



SEPTEMBER 2019

PARENT NEWSLETTER

From the Autism Spectrum Disorder Department at Easterseals Joliet Region

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What's Going On At Easterseals....

2019-2020 School Year Social Skills Groups

During the school year Easterseals runs social skills groups for children with Autism. Each group is a 6-8 week session that meets once per week, and every session targets a different age group and set of skills. Groups are the right fit for children who have made progress with individual therapy and are ready to start practicing those skills in a small group setting that has a ratio of one adult to three children. If you would like to put your child on the waiting list so you will be contacted when there is a group for their age; or if you are interested in more information about social skills groups for the 2019-2020 school year you can contact Laura Gardner at 815-927-5466 or lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com.

Here is the schedule for the 2019-2020 school year:

Fall Session (8 weeks):

- 4th and 5th graders meets Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 9/11/19 – 10/30/19
- Early Childhood (3 to 5 years old) meets Fridays 9:00 – 10:00 9/13/19 – 11/1/19
- Early Childhood (3 to 5 years old) meets Wednesdays 1:00 – 2:00 9/11/19 – 10/30/19

Winter Session I (6 weeks – no group the week of Thanksgiving):

- High Schoolers meets Thursday 3:00 – 4:00 11/7/19 – 12/19/19
- 6th – 8th graders meets Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 11/6/19 – 12/18/19

Winter Session II (8 weeks):

- 2nd and 3rd graders meet Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 1/8/20 – 2/26/20
- Potential for second group based upon interest

Spring Session (8 weeks):

- Kindergarten and 1st graders meet Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 3/11/20 - 4/29/20

Social Skills Group: 4th and 5th 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 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. The group is run by behavioral therapists from our Autism Department, and includes a variety of visuals, sensory supports and positive behavioral techniques to help children be successful within 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: Every Wednesday 5PM-6PM from September 11th through October 30th

The group is 8 weeks long and meets once a week. The cost of the entire session is \$150, due at the first meeting. If interested please contact Laura Gardner, LCSW at 815-927-5466 or lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com

Social Skills Group: Early Childhood (3 to 5 y.o.)

Young children with Autism can have difficulty in group settings with peers, including difficulty attending to group activities, participating in reciprocal (back and forth) play, building friendships and knowing how to ask for help with resolving conflicts. They may benefit from Social Skills Group to specifically practice skills they have learned through individual therapy, and applying those skills in a group with other kids their age. The group is run by behavioral therapists from our Autism Department, and includes a variety of visuals, sensory supports and positive behavioral techniques to help children be successful within 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.

- **AM group meets Fridays 9:00 – 10:00 starting 9/13/19 through 11/1/19**
- **PM group meets Wednesdays 1:00 – 2:00 starting 9/11/19 through 10/30/19**

Each of the groups is 8 weeks long and meets once a week.

The cost of the entire session is \$150, due at the first meeting. If interested please contact Laura Gardner, LCSW at 815-927-5466 or lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com



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 October 3rd from 5:00 – 7:30** Easterseals will be hosting a Grandparent and Extended Family Workshop, where Autism professionals will present basic information about Autism, give tips on how to support your loved ones and answer all of your questions. The cost is \$10 per family, paid at the workshop.

Registration is required. To register or if you have any 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 6:00pm – 7:30pm. 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, September 11th**. As always, childcare will be provided for those who sign up ahead of time by Easterseals staff. Both the group and childcare are free of charge. Laura Gardner is returning this month as the facilitator! Please contact Laura if you have any questions or would like 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 October 4th**. 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.

Family Center for Autism Resources

Don't forget about our amazing lending library which is full of books, articles, games, and therapy tools. We have recently refreshed our resources with some new release books and we have titles on topics ranging from understanding ASD, biographies, sensory processing disorders, comparing treatment approaches, parenting strategies, anxiety, sibling support, social skills, and more. We also have books on many other special needs and typical development. The library is free to use and open to the public. Please call us today to set up a time to explore our library and consult with one of our staff! Call Valerie Lentz at 815-927-5465

What's going on in Your Community...

Workshops & Resource Fairs

Autism's Got Talent and Resource Fair

Come join us for a family fun event! There will be activity stations, face painting, balloon art and a photobooth. Meet with some of the local businesses. There will be raffle drawings and refreshments for purchase.

Witness the talent of those who are on the Autism spectrum as they showcase their skills on stage. Also witness the magic and grand illusion of Chicagoland's favorite magician The Amazing Christopher George! The act will feature grand scale magic illusions. Be amazed as an audience member gets sawed in half and one lucky audience member will magically disappear!

