



# DECEMBER 2016

# 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....

### 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 we are featuring our Clinical Coordinator and Developmental Therapist, Karrie Racutt, DT. Karrie has years of experiencing working with children and their families through our Loveable Lilies Childcare and Early Intervention clinical program. She provides in home developmental therapy for children through Early Intervention, runs developmental therapy groups and is a member of our Medical Diagnostic Team. She will be chatting on **Friday December 9th from 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. about Holiday Gift Buying Guide: How to purchase developmentally enhancing gifts for your child.** She will be making recommendations about some of her favorite toys that bolster different areas of development, and tips on how to find your next favorite toy! Remember to log on and get your questions answered!

### 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, December 14th** 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 brand new group we are excited to be offering. It 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.** Next month we will meet on **Friday January 6<sup>th</sup>**. 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. A flyer written in Spanish is also attached to the newsletter email.

## Annual Parent's Night Out

It's that time of year again! Each year Easterseals provides a respite evening during the holiday season to help busy parents get a little break. This year Parent's Night Out is on **Thursday December 8<sup>th</sup> from 5:00 – 8:00**. Easterseals' staff will provide dinner, small group activities, holiday crafts and a movie to keep your children entertained while you get some time to yourself. Run last minute holiday errands, go on a date night or take a nap! The cost is \$10 for the first child and \$5 for each additional child in the family. Parent's Night Out is available to Easterseals' clients and their siblings. Please contact Ali or Jamie to register at 815-725-2194 x 210. The deadline to register has passed, but we still have some openings! Call today to see if there is still availability for your children!



## Winter Session: Social Skills Groups

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other social delays have difficulty developing social skills, and may benefit from a therapy group focusing on teaching and practicing specific skills. Groups are best for children who have made progress in individual therapy and are ready to start practicing those skills in a group setting. At each group parents receive a schedule of activities, a hand out discussing the skills that are targeted for that day and ideas on how to continue working on those skills at home. The groups are 8 week sessions and cost \$150 for the entire 8 weeks, due at registration. This service may also be billable through your insurance.

- **Highschoolers (grades 9 – 12):** Tuesday from 4:00 – 5:00 pm starting Tuesday January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and ending Tuesday February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017
- **2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade:** Thursdays from 4:00 – 5:00 pm starting Thursday January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and ending Thursday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

Call Donna Ferraro at 815-651-2018 for more information or to register. Space is limited!

## 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.

## **What's Going On In Your Community...**

### **Workshops & Resource Fairs**

#### **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?enl=7&mt=10&ls=1>

#### **Navigating the IEP Process**

The Family Resource Center on Disabilities will be hosting a FREE workshop on Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm at 11 E. Adams Street, Suite 1002, in Chicago on the rules and regulations related to creating and implementing the individualized education plan (IEP). Registration is required and can be done at [https://frcd.org/workshop\\_posts/nav-iep/](https://frcd.org/workshop_posts/nav-iep/)

#### **Transition to Post Secondary Education**

The Family Resource Center on Disabilities will be hosting a FREE workshop on Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm at 11 E. Adams Street, Suite 1002, in Chicago on the rules and regulations related to creating and implementing the individualized education plan (IEP). This training will discuss issues relating to transitioning from school to adult life/post-secondary education identifying outcomes and developing goals as part of the IEP process. Parents and young adults will become knowledgeable regarding resources in the community in order to build linkages, and ensure dignified life as a contributing citizen. Registration is required and can be done at [https://frcd.org/workshop\\_posts/transition-to-post-secondary-education/](https://frcd.org/workshop_posts/transition-to-post-secondary-education/)

### **Recreational & Social Opportunities**

#### **Caring Santa**

The Caring Santa program provides a subdued and welcoming atmosphere for children with special needs and their families to visit with Santa. On Sunday December 4<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Caring Santa will be in the Ice Palace at Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg. It is a free event and picture

packages will be available for purchase. For more details or register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/caring-santa-tickets-27124951460?aff=es2>

## **Joliet Library Holiday Events - FREE**

The Joliet Public Library will be hosting several holiday events in December for all ages and abilities. On **Tuesday, December 13th from 6:30 to 8pm at the Black Road Branch of the Library** it is time for Stories with Santa. Santa's helpers will read seasonal stories. Children will have the opportunity to meet Santa and spend time doing activities with their families. Bring your camera! *While registration is not required seating is limited.*

