

# November 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 1:3 ratio.



**WHEN:** THURSDAYS 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)

#### 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, November 14<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 November 2nd.** 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 November 9<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.

## Celebrate the Season: A Recreation of the Historical Walnut Room Hosted by Easterseals Joliet

Join us to celebrate the joy of good friends and family as you dine under a magnificent Christmas tree, listen to holiday music, make wishes with Christmas fairies, visit with Santa, and make memories that will last forever. This event is held at the beautiful and historic Jacob Henry Mansion Estate at 15 S. Richards Street, Joliet, IL 60433. There are three meal seatings: November 17, 2018 at 4pm, November 18, 2018 at 12pm and November 18, 2018 at 4pm. This annual fundraiser helps support all of the amazing programs Easterseals offers to children and adults with disabilities. The cost is \$40 per adult, \$20 for children 12 and under, and an optional \$10 for a printed photo with Santa.



Tickets on sale now at <http://www.easterseals.com/joliet/get-involved/events/holiday-fundraiser.html> or you can call 815-725-2194.

There are also sponsorship opportunities available, which help make a difference in the lives of children and adults with disabilities. We are looking for volunteers to be \*Christmas Fairies\* and grant wishes to the children attending. This is a great way to earn community service/volunteer hours. Contact Teresa Summers at [tsummers@joliet.easterseals.com](mailto:tsummers@joliet.easterseals.com)

# 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.

- Thurs. Nov. 1 & Nov. 8 - 9:30 am to 11 am - Supportive Housing Options: Living in Your Community

- Sat. Nov. 10 - 10 am to 12 pm - 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 the following Mondays: September 24, October 29, November 26, and 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.

### **Free Webinar: Hey, Wanna Be My Friend?**

This Webinar is being offered by StarNet Region VI, and is free to families and professionals working with young children. On **December 4, 2018; 3:30pm-5:00pm** there will be an online presentation about social emotional skills in young children. Young children need key social emotional skills to be successful as they enter school (and all of life). Setting the stage is necessary to build skills for making friends, which doesn't come naturally to all kids. In this webinar we will discuss the opportunities to embed these skills using discrete, systematic teaching of friendship skills and participants will explore ways to embed practice in daily routines. We will also discuss how to provide supports to children with special needs and those with challenging behavior.

Register on-line: <https://conta.cc/2JJiHmS>

### **2018 Autism and Special Needs Seminar**

The Autism and Special Needs Seminar Showcases Expert speakers and vendors with tables displaying their products and services regarding Autism and Special Needs. The seminar will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Building M on the campus. This event's goal is to give parents insights and the answers that they have been searching for. Vendors can be visited from 9am-3pm. speakers will be giving presentations from 10am-5pm. Don't miss out keynote speaker, Dr. Valerie Nowinski, in room 2 and 3 from 10am -12pm. With a variety of speakers and exhibitors, attendees will be offered unique

resources and beneficial information. Caroline O'Connell, Family Time Magazine's publisher, founded the seminar in 2009 after seeing a need to provide more resources to families with loved ones with autism and other developmental disabilities. There is a fee to attend.

DATE: Saturday, November 10th 2018

TIME: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

LOCATION: Moraine Valley Community College

9000 W. College Pkwy., Building M

Palos Hills, IL 60465

## **Therapy Resources**

### **Ready, Set, Go: "Fast Track" – DRS Curriculum**

Students of all abilities have a new opportunity for honing independent living skills in their own schools this fall! The Fast Track program is designed to enhance the ability of students to transfer skills learned in the classroom to real-life situations, such as gainful employment or post-secondary education. The program is the result of an exciting new partnership between the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and area schools. Taught by Independent Living Advocates Jerrod Nichols (Will County) and Tabitha Boshears (Grundy County), the FREE workshops are held in small or large groups of 8 to 20 students, and can be taught in the classroom during the school day. Topics include: self-advocacy, money management, communication skills, engaged listening, negotiation, independent living skills, job exploration, goal setting, and much more. While some of these topics may already be included in a school's curriculum, this program is a great way for students to continue their education and put what they have learned into action within the lessons. The curriculum will include a combination of Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning Experiences, Counseling on PostSecondary Education, Workplace Readiness Training, and Instruction in Self-Advocacy. For more information on the Fast Track program, call (815) 729- 0162 or email Jerrod at [jerrod@drcjoliet.org](mailto:jerrod@drcjoliet.org) or Tabitha at [tabitha@drcjoliet.org](mailto:tabitha@drcjoliet.org).

## **Recreational & Social Opportunities**

### **Check Your Library!!**

If you are looking for something to do with your kids this fall, don't forget to check your local library! Each library website has a link to events that they host and different activities daily. It's a great way of socializing and the activities range to all ages. Many libraries now host programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of kids with different abilities, so if you feel your child isn't ready for "typical" library groups yet, call and find out what else they offer!