All proceeds will go to support families by purchasing medical insurance for children with Autism.

Saturday, September 21, 2019

Admission: Pay what you can All donations are welcomed!

Location: Parkwood Elementary, 2150 Laurel Avenue Hanover Park, Illinois

From 1:00pm — 4:00pm

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/autisms-got-talent-and-resource-fair-tickets-66435234575>

Therapy Resources

Autism Parent Support Group

Monday, September 9th Village Grind in Oswego from **10:30am-12:00pm** for our autism parent support group! Coffee and treats on BPI! **This is a free support group!**

Monday, September 16th Grace Coffee and Wine, 42 West Countryside Parkway Yorkville, IL 60560 from **10:30am-12:00pm** for our autism parent support group! Coffee and treats on BPI! **This is a free support group!**

Recreational & Social Opportunities

Creative Sketching for Artists with Autism

Merchant Street Art Gallery provides workshops, classes and Art Therapy for youth and young adults with Autism. If you have an interest in the Creative Sketching course and would like more information about joining the Gallery go to merchantstreetartgallery.org/getinvolved

Creating original artwork begins with the foundation of an interesting subject and to get those ideas on paper begins with sketching. Sketching can be considered practice or the foundation of the art piece.

- Art materials and drawing pencils required are a sketch pad 9x12(or similar size) and a HB drawing pencil
- Learn the basics of shape and style
- Shading

- Creating Highlights and Shadow
- Relaxed environment studio setting
- new students with Autism welcome
- DATES ARE **SEPTEMBER, 14 AND 29 AND OCTOBER, 12 AND 26**. CHOOSE TO ATTEND ALL FOUR CLASSES OR TWO CLASSES IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER. **11:30am-1pm**
- To reserve go to the Event page <https://www.merchantstreetartgallery.org/events/2019/10/14/creative-sketching-for-artists-with-autism>
- Attendance Policy: When at Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism, all children 17 years old and under and those over 18 who are not their own guardian must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult who is at least 21 years old
- **Cost: \$10 per month**



Recurring Monthly Events

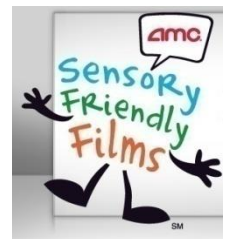
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

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

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

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.

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.

Brookfield Zoo: Sensory Friendly Rooms

Low-sensory room offers a quiet environment for children who may need a break from the potentially overstimulating environment of a day at the zoo. The room includes fidgets and other sensory-support materials, comfortable seating, blackout curtains, dimmable lights, and access to Wi-Fi. It is a safe and convenient place to deescalate before children and families return to their zoo visit. **Check if your local library offers free passes to the zoo that can be checked out.** 8400 31st Street, Brookfield, IL 60513

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

17 tips to help the transition back to school for kids with autism

This is a post by Kimberlee Rutan McCafferty, mother to two sons on the autism spectrum and an Autism Family Partner at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Kim is also the author of a blog about her two children with autism, at autismmommytherapist.wordpress.com. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/17-tips-help-transition-back-school-kids-autism>

Summer vacation is ending all too fast, and before we know it those bright yellow school busses will be darting through our neighborhoods and a new school year will commence. Moving to a different classroom, grade, or school can be stressful for any child; for those on the autism spectrum, handling anxiety about the unknown can be exceedingly difficult. These fears can be reduced by taking small steps to familiarize your child to his or her new situation prior to the beginning of the school year. I've used many of these strategies over the years with both of my autistic boys, who are on different ends of the autism spectrum. Of course all children are unique, so some may work better than others. I've actually revisited several that haven't worked in the past and found them to be helpful as the boys grew older.

Below are some tried and true tips that have helped my kids make a smooth transition in September, and have helped them to start a new school year successfully.

1. Talk to your child frequently about what to expect in the upcoming year. It's the simplest tip, and perhaps the most important one to help reduce your child's anxiety.
2. Cross days off on your calendar. Some children may have anxiety about when the school year begins. Simply crossing days off the calendar may help your child better understand when the school year starts.
3. Create a new morning routine and practice it prior to the start of the school year. Begin waking up your child a little earlier each morning so that he or she is acclimated to the new wake-up time way before that big first day. Do a few "run-throughs" near the end of summer vacation so your child knows what to

expect in the time before leaving for school. If your child responds well to visual schedules, you might create one outlining everything from getting dressed to going on the bus.

