at missy@wgcil.org.

An Evening with Andrew Solomon: Love No Matter What

On **Tuesday, April 11 at 7p.m.**, Glenbard Parent Series and College of Dupage will host a FREE lecture presented by Andrew Solomon. Based on Solomon's best seller "Far from the tree: Parents, Children, and the search for Identity" and his own experiences growing up, this presentation will examine how families accommodate children with physical, mental and social disabilities and find courage in the face of heartbreaking prejudice and unimaginable difficulty. Be inspired by the parents facing the challenges of raising children with autism; schizophrenia; multiple, severe disabilities; as well as children who are prodigies, who become criminals, or who are transgender. Hear the stories of their universal struggle toward tolerance and compassion and the courageous power of parental love. This free program will begin at 7 p.m. at the College of DuPage McAninch Arts Center, 425 Fawell Blvd. in Glen Ellyn. For more information visit: <http://www.glenbardgps.org/event/885/>

Therapy Resources

Art Therapy Workshops for People with Autism

The Merchant Street Art Gallery in Kankakee is hosting a monthly art therapy workshop for individuals with Autism and other needs. The workshops will be conducted by an art therapist who will support the individuals in helping their ideas come to life, with a focus on social interaction, sensory integration, emotional regulation and self expression. Volunteers will be on hand to provide additional support. Workshops are the second Saturday of each month starting in March going through June with 6 to 12 year olds from 11:30 – 12:30 and 13 years old and up being from 1:00 – 2:30. The cost is \$20 for all four sessions. Call 815-214-9135 with questions or to register.

Recreational & Social Opportunities

Miracle League Baseball in Joliet

Because every child deserves to play baseball. The Miracle League of Joliet's mission is to provide opportunities for children and young adults from 4 to 19 to play and experience the joys and benefits of baseball. During games with the Miracle League, each player bats one inning, all base runners are safe, every player scores a run before the inning is over, community children and volunteers serve as "buddies" to assist the players, and each team and each player wins every game. Games are played every Saturday for 6 weeks at the Miracle League Field (120 E. Clinton, Joliet) on a full-sized playing field with a custom-designed, cushioned, rubberized, and completely flat surface with painted baselines and bases so it is free from any obstacles that accommodates assistive devices while helping to prevent injuries. Registration is open now through April 1st and can be done online. Opening day is Saturday, May 13th! Registration, more details, and further information can be found at <http://miracleleagueofjoliet.com/> or contact Sharon at sferro@miracleleagueofjoliet.com or 815 258-3799.



Spring Formal

The Special Recreation of Joliet/Channahon is hosting their annual Spring Formal for kids 13+. The cost is \$35 for residents and \$44 for non-residents. The cost includes dinner, photo, and a corsage. The event takes place on May 12th but registration closes April 7th. To register for this event, please go to <https://bluerec3.bluerec.com/php/programinfo.php?org=joliet&item=244184>

Touch-A-Truck!

Put your imagination in gear and go! The New Lenox Park District is hosting an event for children of all ages to climb on and explore their favorite vehicles including fire engines, police cars and construction trucks while they rub elbows with their hometown heroes. How often does anyone get to look inside any of these unusual vehicles and get to talk to someone who operates them? It will be a day that will be remembered! Parent supervision is required and cameras are highly recommended. New this year, the first hour will be HORN FREE. This event is from 10am-12pm, no registration is required, and it is **FREE!** Stop on by on **Saturday May 6th** at Walker Country Estates Park located in New Lenox.

Recurring Monthly Events

These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

Sensory Sensitive Sundays at Chuck E Cheese

Chuck E Cheese recently announced it will now be **open two hours early on the first Sunday of every month**, specifically for children with autism and other special needs. During these hours there will be reduced lighting and noise, while still offering the food and games Chuck E Cheese is known for. This month, Sensory Sensitive Sunday will occur on April 2nd from 9am-11am at the Joliet and Villa Park locations, and from 8am-10am at the Naperville and Tinley Park locations.

