

# DECEMBER 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...

### Social Skills Group: 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> graders



Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have difficulty applying the social skills they have learned through therapy in a variety of social settings. They may benefit from a Social Skills Group to specifically practice applying skills with other kids their age. In this group we can build on strengths they already have and develop more advanced skills. We will incorporate activities they encounter in their everyday world, like working in a group on a school project, understanding complex friendships, bringing up concerns with others managing their emotions and resolving conflict. We will also facilitate friendship building activities within the group and target skills requested by the group. Parents are provided with a weekly handout on the activities, an explanation of skills targeted and ideas on how to carry those skills over at home. This group is the right fit for children who have made progress with individual therapy and are ready to start practicing those skills in a group setting with a 1:4 ratio.

**WHEN: Every THURSDAY 5PM-6PM from January 10<sup>th</sup> through February 28<sup>th</sup>**

This group will be 8 weeks long and meet once a week. The cost of the entire session is \$150, due at the first meeting. If interested please contact Laura Gardner LCSW 815-927-5466 or [lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com](mailto:lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com)

### 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 13<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 Laura Gardner to register at 815-927-5466. Call today to see if there is still availability for your children!



## 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. Next month we will meet **on Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**. 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.** **The next meeting will be on Friday December 7<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.

## 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! **The next screening day will be Friday December 14<sup>th</sup>**. 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

#### **Free Workshops: Legal Information YOU need**

Join us for a series of FREE workshops presented by attorney Consuelo Puente at Disability Resource Center in Joliet. These events are open to the public and will be available in both English and Spanish. Supportive Housing Options: Living in Your Community. Also, free legal consults (donation suggested) with Ms. Puente are available **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY** between 1 pm and 4 pm on Monday December 10. Call Katy or Sam at 815-729-0162 to set up an appointment.

## **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/](http://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**

### **Autism Therapy Assistance Grant**

The Chicago Autism Project is offering up to \$10,000 for an Autism Therapy Assistance Grant. The grant program provides support for life-changing services including speech, ABA, occupational, feeding, and physical therapy. The Chicago Autism Project is a certified 501©(3) nonprofit dedicated to helping families impacted by autism. You can learn more about the mission and programs at [ChicagoAutismProject.org](http://ChicagoAutismProject.org). Families can apply online in minutes at: <https://chicagoautismproject.org/Autism-Therapy-Grant/>

## **Recreational & Social Opportunities**

### **Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism**

The Merchant Street Art Gallery features art shows, classes and events celebrating artists with Autism Spectrum Disorder. They are located at 356 Merchant Street Kankakee, IL and can be reached at 815-685-9057 or [info@merchantstreetartgallery.org](mailto:info@merchantstreetartgallery.org) You can visit their website at [www.merchantstreetartgallery.org](http://www.merchantstreetartgallery.org) to read about their mission and see their calendar of events.

Merchant Street presents Holidays on Merchant Street: featuring art work that celebrate the holidays. For this show, art purchased may be taken home at the time of purchase. Opening Reception is November 2<sup>nd</sup> and the exhibit is open from November 2<sup>nd</sup> to December 29<sup>th</sup>. You can visit the exhibit on Thursdays and Fridays from noon to 4:00pm and on Saturdays from 10:00am to 1:00pm. You can also schedule an appointment by calling or texting 815-685-9057 to schedule.

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

The Joliet Public Library will be hosting several holiday events in December for all ages and abilities. On **Wednesday, December 12th from 10:00am-11:30am 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 Monday December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, and Thursday, December 13<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 17th from 6-8:30pm** 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, \$5 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/>

## Recurring Monthly Events

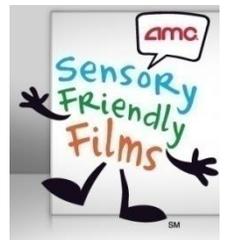
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

## 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. **The next Sensory Sensitive Sunday will occur on October 7th** from 9am-11am at the Joliet and Villa Park locations, and from 8am-10am at the Naperville and Tinley Park locations.

## 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 **Tuesday evenings AND every second and fourth Saturday every month**. To find specific showtimes, more information, and nearby theaters: <http://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films>



## 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 4:30pm-5:30pm**. 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. There is also special needs story time going on at the same time! 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

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> - the next one is on **Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup>**.

# 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. They are also working to put together additional support groups for parents and family members who speak Spanish! 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).

*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 [lgardner@joliet.easterseal.com](mailto:lgardner@joliet.easterseal.com) to be considered for our next newsletter*

## Articles of the Month



# Ten Toys for Children with Autism

September 6, 2018

*We asked parents and experts for a list of toys that may provide the best opportunities for fun and learning.*

## [Simple First Words: Let’s Talk](#)

*Priddy Books*

Look at the picture. Locate the matching button on the sound bar. Then, press the button to hear the word. That’s it! There are no other sound effects or music to distract youngsters from learning the

simple, clearly spoken words. Reinforce finger-pointing skills by having the child use one isolated finger to activate. For those unable to isolate individual fingers, encourage them to use several fingers or a whole hand movement. (Board Book; 22 pages)

### 2-in-1 Snug 'n Secure Swing

*Little Tikes*

This molded-plastic swing provides a fun-filled way for little ones to help improve their vestibular function while developing visual, spatial, perception and postural control abilities. A removable T-bar rotates downward for easy loading/unloading. In addition, the high seat back, safety belt, deep seat well and high sides provide an extra boost of confidence to children beginning to explore motion.

