



# January 2020

## 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....

#### 2019-2020 School Year Social Skills Groups

During the school year Easterseals runs social skills groups for children with Autism and other conditions impacting social communication skills. Each group is an 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 to 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](mailto:lgardner@joliet.easterseals.com).

Here are the groups coming up:

Winter Session II (8 weeks):

Age	Day	Time	Dates
4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> graders	Mondays	5:00 – 6:00	1/6/20 – 2/24/20
2 – 3 years old	Tuesdays	9:00 and a 10:30 group	Starts 1/7/20
2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> graders	Wednesdays	5:00 – 6:00	1/8/20 – 2/26/20
High School	Thursdays	3:15 – 4:15	1/9/20 – 2/27/20

Spring Session (8 weeks):

- 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> graders meet Mondays 5:00 – 6:00 3/9/20 – 4/27/20
- Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> graders meet Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:00 3/11/20 - 4/29/20
- Other groups may be added based upon interest

#### 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, January 8<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 is on Friday, February 7th.** 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**

#### **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 <https://www.starnetregionii.org/calendar> They cover Will, Grundy, Kankakee, LaSalle, Kendall and the southern portion of Cook County.

#### **Youth Mental Health First Aid Training**

On Tuesday January 21st and Thursday, January 23rd, from 8:30am-12:30pm from Edward Plainfield Campus, in Plainfield, is offering this training and certification program. One must attend BOTH sessions in order to receive certification. This training is being presented by Linden Oaks. CEUs are

available for mental health professionals. The cost is \$10 to attend and \$50 if seeking the completion of CEUs. Learn about how signs and symptoms of mental health conditions in youth, how to assess risk, interventions and strategies that work and how to refer families for more help. To register go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-mental-health-first-aid-12120-12320-2-dates-tickets-83009231847?aff=erelexpmlt>

## **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-relateddisorders/id495056283?enl=7&mt=10&ls=1>

## **Community Resources**

### **Autism2Work**

Autism2Work helps pair qualified candidates on the autism spectrum with carefully matched jobs in IT and business operations. They manage not only the recruiting, selection and training of autistic team members, but also the cultural integration, on-the-job supervision, skill development and performance management. CAI strives to create job opportunities and improve the lives of their workers, and the populations they serve. More information on CAI and their Autism2Work program can be found online at: <https://www.cai.io/capabilities/autism2work/>

### **Symbol-It: Making Language Visible**

Symbol-It is an Apple Store Application that provides an opportunity for non-verbal individuals to learn language and to facilitate real-time communication with symbols. Users will search through 21,000 picture symbols stored in the application and select the images that correspond with what they would like to say. The application makes spoken language visible. Just as spoken language is learned through imitation, Symbol Speakers learn symbols best through interacting with other people speaking both verbal language and picture symbols simultaneously, as opposed to symbol only interactions. You can adjust light and dark colors and the sizing of the symbols. It is a free app and is rated very well among its users and can be found by following this link: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/symbol-it/id1441561034>

## **Recreational & Social Opportunities**

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

The Merchant Street Art Gallery is one of only three art galleries in the United States that is dedicated solely to showcasing and selling art pieces created by individuals with Autism. They offer regular shows, classes and social opportunities, and are located at 306 E. Merchant St. Kankakee, IL. Please see their website for more information at <https://www.merchantstreetartgallery.org/>.

On Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, Merchant Street Art Gallery is hosting a Celebration Steak Dinner to get an exclusive look at 5 large paintings created by the artists that were commissioned by ComEd in Chicago and will be on display in the lobby. Please see the flyer below for more details.