4. Take a tour of the school. This can be arranged with the case manager of your child study team. You may not get to meet your child's new teacher this early, but at least your child will become familiar with the building prior to attending. When you are on your tour, visit the main office, bathrooms, cafeteria, gym, library, playground, and any room your child may spend time in during the coming year. Take pictures on your tour and incorporate them into a social story afterwards so that you and your child can review it during the summer (a social story is a book that a parent or caretaker creates to explain in written and/or pictorial detail what the child should expect for an upcoming event).

5. Walk through emergency procedures on your visit. Many children on the spectrum have difficulty with loud noises and breaks in routine. If possible, when on your tour, have your case manager show your child where to go and what to do during any emergency scenario. Doing this will help your child be prepared, and he or she might find it fun to have mom or dad practice standing along silently.

6. Create a daily school schedule for your child. You may not know the exact routine, but even walking through one day may make your child feel more at ease. If possible, ask your case manager to acquire the present year's schedule prior to your tour, and have your visit at the school follow that schedule.

7. If at all possible, have your child meet the teacher prior to the start of school. Remember to take his or her photo and add it to your social story.

8. Write a letter outlining your child's strengths, weaknesses, possible sensory issues, dietary restrictions, and favorite reinforcers. If possible, have your child help you create this document, as it will be invaluable input for school staff. Be sure to include a few things that are fun and unique about your child. A copy of this letter (one to two pages maximum) should go to your child's teacher and

aides, but should also be made available to any staff who work with your child. Remember to send a copy to the principal, assistant principal, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech therapist, physical education instructor, music teacher, etc. It is very helpful to teachers to have a “snapshot” of your child prior to instructing him or her. Don’t hesitate to brag as well!

9. If appropriate, make certain a behavior plan is in place day one. If your child has a plan that’s been working for him or her, ask that it be shared with his or her new teacher and implemented immediately at the start of the year.

10. If your child uses an augmentative device to communicate, make sure all the adults in his or her classroom are familiar with it. Many augmentative devices require some instruction on how to use them. At the very least, the teacher should be familiar with the device prior to the fall. All the aides who will work with your child should be trained as well, and there should be a plan in place so that all are comfortable using the device within the first few weeks of school.

11. If your child has sensory issues make sure he or she has a favorite sensory item available from the first day. For those children on the spectrum who struggle from sensory overload, certain objects can offer a great deal of comfort. Make sure your child will have at least one available at all times.

12. Ask to meet the bus driver. Many bus drivers take a practice run the last week of summer vacation. Request a “meet and greet” with your driver so your child feels comfortable riding the bus on that first day. You can even ask if you and your child can do a ride-along to the school as some drivers are amenable to that request.

13. After the school year begins be on top of your child’s progress. Make contact with all of your child’s instructors in the first few weeks of school. This enables you to track how your son or daughter is progressing and lets school staff know you are interested and invested in your child’s success.

14. Write a thank-you note to your child's teacher and principal. If the first few weeks go smoothly for your child, it never hurts to thank those responsible for a smooth transition.

15. If possible, volunteer. Your presence at school sends the message that you are actively involved in your child's education. Also, (for the most part) children love to see their parents at school. You will score points for being there!

16. Ask for help. Requesting assistance shows that you are willing to learn and to try new things to help your child.

17. Last, but definitely not least, try to relax. All children can pick up on their parents' anxiety. If you can keep yours in check, it will help your child stay more calm on that all-important first day and through the school year.

Have a great year!



In the back to school shuffle, don't forget about self-care

By Kathy Hooven | August 28, 2019 <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/back-school-shuffle-dont-forget-about-self-care>

Self-care is not selfish, it's necessary, so please put yourself on your 'To Take Care Of' list too, somewhere near the top.

Ahhh...the school year has started. I don't know whether to celebrate or cry. I love the routine-less routine of summer, but, another part of me is craving the routine that the school year brings. This year though, there is a subtle change in the quickly approaching fall air. This school year routine will not be routine at all. This is my autistic son's last year of high school. Next year, he will be heading off to college (breathe deeply into a paper bag here). This year, will be filled with lots of "lasts" and this mama bird is going to need to indulge in a little self-care as I prepare for my bird to leave the nest.

Sometimes that self-care will be an hour at the gym, a glass of wine, a night out with girlfriends and when those things won't do, crawling into my bed scrolling the Netflix line up and pulling the heaviness of a weighted blanket up to my chin. My son was recently gifted a weighted blanket and as soon as he tried it he said, "I find deep pressure very satisfying, but, not in July". July is a little warm for any kind of blanket for my kid who runs hot, so I thought I'd try the weighted blanket. I think we are going to need two. As soon as I felt the weight of the blanket snuggling me in, ironically, I felt the weight of the world leave me. No wonder many autistic individuals get a sense of calm under this weight. It's the deep pressure hug we all need when the world feels too big or the future seems too unknown.

