

APRIL 2018

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....

Annual Awareness Open House

This year's open house will be on **Wednesday April 11th from 1:00 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 19th from 5:30 – 7:30 PM** 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 Lentz 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 PM**. 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 11th** 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 Español (Support Group for Spanish Speaking Parents)

This is a 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 will be led by a social worker from our Autism Department and a translator from our parent education program. Group will meet **the first Friday of every month from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. The next meeting is on Friday April 6th.** 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.

Summer Therapy Groups

Please see the attached flyer with all of the amazing therapy groups being offered this summer at Easterseals! We have 14 different groups this year so there is something for every interest, age and ability! Call and register soon – space is limited!

- » **Blooming Buddies**
- » **Preschool Pals**
- » **Adaptive Athletes**
- » **Fit, Fun & Fabulous**
- » **Handwriting Without Tears**
- » **Sibshops**
- » **Secrets to Success (Transition)**
- » **Golf for Kids with Special Needs**
- » **Soccer Shots**
- » **Fit, Fun & Fierce**
- » **The Alert Program**
- » **Animal Therapy**
- » **Feeding Group**
- » **Sensory & Self-Regulation for Success**

Autism Awareness Items for Sale

Easterseals sells a variety of Autism Awareness items at cost to make them as affordable as possible for families, so you can proudly spread awareness and show support for your loved one with Autism. These items make great gifts for your family, for your child's teachers and therapists. We have coffee mugs, pins, bracelets, ornaments, car magnets, lanyards and more. Stop by our Family Center for Autism Resources, which also houses our free lending library, to browse our selection! Call 815-927-5465 for more information.



2019 Calendar Art Contest

Every year National Easterseals creates a calendar highlighting artwork done by children and adults benefitting from Easterseals' programs. The 2019 calendar will mail in the fall to 1.3 million households nationwide. Right now they are reaching out for artwork to be considered for the 2019 calendar! The art piece should be something that was completed during an Easterseals' program like a therapy session, summer group, or childcare. If you are interested please reach out to Valerie Lentz at 815-927-5465 on how to submit your loved ones art piece. **The deadline for art submissions is May 31st.**



Celebration of Giving Telethon 2018

Easterseals Regional Celebration of Giving Telethon will be held Saturday, **April 14, 2018** at the Jacob Henry Mansion. It is an exciting blend of the area's finest entertainment and enlightening segments showcasing Easterseals' important work in creating solutions and changing lives. The Telethon is streamed live and offered on a variety of local stations, but we also invite you to come join us in our live audience to enjoy the many talent acts and spread the word about the services at Easterseals!

What's going on in Your Community...

Workshops & Resource Fairs

Kids Expo 2018 Extravaganza

The Family Time Magazine is hosting a Kids Expo filled with fun activities and over 100 exhibitors on April 14th and April 15th at Roma Sports Cub (9115 Roma Ct. Frankfort, IL 60423). Some of these activities include, face painting, surprise appearances, and live animals! There will be exhibitors there to tell you all about their services including camps for kids, museums, tutoring centers, family fun centers, and much more. Admission for kids 12 years and under is \$6 and adults are \$9, free parking. For more information visit <https://chicagolandkidsexpo.com/> or call 815-806-8844

“No One Can Stop Me” 8th Annual Abilities Expo

The Plainfield Township Ability Group is hosting their annual “No One Can Stop Me” Abilities Expo on Saturday May 5th from 10 a.m to 2 p.m. This year's event will be a collaborative effort coordinated by the Abilities Group and the Louis Joliet Mall, and held at their location at 3340 Mall Loop Drive, Joliet, IL 60431. There will be over 60 exhibitors, service dog demonstrations, song and dance demonstration, concessions, raffles, and much more! The first 50 attendees receive a free gift (one per family) and admission is FREE. For more information please visit www.plainfield-township.com

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>

STAR NET Trainings

STAR NET provides free workshops and webinars to families and professionals working with young children with special needs. In addition to the trainings being free, they also have grants that families can apply for to help cover other expenses, like traveling to the training.

Visit the STAR NET Region II website to see their full calendar of free trainings offered to parents of young children with disabilities. www.thecenterweb.org/starnet/ Region II covers DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and the western portion of Cook County.