Special Needs Family Time at Gizmos Fun Factory

Gizmos Fun Factory in Orland Park is hosting Special Needs Family Time on the 1st and 3rd Mondays each month from 4pm-8pm. This time is reserved for special needs children and their caregivers, and all attractions will be available. Cost is \$20 per child, and each participant receives a \$10 game card. Visit <http://gizmosfunfactory.com/Parties-and-Events> for more information.

Exploration Station Special Needs Nights

Exploration Station is a wonderful children's museum in Bourbonnais. They host a special needs night on the **First Sunday of every month from 11am-12:30pm**. The staff at Exploration Station has taken special care to adapt the environment and provide an opportunity for children with special needs to explore their exhibits so they can learn through hands on interaction. The museum is only open to families with special needs children during this time, which provides a safe and accepting environment. The fee is \$2.50 for residents and \$3.50 for non-residents. Exploration Station is located at Perry Farm Park on 459 N Kennedy Drive in Bourbonnais. Pre-registration is required. Call 815-933-9905 ext. 3 for more information or visit them online at www.exploration-station.org.

Sensory Friendly Films at AMC

AMC has EXPANDED their Sensory Friendly Film program to include some evening hours with films geared towards an older crowd! The auditoriums dedicated to the program have their lights up, the sound turned down and audience members are invited to get up and dance, walk, shout or sing! They will now be on the **second and fourth Tuesday at 7pm AND second and fourth Saturday at 10 am every month**. Go to <http://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films> for more information and to find a nearby theater that is participating in this great program!



DuPage Children's Museum Special Needs Nights

Did you know that the DuPage Children's Museum has a dedicated night for families of children with special needs? They do! It is the **third Thursday of every month from 5pm-7pm**. It is a time designated for the families of children with special needs to enjoy the museum in an inclusive, typically quieter, less crowded atmosphere. They have a creativity drop-in studio that implements sensory-based activities with a different theme every week along with purposeful play with peers, adaptive equipment, and guides to help parents use the exhibits for therapeutic benefit. Admission is

\$11 per person, ages 1-59, and \$10 for anyone over 60. For more information go to their website at <http://dupagechildrens.org/>

Sensory Story Times

The Plainfield Public Library is hosting a **FREE** drop-in Sensory Story time one Saturday every month. After free play, socializing, and tactile activities, gather for a story time designed for children of all abilities. Friends and siblings are welcome. Children ages 3 to 9 must be accompanied by an adult. Drop in event, no registration is required. Find dates/time and more information at <http://il.evanced.info/plainfield/evanced/eventcalendar.asp>

Fountaindale Public Library (in Bolingbrook on Briarcliff) offers a **FREE** drop-in Sensory Story time on the second Saturday of every month from 10:30 to 11:15 for children from 2 to 6 years old with a caregiver. This story time is geared “especially for children with sensory integration issues”. Visit their calendar at <http://host7.evanced.info/fountaindale/evanced/eventcalendar.asp>

ASD Life Transition Group

Alexian Brothers Health System presents the ASD Life Transitions Group. This **FREE** group will be held on the 4th Tuesday (Tuesday, February 28th) of every month from 7pm until 9pm at the Alexian Brothers Women and Children’s Hospital, in the Lower Level meeting rooms 3 & 4 (1555 Barrington Road, Hoffman Estates). Each month they invite a different speaker to present to the group and address a variety of issues specific to this population, including college transition and accommodations, job skills, independent living, volunteer opportunities, government benefits, driving, exercise and more topics of interest. Additionally, our young adults will break out for the second hour where they will be able to enjoy game nights, time to socialize, and more! This group is for young adults 16 and up and parents. To register please email Ana.Garcia-Maldonado@alexian.net or call 847-755-8536.

Art Happenings Workshops

The Merchant Street Art Gallery in Kankakee offers a monthly **FREE** workshop for families that have a member with Autism. It is the fourth Tuesday of every month from 4:30 – 6:00. The workshops offer families the opportunity to explore the visual arts in a casual atmosphere while meeting and getting to know other families. You can call the art gallery at 815-685-9057 or visit their website for more information at www.merchantstreetartgallery.org

NAMI of Will-Grundy: Family Support Group

NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) Family Support Group is a peer-led support group for family members, caregivers and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness. Families can gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar circumstances. NAMI’s Support Groups are unique because they follow a structured model, ensuring everyone has an opportunity to be heard and to get what they need. NAMI Will-Grundy offers a variety of locations and times for these free support groups. For more information visit <http://namiwillgrundy.org/familysupport/> or contact NAMI Will-Grundy at (815) 731-9103 (call returned within 48 hours) or email info@namiwillgrundy.org.