**MERCHANT STREET  
ART GALLERY OF  
ARTISTS WITH AUTISM**



# ComEd Project Celebration Steak Dinner

TO CELEBRATE THE COMPLETION  
OF THE COMED PROJECT,  
WE ARE HOSTING A STEAK DINNER HERE AT THE GALLERY!  
FOR \$20 A PERSON, YOU WILL GET  
STEAK, SALAD, AND A BAKED POTATO.  
YOU WILL ALSO RECEIVE A DESSERT  
FROM TURTLE ACRES  
THEN YOU WILL GET AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT THE  
5 LARGE PAINTINGS OUR ARTISTS  
HAVE SPENT MONTHS WORKING ON.  
THESE PAINTINGS WERE COMMISSIONED BY COMED IN CHICAGO,  
AND WILL BE ON DISPLAY IN THEIR LOBBY!  
THIS IS A HUGE DEAL  
FOR OUR GALLERY, ARTISTS, AND COMMUNITY!  
PLEASE JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THIS ACCOMPLISHMENT  
AND ENJOY A LOVELY DINNER AS WELL!

**356 E MERCHANT STREET  
KANKAKEE IL 60901**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 11TH**

**6:30 PM**

## Dance Beat Studio Special Needs Nights



Dance Beat Studio provides Special Needs Lessons on **Wednesday nights from 6pm-7pm**. Their goal is to provide a family-friendly environment while giving quality dance lessons. They believe the love of the art of dance is important to everyone and should be a happy and fun-filled experience. Their goal is to give each dancer a lifelong love of dance. The instructor, Dana has taught special needs classes in school and is certified for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Anybody is welcome to try their first class for free! Please contact the studio by phone or email: [dancebeat2019@gmail.com](mailto:dancebeat2019@gmail.com) / (815) 582-0485 or visit their website at: <https://dancebeat.studio/#/>

### Recurring Monthly Events

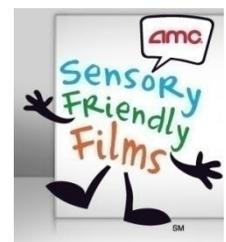
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

## 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 to 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](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 the 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!

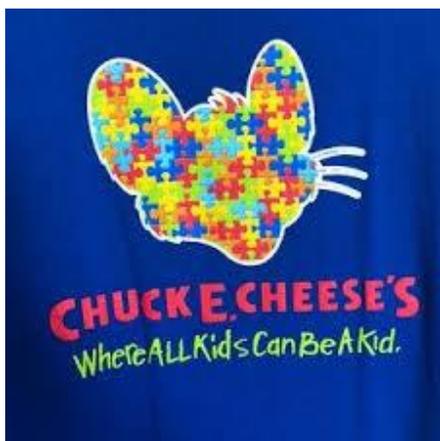


## DuPage Children's Museum Special Needs Nights

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 10:30am to 11:15am** 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 <https://communico.fountaindale.org/events?t=Storytimes&r=thismonth>



## Sensory Sensitive Sundays at Chuck E. Cheese-Joliet

CARD & Chuck E. Cheese's recently launched a national roll out of Sensory Sensitive Sundays across the United States! Sensory Sensitive Sundays occurs on the **first Sunday of every month 2 hours before the restaurant opens** to the general public. Along with less crowds and dimmed lighting, the music and animatronic show are turned off during this time with limited appearances by

Chuck E. Please visit <https://www.chuckecheese.com/events/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](mailto:info@namiwillgrundy.org).

# 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 next two events will be hosted on Saturday, January 11th and Saturday, February 8th.** 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.chicagochildrensmuseum.org/play-for-all>

*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

### How do I keep my marriage strong while raising a child with autism?

Blog [Maureen Bennie](#) June 27, 2016

*Maureen Bennie created the Autism Awareness Centre in 2003 to address what she saw as a gap in support and advocacy for those struggling with autism and autism spectrum disorders. For Maureen, education brings positive change to the lives of those affected by autism and autism spectrum disorders. Link is here: <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/keep-marriage-strong-raising-child-autism/>*

Marriage is work and a lot of it, even when the relationship is a strong and loving one. About 60% of all marriages end in divorce. That is a staggering figure. I've read that the failure rate of marriages that have a child with autism is 80%, although I have never seen a confirmed study of this number. Does the autism factor put marriages at a higher risk for breakdown? It can. Adjusting to the emotional, financial, and time strains that an autism diagnosis can bring is challenging, but possible. Here are six tips for how to keep your marriage going during those challenges.