### Smart Tablet

*Fisher-Price*

Log on and learn! The color-changing LCD screen adds to the excitement and keeps children's visual attention as they problem solve their way through numbers, letters, phonics, typing, music and more. Six learning modes offer a wide range of learning and creative expression opportunities. The touch-screen, QWERTY keyboard reinforces cause-and-effect learning as users make a direct connection between what they press with their fingers and what happens on the screen. Convert for tabletop use to make the tablet more accessible for children who need extra stability.

### Sound Puzzles

*Melissa & Doug*

These sound puzzles provide a wealth of skill-building opportunities as problem-solvers see, listen and learn! Children use their pincer grasp to lift each puzzle piece by its knob. When the piece is placed correctly on the board, players are rewarded with realistic transportation sounds! These auditory responses provide positive reinforcement and motivate continued play. Also, the corresponding illustrations on the puzzle board provide visual cues and help place success within reach. Choose from Train or Vehicles.

### Disney Mickey's Color Adventure Playland

*Moose Mountain*

This inflatable clubhouse offers engaging sensory and social opportunities. Older children will enjoy big-muscle challenges as they grasp and toss the balls into the top, while younger children visually track the primary-colored balls as they swirl down and around, then spill out and fill the ball-pit floor. Encourage social interaction by having one child pick up a ball using one or both hands, then handing it to another player to throw into the top

### Jumpsmart Electronic Trampoline

## *Diggin' Active*

Kids will jump for joy as they bounce along to fun learning games and silly songs! As they bounce, children receive stimulation and input from their joints that can help regulate and provide inner balance, positively affecting attention and organizational skills. Best of all, every bounce is rewarded with sounds or music! This instant reinforcement helps further cause and effect learning and motivates kids to keep jumping. (Sturdy enough for children up to 80 lbs.)

## [Calico Critters Family Camper and Cherry Cruiser](#)

### *International Playthings*

Sized right for tabletop or floor-time fun, these toys provide opportunities for imaginative play, as well as language and vocabulary development, as children tell travel tales about camping adventures. The top hinges on the camper open and a side folds out for easy access. And when it's time to call it a day, hitch the camper to the Cherry Cruiser and head on home! Critter families sold separately.

## [Hungry Hungry Hippos](#)

### *Hasbro*

It's fun to find out who has the hungriest hippo! Use an isolated finger or an entire hand... because one repetitive movement is all that it takes to start the frantic feeding! Plus, no reading is required. Players are also introduced to the concept of competition using parallel play—instead of turn-taking— for a less-frustrating, more fun-filled, first gaming experience! (For 2-4 players. Includes game base, hippos, levers, marbles, stickers and instructions.)

## [Xbox 360 4GB Gaming System with Kinect](#)

### *Microsoft*

You're the controller! The Kinect sensor uses full-body tracking that recognizes players and mirrors their every move. Exploring with the on-screen avatar helps provide children with a sense of self-awareness and movement. Kinetic stimulation comes into play by way of weight shifting, jumping, balance, and arm and leg movements. Visual tracking, attention, processing and reacting also play a major role in each game

## [Bop It!](#)

### *Milton Bradley*

Bop, pull and twist your way to victory! Players listen to the auditory prompts and then respond quickly with manual movements that employ a whole-hand grasp. These various actions offer fun opportunities to reinforce listening skills and the importance of following directions. And the better players get the more skill levels they'll unlock. So, get ready to think fast!



## Enjoying the magic of Christmas – autism style

Liz Becker

As Christmas approaches I can't help but reflect on the years past and how my son Matt has changed in his own way to embrace the spirit of the season. Matt is almost 26 years old, so there's plenty to reflect upon. As I thought about all of our unique experiences I wondered, "Do other parents of autistic children have this much fun?"

I use the word "fun" because looking at it from my point of view it would all make such a great movie, a comedy I think, about learning the true meaning of Christmas. Don't get me wrong, there were a few years with too much family drama. Some were budget-breaking extravaganzas, while others were completed on a shoestring, financially. Some were tearful - due to overwhelming joy, and others tearful because they were absolutely heart-wrenching. Yet all, every single one, ended with the warmth of a love-filled home, smiles on children's faces, full bellies, and plenty of unforgettable (and sometimes pretty hilarious) memories.

We always went on a drive to see Christmas lights and decorations on or near Christmas Eve and we always waited to put the toys and gifts under the tree until after the kids were asleep. This was a challenge as every year for 10 years Matt would camp out in the hallway with his pillow, blanket and fan (he has slept with a humming fan next to his head all his life) to await the arrival of Santa (maybe catch a glimpse) and we had to traverse this blockade without waking him. It was a two-person job - a team effort - just to get the packages from point A (bedroom closet) to point B (under the tree.) Matt never knew, never awoke even once and it kept the magic of Christmas alive, and the illusion of presents just suddenly appearing under the tree safe for another season.