*Do you have an event coming up that would be of interest to families that have children with special needs?
We help to spread the word about events that are reasonably priced and promote awareness, inclusion,
learning opportunities and fun for the special needs community! Please submit your events to
vlentz@joliet.easterseals.com to be considered for our next newsletter*

Articles of the Month

Autismspeaks.org has an online blog called “Got Questions” where parents and caregivers can submit questions related to Autism and get answers from professionals on the Autism Speaks staff. Visit autismspeaks.org for more posts.

Autism & turn taking: How can I teach our son this crucial life skill?



This week's “Got Questions?” response is by Janine Stichter, professor of special education and an applied behavioral analyst at the University of Missouri's Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, in Columbia. The university and its autism center are among the 13 sites in the [Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network \(ATN\)](#).

Editor's note: The following information is not meant to diagnose or treat and should not take the place of personal consultation, as appropriate, with a qualified healthcare professional and/or behavioral therapist.

I often hear this question about a pivotal life skill that challenges many children and adults on the autism spectrum.

Most people agree that learning to take turns is crucial to success in social situations. What often goes unappreciated is how turn taking involves the mastery of several related skills that are likewise important throughout life.

For instance, the ability and willingness to take turns involves

- * the skill of waiting (impulse control),

- * the ability to read facial expressions and body language (social perception) and

* the twin skills of sharing and conversational reciprocity (the dance of interactions).

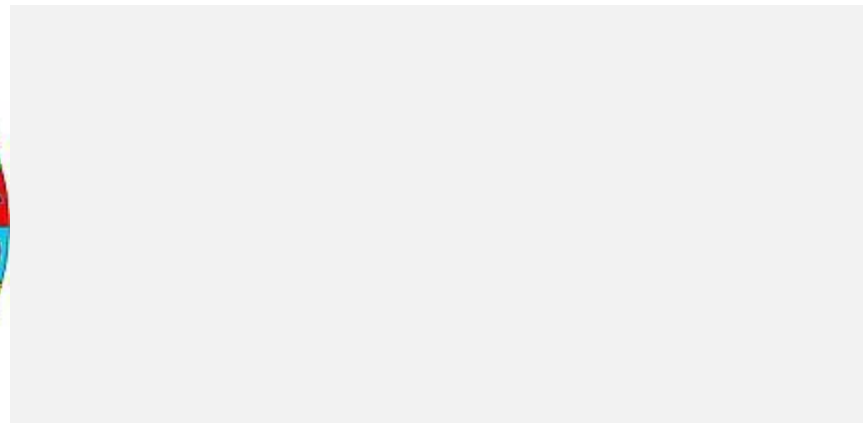
How we teach turn taking depends on a person's developmental level. For example, young children and those with intellectual disability or limited language skills may not be able to process a lot of verbal instruction. In these situations, it's important to create an environment that encourages and supports turn taking. (More about that below.)

Explaining how and why to take turns can work well with many older children and those on the less-severely affected end of the autism spectrum. With these groups, we can also teach higher-level turn taking skills. (Also described below.)

To put it another way, learning how to take turns along with its related skills is a lot like learning to read. As the child masters each level, we want to build on the skill while practicing it in different situations.

Here are some strategies we've found helpful working with children of different ages and developmental levels.

Taking turns in games



My favorite games for teaching turn taking involve clear turns that involve spinning a wheel, throwing dice or picking up a card. (image courtesy Wikimedia Commons) Many games and other fun activities lend themselves to learning how to take turns. I recommend games that have a clear turn taking structure combined with a strong visual element. Good examples include games with turns that involve rolling dice, spinning a wheel, picking up a card and so on.