## **Santa House in Naperville**

Take a magical trip to visit Santa on the Naperville Riverwalk at Jackson Avenue and Webster Street. Admission is free. Photos can be purchased for \$8 each or two for \$15. Don't miss this unique opportunity to visit Santa this year! They have certain times set aside for special needs families on Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, and Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup> from 5-8pm. Reservations are required and can be done at <http://www.napervilleparks.org/santahouse>

## **Lincolnway Special Rec's Family Holiday Party**

The Lincolnway Special Recreation Association is hosting a family holiday party at their facility (1900 Heather Glen Drive in New Lenox) on **December 12th from 6-8pm** to get families into the holiday spirit. The event includes dinner, crafts, and a visit from Santa with gifts. Cost is \$4 for LWSRA residents, \$6 per person for SSSRA residents, and \$10 per person for non-residents. Registration is due by December 7th. Find out more information and register online at <http://www.lwsra.org/>

## **KidsWork Children's Museum Special Needs Day**

KidsWork Children's Museum is a fun exploration opportunity in Frankfort. They host a special needs day on the **December 11th from 9:30-11am**. This is an opportunity for your special needs child to explore without crowds or overstimulation. The museum is only open to those who register at these times, which provides a safe and accepting environment. This is a free event to those who register. The museum is located at 11 S. White St., Frankfort, IL. To register for this event call KidsWork at 815-469-1199.

## **Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism – Art Happenings Workshops**

Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism will kick off 2016 with a series of monthly Art Happenings Workshops for families having member with Autism. The workshops will have an art focus and all family members are encouraged to participate. This is a causal way for the families of people with Autism to explore the expressive arts while getting to know each other. These workshops will be held on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 4:30pm to 6:00pm at the art gallery at 356 E. Merchant Street, Kankakee, IL

## Upcoming Dates

December 27th, 2016 - Numbers with Art

## 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 [www.exploration-station.org](http://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, October 25<sup>th</sup>) 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](mailto:Ana.Garcia-Maldonado@alexian.net) or call 847-755-8536.

## Play For All at Chicago’s Children Museum

On the second Saturday of every month at 9:00am, the Chicago Children’s Museum will open and host Play For All: For Families with Children with Disabilities. The museum invites children and families with disabilities to come and experience CCM’s playful, multisensory exhibits for a special private hour inside the museum. Play For All Families are welcome to stay and continue exploring the museum all day. The first 250 visitors to register receive FREE admission. Pre-registration is required. This is held every second Saturday of the month. For more information and to register, go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/december-2016-play-for-all-for-families-with-children-with-disabilities-tickets-29335809195?aff=erelexpmlt>

## 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](mailto:info@namiwillgrundy.org). Locations and dates listed below.

<b>Town</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Times</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Joliet	Presence St. Joseph's	6:00-7:30pm 1st and 3rd Sundays	Dec. 4th and 18th
Morris	Morris Hospital	7:00 - 8:30 pm 2nd Tuesday	December 13th
Bolingbrook	Adventist Hospital	6:00 pm – 7:30 pm 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	December TBD

*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](mailto: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](http://autismspeaks.org) for more posts.

### Holiday travel & autism: Five tips for success on the road

Do you have some strategies to help us maintain toilet training when we travel with our 10-year-old who has autism? There’s no problem remembering to use the bathroom at home and school. But we still need a diaper when we travel or otherwise disrupt our usual routine.

Today’s “Got Questions?” answer is by psychologist and behavior analyst Daniel W. Mruzek, of the University of Rochester Medical Center. The medical center is one of 14 sites in the [Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network](#).



**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.**

That’s an outstanding question that’s especially timely as we enter the season for holiday travel. In particular, your question highlights a common consideration for children with autism – the variability of skilled behavior across time and settings. This includes the “on again, off again” nature of learned skills, even those that seem to be well established.

One principle to remember – for all of us – is that knowing is not the same as doing. For example, I can plainly state the key attributes of a great golf swing. However, as my sons are happy to attest, I regularly sail golf balls into nearby woods, ponds and even behind me. Of course, on other occasions, I hit the ball straight down the fairway.

“Why can’t I do that every time?” That’s variability.