### **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

Here are some of their current and upcoming events:

## Hands on Art History

Featured Artist: Leonardo Di Vinci. Open to the public. Attendance policy: all children 17 and under and those who are 18, that are not their own guardian, must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult who is at least 21 years old. Tuesday, November 13, 2018- 4:30pm to 6:30pm

## Recurring Monthly Events

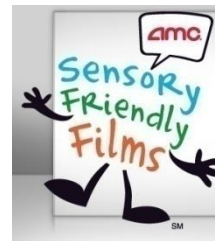
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

## 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

### 7 Tips for Including Kids with Autism in Family Events



**Extended family can be more challenging than autism**

PRINT

By [Lisa Jo Rudy](#) | Reviewed by [Joel Forman, MD](#)  
Updated May 30, 2018

There are parents and in-laws who work hard to understand autism and make life easier and pleasanter for their children and grandchildren on the spectrum. There are sisters and brothers who fully understand that life with autism can be complex and difficult—and who cheerfully

offer babysitting, respite care, and genuine support. Then, there are those parents, in-laws, and siblings who seem unable to be in the same room as an autistic child.

If you're the parent of an autistic child who struggles to find a way to attend family events without negative comments, criticism, rolled eyes or bad advice, you're not alone. Fortunately, it's not hard to understand why autism might make some family members uncomfortable, and it's even easier to plan your family get-togethers in such a way that you, your child, and your extended family members can all enjoy the experience.

## Why Autism Can Be Hard for Extended Family

It's not hard to understand why extended family might have a difficult time with autism, especially if they've never experienced it before. Some of those reasons are understandable; others may be upsetting, frustrating, or even anger-inducing. Here are just a few of the more common reasons for your family members' discomfort:

- Most typical adults are very uncomfortable with even very slight differences in social communication. We are carefully trained to expect specific responses, and when we don't get them we are made uneasy. More significant differences (a child who is non-verbal, for example) can create real anxiety. This uneasiness may actually be sub-conscious, and your family members may not recognize their discomfort until it's pointed out to them.
- [Myths and misconceptions about autism](#) can be paralyzing. Some people are under the misapprehension that people with autism are contagious, aggressive, or unable to feel affection. These myths can cause family members to pull away from an autistic child.
- Autistic children who are aggressive can actually frighten extended family, who fear for their own safety and the safety of their children. In some cases, there are legitimate reasons for fear, but these cases are extremely rare.
- Some extended family members are embarrassed by the fact of having a disabled family member. This may be "wrong," but it's not unusual. Intellectual disability and mental illness are traditionally (if wrongly) considered to be "weaknesses," and people with autism

may have intellectual disabilities and are often (incorrectly) believed to be mentally ill.

- In some cases, extended family members feel "put upon" when asked to make accommodations for disabled family members. They have their ways, and their traditions, and, rightly or wrongly, have no desire to change.
- Some well-meaning family members may worry that they will approach your child in the wrong way and upset them. Seeing that your child has very specific preferences and is easily thrown off by changes in routine, they may believe it's best to take a hands-off approach and "wait for him to come to me." Of course, they may not understand that autistic children rarely approach others on their own.
- In some cases, family members may feel pushed aside by an autistic child's lack of response to their warm advances. Autistic children rarely understand that Grandma's big hug and kiss are kindly meant and should be accepted; instead, they're likely to shriek and run away from the unexpected or uncomfortable embrace. When that happens, Grandma feels she's been rejected and has no desire to repeat the experience.

As a parent, you may well feel that a family's job is to figure out how to welcome your child, autistic or not. But if you really want your family to support your child with autism, or at least feel comfortable around them, [you will need to put some supports in place](#), both for your child and for your family. You may also need to make some tough choices about how much work you really want to put into the process.

## Tips for Bringing Together Extended Family and Your Autistic Child

You want your family to know and love your autistic child. But you dread the reactions some or all of your extended family have when your child behaves like a person with autism. Fortunately, with some forethought and planning, it should be possible to build an inclusive environment that works for everyone. Here are some tips for making it work.

1. **Consider the situation you're stepping into.** Is it worth the pain to bring a child with autism to a family wedding or funeral? If your



child is likely to act out, [melt down](#), [stim](#), or otherwise create unwelcome attention, these may not be the right venues for inclusion. Yes, he's a member of the family, and by rights should be welcomed by all—but knowing that's not going to happen, you may choose to sidestep the potential pitfalls.