Visit the website of STAR NET Region VI to see their training calendar at <http://www.swccase.org/StarNet/default.htm> They cover Will, Grundy, Kankakee, LaSalle, Kendall and the southern portion of Cook County.

Therapy Resources

Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism



The Merchant Street Art Gallery in Kankakee hosts regular art workshops and other events to support and showcase artists with Autism. **On April 13th-July 7th** they will be having the “Color of Spring” showcase featuring art work showing the artist’s interpretation of the theme. If you want to be featured on the show, submit your art by **April 2nd**. For more information visit their website at www.merchantstreetartgallery.org and see their calendar of events.

Summer Camps for Kids with Special Needs or Autism

Camp Timber Pointe

Easterseals Central Illinois hosts several week long overnight camps during the summer on beautiful Lake Bloomington at the Timber Pointe Outdoor Center. Each week focuses on kids and adults of different abilities and ages. Visit their website to learn about this amazing camp experience <http://www.easterseals.com/ci/our-programs/camping-recreation/>

Keshet

At camp with Keshet, endless opportunities are provided for children with disabilities. From learning a new stroke in the pool to getting invited to their first playdate, Keshet provides a positive, inclusive camping experience for all of our campers. There are seventy inclusive summer day and overnight camp programs for children with disabilities at 15 sites throughout the Chicago area and the Midwest. For more information about Keshet Camps, contact Jen Phillips at jphillips@keshet.org or call (847) 205-0274. keshet.org

Camp Red Kite

Camp Red kite offers a summer arts camp tailored specifically to the unique interests and needs of children on the autism spectrum. The program is led by a team of artists, administrators and special education teachers dedicated to creating a safe, welcoming, and comfortable environment. Camp dates are from August 6th-August 24th for children ages 8-14 and 15-22. Camp is located at the Station, 100 S. Racine Ave, Chicago IL 60607. Financial aid is available. For more information visit ChicagoChildrenTheatre.org or call 773-227-0180.

SRA

Don’t forget about your local Special Recreation Association for recreational events, extracurricular activities and summer camp. Every Park District is part of an SRA, which provides programming for children and adults with special needs. The programs typically have smaller ratios, staff with

additional training, and adapted activities. Just like park district programs, there is typically a resident fee and a non-resident fee – so you can check out both your SRA and also surrounding communities. If you aren't sure which SRA you belong to, call your local park district and ask!

Recreational & Social Opportunities

Zoo for All at Brookfield Zoo-Free Event

Brookfield zoo has recently completed some renovations at Hamill Family Play Zoo and is hosting three Sensory Friendly Open House events. Families of children with disabilities can come check out the Hamill Family Play Zoo's new features and have an opportunity to talk with staff. **The Open House events will take place on April 12th (5:30pm-7:00pm), and April 22nd (9:00am-10:30am).** Families will have the opportunity to learn more about the Zoo for All initiative, meet their Play Zoo crew and their inclusion Specialist, experience the Hamill Family Play Zoo, and learn about inclusive family programs offered at the Play Zoo. **For more information and to register go to www.czs.org/zooforall, space is limited.**



Brookfield Zoo Goes Blue

Brookfield Zoo located at 3300 Golf Rd Brookfield, IL 60513 is once again taking part in the annual Zoos Go Blue campaign on **Saturday, April 7 from 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m!** To commemorate the day, the zoo's iconic lion statues will be clothed in blue scarves, blue flags will decorate the park's grounds, and special inclusive activities and animal Zoo Chats will take place.

Brookfield Zoo strives to provide the most inclusive guest experience possible: An Accessibility Guide can help! Brookfield Zoo also provides Care Kits that can be checked out by families which include zoo visual schedule books, noise-reducing headphones, name tags, "if lost" ID bracelets and safety alert badges. For complimentary admission and parking, register at CZS.org/zoosgoblue

Cubs Autism Awareness Game

Join the Cubs for Autism Awareness Night Thursday, April 26 at 7:05pm, at Wrigley Field. To show support for Autism Speaks, the Cubs are offering fans specially priced tickets to watch the Cubs take on the Milwaukee Brewers. A portion of net proceeds from Autism Awareness Night will be donated to Autism Speaks.