## **1)Remember that everyone reacts differently to an autism diagnosis**

There are many factors that affect a marriage once a child is diagnosed with autism. Every person reacts and responds differently to a diagnosis. Some people experience feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, and loss. Others want to blame someone or find out the reason for a diagnosis. Different reactions can pull people apart or cause them to go in separate directions. Men tend to be more solution oriented and say, “We have a problem here, now let’s find the best way to fix it.” Women tend to be more willing to ride the ups and downs of a neurological diagnosis. They can accept the setbacks, slow progress or small gains.

Women tend to be the ones who search for information, services, attend conferences and trainings, and read the books. It is often women who experience the greatest life changes such as having to give up a job, be the main caregiver, switch careers, or handle the day to day problems and medical/therapy appointments. Quitting a job or reducing work hours can add economic pressure on the family. It is often because of these dramatic changes that women can feel lost. For more ideas about developing a life for yourself without guilt and strengthening relationships, read [\*More than a Mom\*](#).

## **2)Take time to adjust to work/life changes that occur**

Once both of my children were diagnosed, I was no longer able to remain in the teaching profession. There was not enough flexibility in the work day to attend therapy sessions. Interrupted nights of sleep made getting up early the next morning near impossible. Losing my career as a music teacher was devastating for me and left me wondering who I was. I had developed such a strong identity through music. My husband was able to remain in his music career and I sat on the sidelines and watched. It was one of the most difficult times in our marriage. We were able to work through this with counselling; I also found a new life purpose when I started Autism Awareness Centre.

## **3)Find time to be together as a couple**

Couples often neglect spending time together when they are overwhelmed with the daily demands of a child with special needs. Couples need to schedule regular activities together. Write it in a day timer like you would any other appointment. Time spent together is essential to keeping a relationship healthy. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy – just going for a walk or coffee can be enough to reconnect.

## **4)Ask for help from friends, family, or caregivers**

The level of support outside of the family can make or break a marriage as well. Having a reliable support system affects how a couple feels. An excellent caregiver is essential for respite. We all need someone to depend on outside of our spouse. I was not prepared for the different reactions each set of grandparents had to our children’s diagnoses. Each of my parents had their own way of dealing with their autistic grandchildren and my husband and I found it puzzling at times. My husband’s parents withdrew from the situation altogether. We found the adjustments with our parents quite trying. The family dynamic changed once autism was introduced.

## **5)Don’t let one partner carry too much of the daily responsibilities**

It is important to share the responsibility of raising the children and managing the home. Resentment builds when this is left on the shoulders of one spouse. Two heads are often better than one at IEP meetings at the school, medical appointments, and therapy sessions. Share in the decisions, shopping and housework. Working as a team creates a stronger bond between two people.

## **6)Get counselling**

Don't be afraid to seek counselling. Sometimes it helps to have an outside party help determine what the needs of the family are. It can be helpful to know your feelings and worries around autism are normal and shared by other parents. If one spouse feels too discouraged to start counselling, go alone and begin to make positive changes. Most people feel overwhelmed raising a child with autism. I still experience periods of intense anxiety like at the beginning of the school year. Transitions still cause huge amounts of stress in our personal lives. We have learned to ride these ups and downs and know that they will pass.

There is no one answer to a successful marriage in the face of autism, but keeping connected with your spouse helps. Surround yourself with supportive people who will listen or can give a break when needed. Above all, don't be afraid to ask for help when it is needed.

For more information on strengthening a marriage and autism, read [\*Autism In the Family: Caring and Coping Together\*](#) by father and psychologist Robert Naseef.

Between school struggles, therapies, and the challenges of "play dates," it can be hard to imagine your child with [special needs](#) taking part in after-school activities. The reality, though, is that the right after-school programs may be terrific opportunities for your child to show his strengths, build confidence, [make friends](#), and discover new interests. Link:

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/extracurricular-activities-for-kids-with-special-needs-4143299>

## Extracurricular Activities for Kids With Special Needs

By [Lisa Jo Rudy](#) Updated on June 05, 2019

### Why After-School Activities Matter

Often, parents undervalue after-school activities for their special needs children. They may be more focused on their child's academics or therapies or feel that there just isn't time or money to bother with extracurriculars. While this attitude is understandable, there's a good chance you'll be robbing your child of opportunities that could make a major positive difference in their life. Here's why:

Many kids with special needs also have impressive talents, regardless of learning disabilities, social issues, or speech delays they may be dealing with. But that doesn't mean she can't run like the wind, draw like Picasso, or be a successful Girl Scout. It's important to recognize and build these talents, especially when your child's challenges are so often the focus of discussion.