2. **Offer some autism training.** Not every adult in your family cares to be told anything whatever about what autism is or what your child needs. A few, though, will probably be grateful for any information you can provide about what kinds of interactions work, which don't, how to respond to perseveration, and so forth. For those people who are willing to learn, [it's worth your while to take time to teach](#).
  3. **Know your own family and make choices accordingly.** Your mom may try to pressure you into staying with her for the holidays, but you know she'll freak out if your child does anything she's not expecting. Armed with that knowledge, you may need to stay at a hotel nearby and limit interaction between mom and your child. She may not love it, but it's better than never seeing you at all!
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1. **Plan for a quick, graceful getaway.** Most people with autism are quickly overwhelmed by lots of noise, lights, smells, and demands for social interaction. Knowing this, it makes sense to set the stage for a graceful getaway when your child shows signs of stress. Yes, you can come to the barbecue—but let family members know "we may need to take off early." If things go better than expected you can always "change plans" and stick around.
  2. **Know how you'll handle a difficult moment.** You're visiting with extended family for the holidays, and your autistic child is showing signs that he's about to melt down. What do you do? Hopefully, you've talked with your host ahead of time about a quiet space you can use in just this sort of situation. That way, you and your child can slip out as needed, and return when ready.
  3. **Have support on hand.** There are situations, such as a visit to a restaurant, theme park, etc., in which it's almost impossible to help an autistic child cope with stress while also being a "good" daughter,

son, sister, brother, or parent to siblings. Knowing that that's the case, it's wise to have at least one other adult on hand who can take over, either by helping your autistic child or by supervising the other children (or demanding adults) in your group.

1. **Have a plan for lowering your own anxiety level.** If you're like many people, you want your extended family to be happy with you, proud of you, and comfortable with you and your partner and children. When you have a child with autism, though, that's not always possible. You may feel angry, frustrated, or sad as a result. How will you let off steam? Knowing you have somewhere to go with your not-so-happy feelings can make or break a family visit.



## Seven Ways to Help a Picky Eater

October 9, 2018

*Autism often goes hand in hand with food aversions; an expert provides strategies for gently expanding a narrow diet.*

If you have a picky eater with autism, know that you're not alone. A recent [review of scientific studies](#) found that children with autism are five times more likely to have mealtime challenges such as extremely narrow food selections, ritualistic eating behaviors (e.g. no foods can touch) and meal-related tantrums.

Researchers are still trying to fully understand the autism-picky eating connection. And Autism Speaks is currently funding a [research project](#) focused on expanding food choices by addressing underlying anxiety, inflexibility and sensory issues.

Meanwhile, the lead researcher of this new project – psychologist Emily Kuschner, PhD, of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) – recommends the following strategies to gently expand the diet of picky eaters with autism. (CHOP is a member of [Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network](#).)

### #1 Rule Out Medical Problems

If your child is clamping her lips shut when offered a certain food, it may be that she knows it will make her stomach hurt. Gastrointestinal distress is common among children with autism, many of whom can't easily describe their distress. Your child's doctor can help you figure out if this is the case and how to deal with it.

## **#2 Stay Calm**

Many children need to taste a food more than a dozen times before they're willing to eat it without a fuss. Children with autism-related sensitivities can take longer. Be patient as your child explores and samples new foods. If your child continues to reject a food even after a dozen-plus tries, perhaps he just doesn't like it. Consider trying a different food. Above all, don't let mealtime become a family battleground. Instead, get creative.

## **#3 Take Steps Toward Tasting**

Many individuals with autism are afraid to try new things. Help your child explore a new food by looking at it, touching it and smelling it. When he's ready for a taste, he can try giving the food "a kiss" or licking it before putting a whole bite into his mouth. Sometimes, mixing a new food with a favorite one can help.

## **#4 Tune into Textures**

Autism often comes with hypersensitivity to textures. So remember that it may be how a food feels in the mouth, rather than its flavor, that produces a food aversion. The squishiness of a fresh tomato is a classic example. Try chopping or blending such foods to smooth out the offending texture. That tomato, for example, can be chopped into salsa or blended and cooked into pasta sauce.

## **#5 Play with New Food**

That's right. Playing with a new food is another way to build familiarity and decrease mealtime anxiety. Together, try painting with pasta sauce. Use veggies to make faces on pizza. Use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches into fun shapes. While you're playing, let your child see you taste — and enjoy — the food.

## **#6 Offer Choices and Control**

Your loved one with autism may need to feel some control over what she puts into her mouth. It's also okay to simply not like some foods. So try to offer a broad variety and allow choices within the categories you care about. For example, you might decide that your child needs to have one serving of vegetables and one of protein for dinner. So put five types of these foods on the table and allow your child to choose at least one vegetable and one protein. Along the same lines, if you're making a favorite dish such as pasta, ask your child to add one mystery ingredient for other family members to discover during the meal. She gets to choose: corn, broccoli or chicken?

## **#7 Be Careful with Rewards**

In the long-run, it's important to reward and reinforce your child's flexibility with food and willingness to try to new foods. But blatant bribes can backfire. Your child may eat the food, but won't learn to enjoy it or understand why it's important to eat a well-rounded diet — and that's the goal. Let dessert and treats be part of meals and snacks, but don't use them as carrots to get your child to eat ... carrots.