To purchase discounted tickets click this link:

<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/tickets/specials/community-nights#autismawarene...>

Bowling at Suburbanite

SEASPAR's "The Drop In Center" provides individuals who have mental health needs an opportunity to spend leisure time in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. On April 22nd they are hosting a bowling activity at the Suburbanite, free of charge. Family members are welcome to attend. The activities are designed to enhance relationships between peers and family members. The Drop In Center is located at the Westmont Community Center, 75 East Richmond Avenue, in Westmont. The program begins at 2

p.m. and ends at 4 p.m. Although participation is encouraged, all activities are optional. For more information please visit <https://www.seaspar.org/> or call 630-960-7600.

Recurring Monthly Events

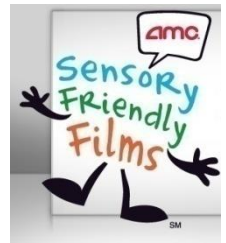
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

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 https://www.btpd.org/es_about_us.php

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>

Sensory Sensitive Sundays at Chuck E. Cheese-Joliet

CARD & Chuck E. Cheese’s recently launched a national roll out of Sensory Sensitive Sundays across the United States! Sensory Sensitive Sundays occurs on the **first Sunday of every month 2 hours before the restaurant opens** to the general public. Along with less crowds and dimmed lighting, the music and animatronic show are turned off during this time with limited appearances by Chuck E. Please visit www.chuckecheese.com/sensory-sensitive-sundays for more information on Sensory Sensitive Sundays and to find all of the participating locations.

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, March 27th) 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.

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

How common are Anxiety Disorders in People with Autism?

https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2012/01/06/how-common-are-anxiety-disorders-people-autism?utm_source=/blog/2012/01/06/how-common-are-anxiety-disorders-people-autism&utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=How Common are Anxiety Disorders in People with Autism?&utm_campaign=relateditems2



This week's "Got Questions" answers comes from Rob Ring, PhD, Autism Speaks vice president of translational research.

Without question, anxiety is a real and serious problem for many people on the autism spectrum. We hear this from parents, teachers and doctors, as well as from adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This disabling anxiety can take the form of one or more disorders, including panic disorder and phobias. A recent review of scientific studies on autism and anxiety revealed that we have no clear gauge of how commonly anxiety disorders overlap with autism. A few small, relatively short term studies have produced starkly different results: from 11 percent to 84 percent. (For comparison, the prevalence of anxiety disorders among the general population is about 18 percent.) A reliable estimate will require a study that tracks many more individuals with autism over longer periods of time and that considers the distinctive way that anxiety oftentimes expresses itself in those affected by ASD.

Fortunately, Autism Speaks is funding the [Autism Treatment Network](#), which collects systematic data on a wide range of medical conditions, including anxiety disorders, in children with ASD. This data will help us better understand the proportion of people with ASD who are suffering from anxiety symptoms. Meanwhile preliminary studies have provided insights. They suggest, for example, that adolescents with autism may be particularly prone to anxiety disorders, while younger children on the spectrum may not differ at all from the average population. Some studies likewise suggest that high-functioning individuals on the spectrum experience higher rates of anxiety disorders than do lower-functioning individuals. Still we must emphasize that these results are preliminary.

We don't know nearly as much as we should about how anxiety disorders affect those with autism. A [recent review of studies](#) found that behavioral interventions can help many children and adolescents with autism who also struggle with anxiety. Along these lines, some [studies](#) suggest that cognitive behavioral therapy can be particularly helpful for high-functioning adolescents and adults with autism and anxiety. We will explore behavioral interventions further in a future "Got Questions?" blog. My own expertise is in the medical treatment of anxiety in persons with ASD.

Currently, we have no medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) expressly for the treatment of anxiety in children, adolescents or adults with autism. Some classes of drugs commonly prescribed for treating anxiety disorders in the general population likewise help some of those on the autism spectrum. These include the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) such as Prozac. For those with autism, anxiety drugs are best used in combination with behavioral interventions. Among

high-functioning individuals, they may be particularly effective when combined with [cognitive behavioral therapy](#).