This notion of “variability” is likewise a key consideration in toilet training. Children can learn the necessary skills: recognizing the need to go, sitting on the toilet, etc. But they may still commonly fail to use these skills at the right times.

This seems to be particularly true for two groups of children:

1) Those who have recently learned the skill of toileting but for whom it’s still not yet an established habit

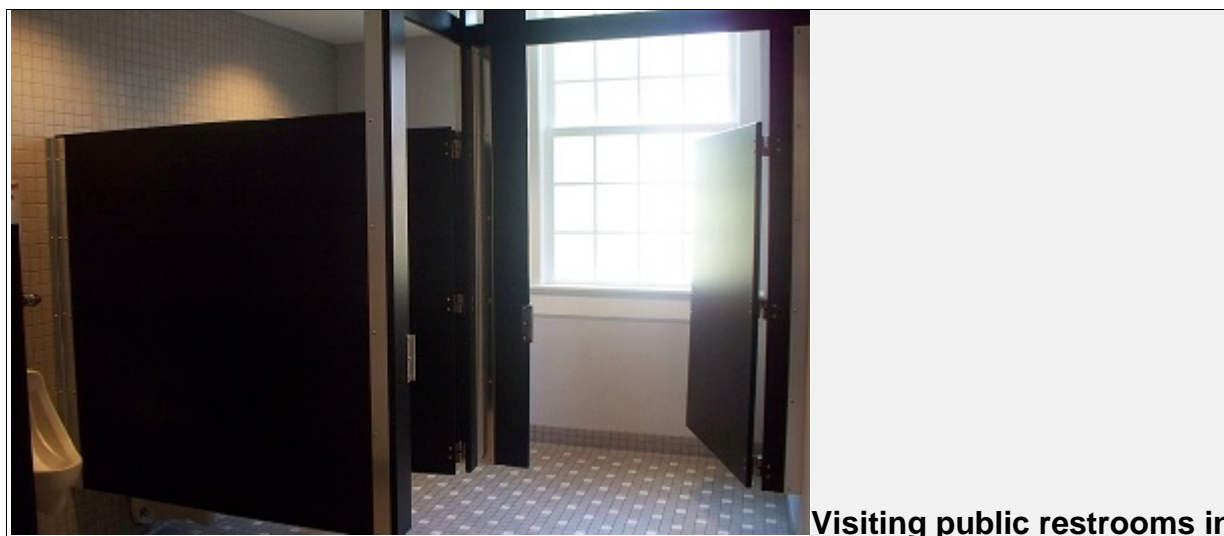
and

2) Those for whom toilet accidents are a longstanding and recurring problem.

Your child sounds like he falls into the second group. It includes kids who “know” the toileting routine and use the toilet with few or no accidents for days, weeks or even months at a time. Then they have periods when, for any number of reasons, they fall back into a pattern of accidents.

Some of these reasons include an illness, a period of increased anxiety or, as you describe, a disruption in regular routine.

Here are five strategies and a special consideration that may help:



**Visiting public restrooms in**

**advance of a road trip can help make them feel less intimidating.**

### **#1 Practice visiting public restrooms**

Toileting is a skill that’s prone to becoming what behavior analysts refer to as “stimulus

bound.” In essence, this means that the probability of success increases in familiar settings and circumstances. Coaches refer to this as the “home field advantage.”

The key to expanding the home field advantage is to use skills in a variety of settings. So in preparing for an upcoming vacation, I suggest that you encourage your child to use different public restrooms. This can be during day outings such as going to the library, grocery store, etc.

As with all toileting routines, keep these practice trips “low stress.” Be sure to reward efforts with praise and compliments.

By the way, I suggest encouraging your child to drink water or another healthy beverage before or during these practice trips to increase the likelihood of needing to use a public toilet.

The goal here is to promote “generalization” of toileting skills across settings. Generalization of a skill doesn’t necessarily happen spontaneously. We need opportunities for practice.

## **#2 Provide positive reinforcement**

Be generous with positive reinforcement immediately after your child uses a toilet outside of home and school. Complement your praise with a favorite treat or activity. It’s a powerful way to teach a new behavior.