Extracurricular activities can increase your child's [opportunities to make friends](#) and find a social niche. Many kids with special needs have social communication challenges. And let's face it: it's hard to make friends while you're in class, on the bus, or navigating the cafeteria. After-school activities are an opportunity to connect with other kids in a completely different way. Choose the right organization, and your child will suddenly have a built-in set of social connections.

The skills your child learns after school can be as important (or more important) than the skills he learns in school. In school, your child is working on handwriting, standing in line, academic skills, [appropriate classroom behavior](#). After school, your child may be learning to be part of a team, to support and encourage others, or to try new things. He may also be learning the rules

of well-known games, earning respect, and building friendships. These are [skills that will last a lifetime](#).

After-school successes [build confidence](#) and respect. When your child hits a home run, plays piano at a recital, or earns a higher level belt in martial arts, both you and he gets to see that he can succeed and even excel.

Some after-school activities can become lifelong interests. If your child gets interested in music, art, sports, dance, chess, or any other cultural activity while in school, that interest can provide an outlet throughout her life.

## Tips for Choosing After-School Activities

Many parents tend to push their kids into doing either what they loved when they were kids or what their friends' kids are doing. Often, for typically developing children, this works out just fine. For kids with special needs, however, it's important to choose carefully with several factors in mind:

**Be realistic.** The fact that your child can kick a ball does not mean he is ready for a full-fledged soccer team. He may, however, be ready for something a little less challenging. Think carefully about what your child can really understand, do well, and focus on for a prolonged period. Both you and your child will suffer if you start something he can't finish.

**Keep sensory concerns in mind.** Many special needs children are unusually sensitive to loud noise, heat, strong smells, and bright lights. If that describes your child, steer clear of activities that involve sensory "assaults."

**Consider special needs after-school programs.** Some children with special needs thrive in "special" programs such as Challenger Club, while others would find such programs babyish or frustrating. If you're not sure, check out both the typical and the "special" versions of activities your child is likely to find interesting.

**Choose an activity in which your child is already interested.** Kids with special needs may already cope with unpleasant therapies, challenging school expectations, [school bullies](#), and worse. After-school activities should be something they actively enjoy.

**Select an activity your child is good at.** Once your child leaves school, she deserves the chance to shine. Is she great at swimming? Is he terrific at drawing? Find your child an opportunity to show off what he can do well.

**Include your child in the decision, but be realistic.** Your daughter may want to take a dance class, but she may not have the skills or discipline for the full-scale ballet program she knows about. Consider finding a lower key, more accepting dance program where she can be fully included even if her *grande jete* needs work.

**Consider structured programs as opposed to open-ended programs.** Many children with special needs do much better in highly structured programs like Boy or Girl Scouts than in open-ended "exploration" experiences. Though the lack of structure appears more accepting, it can actually be extremely challenging to any child who doesn't already have solid physical, emotional, and organizational skills.

**Choose programs that have simple rules and little competition.** Complex team sports (for example) demand high levels of physical, social, motor planning, and cognitive skills. The same is true of many competitive activities, from musical theater (auditions required) to dance team.

**Understand what your child is getting into.** What is really expected of a child who joins the Boy Scouts or the recreational soccer league? If your child needs support, are they available? If your child runs into problems, how will the instructor or coach respond? Be sure your child is capable of doing what's expected (or has the necessary support if needed).

**Talk to the person or people running the program.** Explain your child's strengths and challenges. How would the coach or instructor handle it if your child had difficulties or even had a meltdown? You'll probably walk away knowing if it's a good match.