However, some doctors report that anti-anxiety medications seem to be *less* effective overall in people with autism spectrum disorder than they are in the general population. This observation needs to be verified with controlled research. It suggests the possibility that the biological root of anxiety in those with autism may differ from the “norm” and, as a result, may respond best to different treatments.

At Autism Speaks, we are actively supporting research into anxiety disorders and other medical conditions frequently associated with autism. This includes both basic research on the underlying biology of autism and the safe development of drugs that can relieve disabling symptoms and improve quality of life. If you are considering anti-anxiety medication for a child with autism, our recently published [Medication Decision Aid](#) can help you work with your child’s physician to sort through the pros and cons in the context of your values and goals for your child.

The Autism Speaks blog features opinions from people throughout the autism community. Each blog represents the point of view of the author and does not necessarily reflect Autism Speaks’ beliefs or point of view.

3 Ways Stephen Hawking Revealed Possibilities for People with Disabilities

https://blog.easterseals.com/?_ga=2.90263962.141527080.1522344374-63103030.1517928329

by Angela F. Williams

In a May 2011 interview with the [New York Times](#), journalist Claudia Dreifus asked Stephen Hawking, “Given all you’ve experienced, what words would you offer someone who has been diagnosed with a serious illness, perhaps A.L.S.?”

Hawking, who prepared his answers ahead of the in-person interview, answered: “My advice to other [disabled](#) people would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn’t prevent you doing well, and don’t regret the things it interferes with. Don’t be disabled in spirit, as well as physically.”

Hawking’s progressive and positive attitude toward disability here exemplifies everything Easterseals works toward every day: A world in which people with disabilities can achieve their goals without barriers; the notion that disability isn’t something to fear or regret, rather it’s a natural part of life.



Let’s dig a little deeper into his wise words:

1. **Concentrate on things your disability doesn’t prevent you doing well:** Certain things may be harder to accomplish with a disability, but that doesn’t mean that everything will be. Everyone is uniquely capable of contributing talent, perspective, and skill to make an impact. Hawking was a wonderful example of this. We help people of all abilities make their unique impact at Easterseals,

with the right supports and resources. We are confident that one of the next world-changers will be a part of the Easterseals family.

2. **Don't regret the things (your disability) interferes with:** Hawking was diagnosed with A.L.S. in 1963 at the age of 21. Following his diagnosis he resisted using a wheelchair. Becoming a person with a disability later in life (as opposed to being born with a disability) was hard on him. However, he eventually let go of regret and focused on what he was good at and what he was put on this earth to do. He embraced assistive technology to continue his groundbreaking work, and had a hand in developing and advancing the programs he used. Later he became a vocal disability advocate, taking part in the [Charter for the Third Millennium on Disability](#), which stated: "In the 21st century, we must insist on the same human and civil rights for people with disabilities as for everyone else."
3. **Don't be disabled in spirit as well as physically:** The experience of being human includes disability. We all have the capacity to reach for our wildest dreams, live the fullest lives, and make the greatest change in the world – not in spite of perceived limitations, sometimes because of them. It is what makes us unique, genuine and complete. Hawking calls us all to not be a barrier to ourselves while navigating difficulties in life. Do not stifle the dreams you were born to realize.

For Hawking, the limits of what was possible were vast. He made us consider not just the wonder of the stars, but the wonder of our existence. We remember him as one of the great minds of our time, but I hope we also remember him as an important figure in the timeline of disability history.

I'll leave you with another wonderful quote from this same interview: "Obviously, because of my disability, I need assistance. But I have always tried to overcome the limitations of my condition and lead as full a life as possible. I have traveled the world, from the Antarctic to zero gravity. Perhaps one day I will go into space."

What is the Difference Between Help and Support?

By [Sydney](#)

<https://blog.easterseals.com/capable-support-peg-grafwallner/>



Today's guest blogger is Peg Grafwallner, M.Ed., introduced to us by Bob Glowacki, CEO of [Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin](#). Peg is an Instructional Coach/Reading Specialist in Milwaukee, as well as a blogger, author, and national presenter.

I am an Instructional Coach and Reading Specialist at a large urban high school.

I am also Ani's mom.