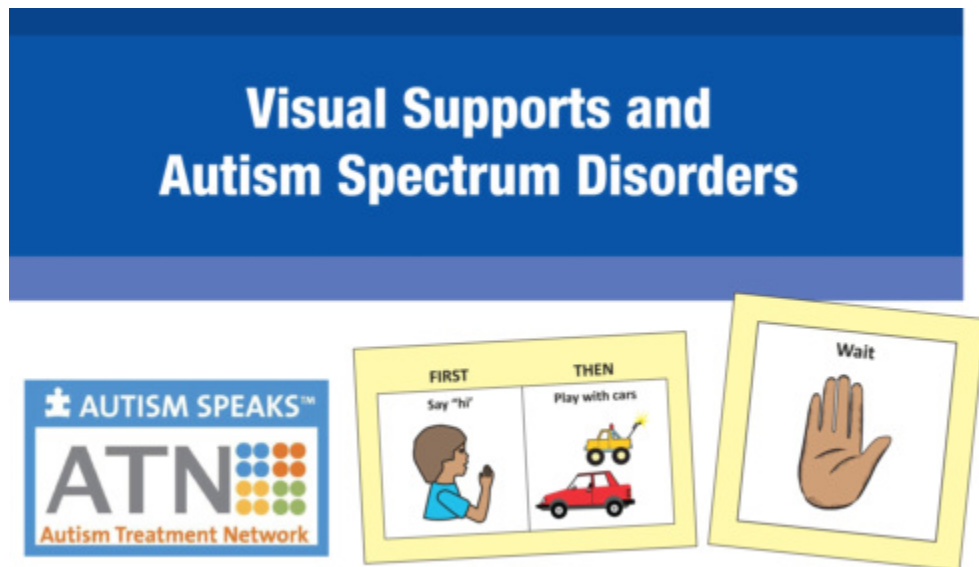
You can gradually decrease and drop (“fade”) these rewards as your child becomes more reliable with using the bathroom in new situations. I suggest that you continue using praise to maintain the toileting behavior.

In general, I encourage you to look for instances of successful behavior to celebrate with your child. This can include remaining dry, using a public restroom or otherwise following a vacation schedule. Here are some techniques for doing so:

## **#3 Consider visual supports**

On your next vacation, it may be helpful to use a visual support such as a schedule board with bathroom breaks listed or “First-Then” boards (e.g., “First bathroom, then trip to the

restaurant”). Still other visual supports can include photographs or icons that prompt your child to think about taking a bathroom break.

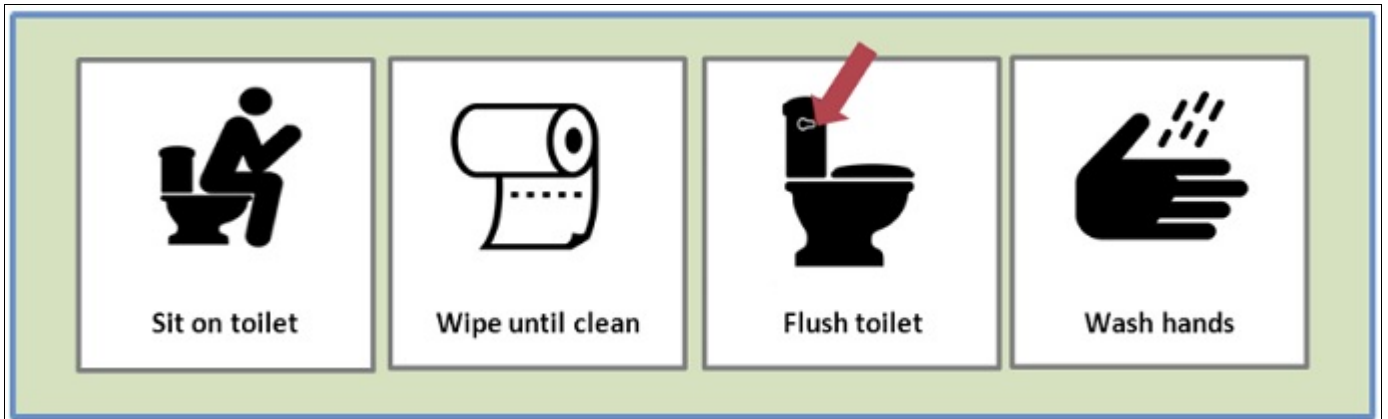


Learn more about visual supports and download the *Autism Speaks ATN/AIR-P Visual Supports Tool Kit* [here](#).