You may find it helps to use visual supports as a reminder or signal for when it's someone's turn. For example, consider giving each player a card that's red on one side and green on the other. You might explain that players keep their cards with the red side up while waiting, then flip it to green when it's their turn.

At first, the person learning to take turns may need some assistance. For instance, if your son reaches for the spinner out of turn, you can point to the red card and say "Wait" or ask "Whose turn?"

Remember to praise your son for waiting his turn. Depending on the situation, you might also give a sticker or other small reward.

A turn taking project



In this turn-taking project, two children get a picture of a two-color object to build together. Then one child gets all the blocks of one color and the other gets all the blocks of the second color. At our center, we've had success with a Legos® building game involving two partners. We provide a picture of a completed structure built from blocks of two different colors. (See example at right.) The structure can be as simple or complex as you judge appropriate. Give one partner all the blocks of one color – let's say red. Give the other color – let's say blue – to the other partner. Now invite them to build the structure by taking turns.

Structured sharing

Classroom teachers can be powerful allies in helping children learn how to take turns. In kindergarten and the early grade school years, for example, it's common to have a daily time for sharing or "show and tell." Often, the students sit in a circle, each holding something to talk about or show to the group. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn the routine of turn taking, as each child learns to not only wait but also to focus on others. The key to success is repetition as part of the child's daily schedule.

As in game playing, the teacher can use red- and green-sided cue cards as visual supports to help students remember to wait their turns. To signal when a student's turn is over, the teacher might use a timer or give a verbal or visual cue. For example, hold up a yellow card, followed by a red card.

Conversational turn taking



Family meals offer many opportunities to practice turn taking skills.

(photo courtesy the CDC) Families can use a similar strategy to practice taking turns sharing about each person's day at the dinner table. Consider putting out a line-up of topic cards (with pictures and/or words) in the center of the table, along with a red/green card for each person. To start, all of the cards should be flipped to red.

One person starts by choosing a topic and perhaps a conversation partner. For instance, one child may choose to talk to his dad about the topic "school." Child and dad flip their cards to green. Meanwhile, mom and another child are listening with their cards showing red. Once the conversation about school ends, the second child can choose a topic and conversation partner, and so on.

If your son isn't ready for this sort of planned conversation, I suggest using the cards slightly differently. Choose a topic card and give it to the first speaker. The person can say whatever he or she would like about the topic, while everyone else listens. The speaker then passes the card to the next person, who then takes a turn sharing.

You can adapt all these strategies to support your son as his skills improve.

Strengthening other social skills

As your son masters simple conversational turn taking, I encourage you to add opportunities to strengthen associated social skills. For instance, let's say that one person at the table shares that she had a bad day. Instead of moving immediately on to the next person, model empathy and reciprocity by expressing how sorry you are that she had a bad day and/or asking a follow-up question. By reciprocity, I mean an exchange that reflects the perspectives of both the speaker and the listener.

Turn taking and table manners

Of course, turn taking is also important when it comes to serving food. Here again, you can use the red- and green-sided cards. Everyone starts with the red side up. Then one at a time, each person turns the card to green when the cook signals it's their turn to serve themselves.

Again, be ready to remind your son if he starts to go out of turn, pointing to the red card and calmly asking, "Whose turn?" or saying, "Wait, please." Likewise, remember to use lots of positive reinforcement such as immediate praise for waiting and perhaps a sticker or small prize.

As these examples illustrate, it's helpful to use the same or similar cues across different activities and settings. The consistency can speed learning and help a child apply the skill in new and unanticipated situations.

You might even keep a couple of those green- and red-sided cards in a pocket or purse for situations like waiting in line at a store or for a server to take your order at a restaurant. Certainly, they can come in handy during a play-date that involves taking turns with a toy.



Jenga (photo by Derek Mawhinney/Wikimedia

Commons)Teens and turn taking

As a child advances developmentally, I recommend activities that introduce more-advanced turn taking skills.

Take, for example, a high schooler who gets impatient while waiting his turn at [Jenga](#). This is a good opportunity for some pre-game coaching.

First, encourage the teen to look at the friend whose turn it is and see if he can tell if the friend is aware that it's his or her turn. You might suggest looking for telltale signs of concentration such as furrowed eyebrows and a slightly clenched mouth. Clearly, reading facial expressions and body language are important social as well as turn taking skills.