**Consider becoming your child's shadow or aide for a while.** In many cases, special needs children need help as they get started in an activity, but once they know the ropes they're just fine. If you have the time and ability, consider offering to be on the spot for your child for the first few weeks. Alternatively, hire a helpful "shadow" who can support your child and step in if a problem arises. This will lower everyone's anxiety and may make it possible for your child to become a full-fledged part of the organization.

**Don't neglect gender-bending or gender-free options.** Sure, "most" boys are supposed to like sports and "most" girls enjoy dance. But kids with special needs may not know about, care about, or meet those stereotypes. If your son loves to dance or your daughter likes baseball, consider those possibilities.

**Remember that "after-school" can mean "in school" or "community-based."** Sometimes the options available in the community (rec sports versus school sports, for example) are a better match for kids with special needs.

## 10 Best Extracurricular Activities

Bearing in mind the tips above, consider options that are most likely to meet your child's needs. These activities are all mainstream options that tend to celebrate individual strengths while lowering the need for advanced social communication skills. As you'll see, some of these activities may require your parental involvement at the start or throughout:

1. **Individual Sports:** If your child enjoys [sports](#), consider teams in which your child is performing on his own and competing with his own best outcomes. Options

including [swimming](#), martial arts, bowling, track and field, golf, archery, and many more.

2. **Structured Adult-led Clubs and Programs:** Many children with special needs thrive in programs such as [Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts](#) and 4H. That's because the programs are highly organized, children progress at their own rate, activities are hands-on, and the organizations themselves are dedicated to including children regardless of ability or background.
3. **Singing and Instrumental Programs:** Instead of or in addition to music therapy, consider enrolling your child in a singing or instrumental program that actually teaches and celebrates skills. If your child can learn to sing, he will always be welcome in a chorus. If she can play an instrument, she can join the band. These are not only entries into school-based programs, but also hobbies to enjoy throughout life.
4. **Volunteer Activities:** Most communities are loaded with opportunities for children (sometimes with parents) to volunteer their time. Kids can help clean up trash at the park, help foster kittens, visit nursing homes, or help raise money for school events by washing cars or selling treats. With parental involvement, they can become valued members of the community or school organizations.
5. **Theater:** Many kids who have a tough time picking the right words and actions do very well when acting from a script. Acting clubs and camps require no audition and can be a great way to get started. Some kids with special needs discover they have a real talent for acting.
6. **Visual Arts:** Many children with special needs are really quite talented in the visual arts. Schools and community art centers often offer after-school programs in drawing, painting, clay, and even multi-media art.
7. **Video and A/V:** Quite a number of tweens and teens with special needs have great interest and skills in video and a/v. Many middle and high schools have video and A/V clubs, and many towns have local TV stations where kids can get involved. Even if your child isn't a creative videographer, she can find opportunities to be confident and valued behind the camera or managing microphones.
8. **Cosplay and Fantasy Games:** Cosplay is short for "costume play," and it's becoming more and more popular. Both kids and adults make and wear elaborate costumes based on comic book or fantasy characters from TV or movies and attend "cons" (conventions) where they show off what they've created, get signatures from their favorite actors, compete in costume parades, and generally enjoy being geeks together. Fantasy games such as Dungeons and Dragons are also great ways for "geeky" kids to find like-minded friends who are eager to build and engage in fantasy world-building.
9. **Special Interest Clubs:** Children with special needs are often fascinated by a particular area of interest and have a hard time getting interested in anything else. If this describes your child, consider helping her get involved with special interest clubs in areas ranging from mathematics and video gaming to animal welfare, Quidditch, or chess.

10. **Horseback Riding:** Horseback riding can be expensive, but it combines a number of wonderful elements that may be perfect for your child. Equestrians learn to communicate effectively, build strength and balance, and gain skills in an exciting sport that can be individual, team-based, competitive or non-competitive. Ask about scholarships or special programs for kids with special needs.

## A Word From Verywell

If you're the [parent of a child with special needs](#) you may feel "it's tough enough to get my child through the grocery store; why would I want to add another layer of difficulty to our lives?" If this describes you, remember that outside interests can change the course of your child's life (and, by extension, your life as well). The child who has an area of real strength, a group of friends and a sense of belonging can do great things. Now is your chance to get your child started on an interest that can last a lifetime.