There was the year of my divorce where I had nothing to give my children, no money to buy gifts and no tree decorated and blinking. Just days before Christmas friends and family got together and delivered a small decorated tree, supplied gifts for my children and took us into their home for a holiday feast. Just days before I had been caught crying by Matt. He responded by crawling into my lap, putting his hand on my face and said "momma" for the very first time. It turned out to be one of the best Christmases ever for me.

There was the first Christmas after autism set in when Matt loved the boxes more than the toys that came in them. There were several where he fought Santa tooth and nail at the Mall, and another where the one toy he wanted was the one toy we searched for in store after store for weeks to no avail and had to leave a note under the tree that promised one would arrive soon. The Christmases after he could write were much better because we encouraged him to write to Santa (you know, that bearded guy he fought tooth and nail just a year before). The letters gave us insight to what he really longed for and sent us on a mission to obtain said items early in the season to make sure a note would not have to go under the tree ever again. Matt asked for a wide variety of items over the years: building blocks and Lego kits, Ninja Turtles, Ghostbusters, Jurassic Park vehicles, Toy Story action figures, Thomas the

Train VCR tapes and train accessories, space shuttle models, airplane models, a Big Wheel, a bike, Home Alone tapes and art supplies, books, clothes (as a teenager he became aware of his appearance and actually wanted clothes!), and sports paraphernalia for Virginia Tech. Take a look at that list again - nothing in it says autism . . . nothing.

Church plays and concerts were met with tantrums and meltdowns - Matt hated the loudness of the music and although fascinated by the plays, did not wish to partake as one of the shepherds. Instead, Matt crawled under the pews or walked the periphery or explored any region of the church he could get away with. This meant I was constantly looking for where Matt was while trying to watch our other children perform. And there were times when I had to miss something - a line, a song, a part of my other kid's holiday, to run after or console a weeping Matt. But children of all ages act out at times or are afraid and must be consoled. I would wager that most parents at one time or another miss their other children's stuff too. Autism doesn't cause the problems - childhood does.

And while visiting Santa was traumatic as a small child, he finally did grow a desire to talk to the big guy in the red suit and it evolved almost overnight into a must-do ritual. Did it really matter that he was now 10 - 12 years old and twice the height of the other children in line? Did it matter that he would only stand next to Santa and talk, not sit on his lap? It never fazed Santa, it never fazed Matt and it never fazed us.

Then one year it happened - Matt no longer wanted to see Santa. He had become skeptical of the magic tale and he needed something more. It was finally *time*. We all know it will happen and we all know we have to eventually break the news to our kids, but how you do it matters - it matters a lot. Breaking the news of the childhood lie was something I had thought about for years - literally. When it came time to sit him down I was ready. I told him that little children believe in a Santa Clause because it is magical and fun. I told him that as a child becomes an adult they know something is amiss - this is because they get smarter. I told him that adults are Santa and when they become adults it is their job to keep the magic a secret and be the Santa for others. Matt especially liked this idea. He would be the secret Santa and keep the magic alive -- he took this responsibility to heart.

Every year since our talk, Matt has been the essence of the Christmas spirit. He hunts for items for each family member and wraps them and puts them under the tree. Matt even buys for himself. He wraps it up and puts a tag on it - *to Matt from Santa* - and on Christmas morning he opens the gift that he himself wrapped and is wonderfully surprised and excited to find exactly what he wanted. His joy at watching Charlie Brown and Snoopy, the Grinch and Rudolph are contagious as well as his excitement at decorating a tree, stringing lights and wrapping gifts. Matt lights up our home and our hearts. Our other children are all grown up and moved away into their own homes and are creating their own season of magic. Yet even with our children grown and our house mostly empty we still have plenty of the Christmas spirit lighting every dark crack and crevice. Matt remind us daily that it is love that matters most - not the gifts or twinkling lights or Christmas songs but the deep desire to give the gifts, wanting to display the lights and to sing the songs that makes it all so magical. Autism does not prevent the desire and it does not prevent the love from being felt. Autism is just the surface. What is inside each of us is what matters, autistic or not. For my husband and me, Matt makes Christmas, Christmas.

I know it sounds too warm and fuzzy to some of you. I can assure you it was not always this way. We felt the aloofness of extended family members, the constant veil of stress, and jumped the hurdles that appeared almost daily from out of nowhere. But that was "then". Something changed along the way and it wasn't just Matt - it was me too. I am now the one who rides the waves of autism with him taking away from each experience the comedic factor and laughing away the conformist part of me that used to think everything had to be just so perfect. I understand now that life really is what we make of it – should Christmas be any different? Enjoy the quirks, survive the stress, and be ready to look back and laugh. Think of the stories you could tell!

Matt just finished wrapping another gift he bought for himself and placing it beneath the tree. I can't wait to see his surprised and joyful expression when he opens that same gift on Christmas morning! It's Christmas - autism style.  
Courtesy of [Liz Becker](#)

Read more: <http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/news/enjoying-magic-christmas-autism-style-3827882#ixzz5YM4snwNO>