Ani is autistic and intellectually disabled. According to the National Autism Center, "Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in social interactions and social communication and by restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior." If you ask Ani what autism is, she'll tell you she gets confused.

I brought Ani home from a Bulgarian orphanage when she was five years, 11 months. Her mind and body suffered greatly. She weighed 23 lbs., had no language, was not potty trained, and focused on bizarre hand movements. It was clear she had had no mental or physical stimulation. When I met her for the first time, she sat under a shelf and rocked back and forth – endlessly.

But the one thing that kept going, that never diminished was her spirit. Through all of the heart-wrenching sorrow within the first several years of her life, she has kept her indomitable spirit.

As a parent of a Special Needs child and as a teacher in a large urban school district, I have a unique perspective. I see many parents who “help” their children and as a result, they do their children a great disservice. They immediately fly into the “I don’t want to see you suffer, so I will gladly do this for you” (because sometimes that’s what “help” looks like) mode every time they smell calamity or perceive that things have become too “hard.” Heaven forbid life gets tough.

Instead of helping, let’s focus on support. There is a difference.

What does help look like and what does support look like when we are talking about my Ani or perhaps, other special education students?

It looks like it does for any other kid.

First, don’t feel sorry for Ani. She’ll never need your sympathy and she’ll never need your help. She’ll need your support. As an example, at home, we could give Ani the space and time to practice a skill. At school, however, Ani was the only student that required assistance and time was of the essence so there might not have been the luxury of practice. Therefore, I would ask Ani’s teachers what specific skill they were working on at school that we could practice at home. Sometimes, Ani would practice using a scissors cutting along thick, black lines; sometimes she would trace shapes to practice holding a pencil. Whatever it was, it had to be simplistic and basic – something that wouldn’t cause anxiety or a loss of patience for mother or daughter.

Second, there’s your way and Ani’s way. It will probably never look the same, and that has to be okay. When Ani was about 10 years old, Max, her brother, asked her to make two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for him to eat after the football game. As he sat on the bus, eager to eat his snack, he opened the bag and took out one of the sandwiches. He took a big bite and stopped. Peanut butter, no jelly. Ani had made a peanut butter sandwich. He took out the other one and opened the two slices of bread. Sure enough, jelly. Ani had indeed made two peanut butter AND jelly sandwiches, her way. To this day, that incident remains one of his favorite high school memories. His friends noticed what happened and laughed good-naturedly.

Finally, and most important of all, have high expectations for any child – including mine. At the beginning of third grade, Ani had learned to tie her shoes. However, I neglected to tell her teacher. One day, I picked her up from school and her teacher thanked me for teaching Ani how to tie her shoes.

Apparently, Ani would go up to her teacher or some unsuspecting classmate, stick her foot out with untied laces and look forlorn (another way to ask for help!). The naive innocent would bend over and tie Ani’s shoes. When the teacher told me what Ani had done, I almost burst my buttons with pride. My daughter, the one who couldn’t cut a straight line with a pair of scissors, who couldn’t trace the shapes on the paper, who couldn’t regulate her finger movements had manipulated them all. Instead of the teacher and her classmates supporting her, they helped her and she took full advantage of it.

So what does this tell us? Support her as you would support any other child. Don't do it for her and don't feel sorry for her. She might surprise you. Ani's way works for her. It might take time and you might do it differently. But, that has to be okay. Finally, remember even though she might be labeled "special needs," she is as special as any other child – with all the manipulative behavior that all of us own.

Ani is an inspirational, intelligent and involved young woman. She is a star athlete immersed with Special Olympics and is one of the Wisconsin Ambassadors for Best Buddies. Today, she is a lab technician at our local pediatric hospital. Her warm personality and honest disposition are genuine and true. She is no longer the "little orphan" that I brought home from Bulgaria 16 years ago; on the contrary, she is a mover and shaker who continues to surprise us and those around her on a daily basis.

I remember many years ago bemoaning Ani's future. How would it look? What would she do? Who could I count on? Ani's art teacher, a special needs parent herself, encouraged me to take one day at a time and that when the time came, I could rely on the "natural support" within the community. She was right. The natural support has revealed itself at Ani's work, in Ani's social life, and in Ani's hobbies. And the expectations remain high.