So to all you parents out there with the start of the school year blues and the uncertain future looming overhead, don't forget when you are doing everything in your power to make sure your son or daughter has a happy, safe and successful school year, don't forget to also do what you can for YOU. Self-care is not selfish, it's necessary, so please put yourself on your "To Take Care Of" list too, somewhere near the top.

Tips that helped my son transition out of school and to the workplace

This guest blog post is by Sandy Petrovic. Sandy Petrovic is a registered nurse, an author, a public speaker, a college instructional advisor/tutor, and the mother of a son on the spectrum. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/tips-helped-my-son-transition-out-school-and-workplace>

Through motherhood and my tutoring position at a college academic support center for students with learning differences, I have gleaned several perspectives that I seek to pass on. Here is a vital one:

There is one thing about CHANGE that never changes: the need for transition.

Preparing for EVERY novel experience has made all the difference in David's quality of life and confidence. And beyond competence in cognitive matters and personal skills, the increasing interactions and complexities of the academic and working worlds require additional planning and transitioning to result in optimal functioning.

When David transitioned from a special needs school to mainstreamed education in the eighth grade, I met with faculty to discuss his strengths, needs, and helpful accommodations. I also tutored Dave in several classes to help him learn in a way that he could comprehend. He weathered social and academic challenges, and consequently became more worldly, skilled, and independent.

We continued with comparable approaches for each school thereafter: a typical high school, a community college, and a baccalaureate program with on-campus living. Besides standard orientation days, we utilized informal preparations to assist with transitioning. We walked the class schedules together and he then repeated these independently. The same was true for learning bus routes (school bus, and later public transportation) and finding needed locations (the cafeteria, book store...). We developed strategies to keep Dave organized and decrease "forgetfulness," and he took study skills courses to help with exams and paper writing. Life skills such as cleaning and laundry were incrementally added.

The key to David's success in ALL schools was establishing balance, support persons, involvement in extracurricular activities, and utilization of accommodations and tutoring. Appropriate disclosures (when ready) and self-advocacy (slowly learned with coaching and practice) are part of this successful formula, as is a hard-working and motivated student. (Several chapters in our co-authored book are devoted to school/college transitioning).

David volunteered before seeking waged work positions. This eased him into learning necessary components: specific job skills, how to get help, co-operation with co-workers, and taking direction and/or critique. In his first paid summer job, Dave dealt with a supervisor's unpleasant disposition and disclosed to a trainer his need to have skills explained—or demonstrated—in varying ways before he comprehended. These valued lessons can surely be applied in future situations to decrease employee/employer frustration and improve work relationships.

Dave was abruptly dismissed from his first student-teaching internship without explanation. Stunned and devastated, we used this opportunity to analyze every aspect of his performance. David deduced that he could benefit from learning chain-of-commands communication and “who to seek” for on-site advice. Addressing these and sensory work needs, we focused on navigating the professional work environment. Dave's second student-teaching experience was so mutually beneficial that he was hired on as a teaching assistant. He actually appreciated the first, aborted internship for the perspective and improvement it enabled! Learn and grow from mistakes or misfortunes.

In David's role as a teaching assistant, he found teacher and administrative mentors who helped him acquire the aspects of educating that cannot be learned in a classroom. He also successfully handled student discipline issues and parent communications. Needing flexibility for public speaking and graduate coursework after becoming a middle school teacher, David became employed as a substitute teacher at three different schools. This arrangement enabled experience with students of many ages, and colleagues with varied personalities and styles...a valuable combination to improve David's flexibility, confidence, teaching skills, and navigation.

Together, the teaching assistant and substitute positions (including two long-term assignments) provided David with a customized transition that was critical for him to cross the professional threshold. Following the step-wise skill acquisition that has always worked for him (note his academic history), David is now seasoned and confident, and he is fully prepared to manage his own classroom. Resume and interview preparations were addressed and practiced in college and at home, and at 25 years of age, Dave has secured his first professional position as a junior high religion teacher in a diversely populated school: his dream job!



David has developed a unique teaching style and assembled the tools and supports necessary for him to shine in a role that he is passionate about and honored to take on. The extra time, effort, and transitional experiences were a stellar investment that will undoubtedly enhance his success!