#### **#4 Use prompts, but try not to nag**

Establish a simple routine for prompting your child to stop and consider whether it's time to go to the bathroom. Of course, you might just ask. (e.g., "Do you need to go now?") But in the interest of privacy, you may want to simply use a gesture or point to a designated symbol on a communication board.

Try to avoid doing what many of us parents (myself included) do too often: nag or dwell on the negative, in this case accidents. Instead, provide brief, direct prompts in as few words as possible.



**A sample visual schedule from the Autism Speaks toilet training tool kit. See the link at the end of this post to download the kit free of charge.**

### **#5 Schedule bathroom breaks**

When on vacation – or during other changes in the usual routine – set aside time for bathroom use. I suggest doing this in two ways:

1) A daily schedule of bathroom breaks – for example, after breakfast, lunch, etc.

and

2) Visiting the bathroom immediately prior to fun activities. For example, before going to the pool or beach.

### **Special considerations around public bathrooms**

When it comes to using public bathrooms, I suggest the additional consideration that there may be something stressful about this environment for your child. In fact, many children with autism have anxiety about specific aspects of public bathrooms. The unexpected noise of an automatically flushing toilet comes to mind!

If you sense your child has related apprehensions, I recommend providing supports such as ear plugs or a calm warning about what to expect.

Additionally, a psychologist or occupational therapist may be able to work with you and your child to identify and address such sources of anxiety.

Second, when despite your best efforts, your child has an accident, react with as little fanfare and conversation as possible. Encourage a prompt changing of clothes in a matter-of-fact tone, with a brief reminder of your expectations going forward.

But I recommend against focusing on the accident. Keep your attention on celebrating and praising successes.

This certainly isn't the final word on the subject. I invite others to contribute their ideas, so we can all learn from each other. Meanwhile, I wish you all the best for your upcoming travels.

## **Why I'm Proud My Child Won't Be in This Year's Christmas Play**

By Miriam Gwynne From the website [The Mighty](#)



Maybe I am getting old, but it does seem like talk of Christmas starts earlier every year. We are only just over Halloween, and already the shops have festive music, selection boxes and wrapping paper in prominent places! But as a trained teacher, there is one place I totally understand preparing early for the holidays, and that is schools. There is a presumption that schools and churches will put on an annual play or concert of some sort, and the organization involved in these is tremendous. It can take months of preparation to teach children songs, practice words and prepare costumes. It is a highlight of the year for many parents and children.

This year, my daughter, who just turned 8, has asked not to be in the Christmas play.

At first I was disappointed, as Christmas is one of my favourite times of year, and both my church and her school put on wonderful shows. But when she told me why she didn't want to be included, I actually cried.

"I don't enjoy it at all," she told me.

It is my duty as a parent to listen to my children and support them. She has a right to choose. My daughter has selective mutism, anxiety and autism. Being on a stage in front of others, remembering stage directions and song words, and wearing itchy costumes is something she finds stressful. She finds the change of routine difficult and the noise frightening. The thought that everyone is looking at her makes her feel physically sick.

I realized I wanted her to be part of it for all the wrong reasons. I wanted it for me, not for her. I didn't want her feeling excluded or feeling like she was missing out. But in actual fact, I was putting her in a situation that made her uncomfortable and stressed.

This year, I will watch the church play and her school play. No doubt I will still cry at "Away in a Manger" and beam with pride at the children in the plays. Instead of watching my little girl perform, I will have the beauty of holding her hand as she sits next to me and cheers for her friends. She will sing the songs happily, and for the first time, I will manage to hear every word as her beautiful voice is right next to my ears. We will laugh together at the fun parts and share the experience in a way she finds relaxing and enjoyable. It will be magical, but in a different way than I imagined.

It took courage for her to be able to tell me something she knew I would find difficult to hear. She knows how much I love watching her do things, and she knows how proud I am of her. This year she knows I am extra proud at the fact she felt she could tell me she doesn't enjoy being part of the Christmas play.

I will never forget her smile and the sparkle in her eyes the night I told her how proud I am of her for not being in the Christmas play this year.

It is OK to be different. It is OK to say no sometimes, too.

This article was originally posted on 11/14/16 on The Mighty can be found at the following link:

<https://themighty.com/2016/11/autism-why-im-proud-my-child-wont-be-in-this-years-christmas-play/>