In addition, I encourage teaching the teen how to express a polite prompt such as "Sorry I'm impatient; do you think you'll be much longer?"

I hope these strategies are helpful. We'd love to hear more from readers at gotquestions@autismspeaks.org.

Julia, the muppet with autism, is finally here

This blog post was written by Kathy Hooven and her son, Ryan, who has autism. You can read more about Kathy and her family on her blog, ["The AWEnesty of Autism."](#)



My son, Ryan seeing a little bit of himself in Julia on Sesame Street.

Good things come to those who wait. We have been waiting for a long time. Some of us, much longer than others. But we waited. We advocated. We raised awareness. We knew what others didn't. And now our patience has paid off.

Julia is here.

Julia, a muppet with autism, has found her way to Sesame Street and she is gonna chase the clouds away for many young children with autism. I am so incredibly grateful that Sesame Street has brought Julia to life, but, selfishly, I wish Julia would have come about a decade sooner. Don't get me wrong, I LOVE that **FINALLY** autism has become so mainstream that adults, kids and now muppets with autism are showing up on your television screen, on the big screen and on Sesame Street, I just wish for my son and the kids who came before him, Julia would have come sooner.

Julia is going to do amazing things for young children with autism. A-mazing things. Kids are going to be more aware, more accepting and hopefully, more kind. The end result will be more, not less. And for many years, autism was perceived as "less" and I think that is why ten years ago, we weren't ready for more...or for Julia. Ten years ago, differences of any kind, weren't as accepted as they are today.

Sure people with autism and their families have been waiting for Julia and for the world to see what they have always known, that people with autism are more like "us" than they are different. Autistic individuals may

process information differently than most of us, they may not communicate in the same way and their behaviors may be different, but, in the end they want to be loved and accepted just like all of “us” and just like every muppet on Sesame Street.

Had Julia come when Ryan was younger, he might be more willing to take risks socially now that he is in high school because the children in his preschool and elementary school watching Sesame Street would be aware that different did not mean less. They would understand that when Ryan didn’t respond to his name right away it didn’t mean he wasn’t listening or he didn’t care what they had to say, it just meant he needed more time to respond.

Those kids would have grown up understanding the reason Ryan had to be taken out of class before the fire drills was not because he was “weird”, but, because the noise was too much for his body to handle. Julia would have helped Ryan’s classmates understand his sensitivity to noises, his fabulous way of communicating through scripts and his desire to be included and accepted in the classroom, on the playground and in the cafeteria regardless of his limited eye contact when his friends approached him.



If Julia would have taught Ryan’s classmates HOW to interact with a classmate with autism, all of the burden of **RYAN** knowing how to interact with **THEM** wouldn’t have fallen on his tiny 5 year old shoulders. Ten years of awareness and acceptance would have made a big difference. Ryan’s classmates would have had ten years to understand autism, to understand him and to accept him, just the way he is. Oh Julia, I love that you showed up, I just really wish it would have been sooner.

Now that Ryan is in HS he struggles to interact socially and because he is “not much of a risk taker”, he doesn’t make many efforts to try. And because there were no muppets on Sesame Street with autism for the past ten years, his classmates don’t have a clue how to interact with him. This lack of awareness and education leads to isolation, it leads to depression, it leads to accepting that being alone is better than risking a social catastrophe.

If Julia would have showed up on Sesame Street ten years ago, Ryan might not feel so ashamed of the word

"Autism", because kids would have been taught autism may be different, but it is not less and he would believe that too.

Julia could have really made a difference for Ryan. I hope that for the parents just hearing the words, "Your child has autism" they realize that there is a tiny yellow character with orange hair living on Sesame Street who is going to help them and their child pave the way to awareness and acceptance. She has arrived just in time for your child and his friends.

Thank you Sesame Street. I know that maybe the time wasn't right ten years ago and maybe "we" weren't ready for a little girl who flapped her hands when she got excited or had meltdowns when a siren went zipping past Sesame Street, but, we are ready now. Thank you for giving her to all of us. We really, really need her.

