

## Helping Your Child Create Summer Structure of Their Own

One of the most important ways to begin helping him to adjust to the new summer schedule is to create a structure of your own. While this structure will sometimes fall off track (They all do at times, even in school.), it's important to have parts of life he can count on. Here are a few simple parts of life you can structure:

- Time to get out of bed.
- Breakfast
- Time outside
- Lunch
- Reading time
- Video Game / Computer / DS time
- Dinner
- Bedtime

**Joseph's Day**

Time to get out of bed		7:30 A.M.
Breakfast		7:45 A.M.
Get dressed and ready		8:00 A.M.
Play outside		8:30
Math and writing practice		10:30
Lunch		11:30

While these may seem like a lot of ideas, many of them are really not very time consuming. They also leave you with schedule times to get things done like yard work or laundry or reading to yourself. Depending on the age of your child, you might need to help him with some things, while you can leave him alone with others. May Institute also suggests creating a graphic board. I did this for a child at school last year, and it's not very hard. Here's an example of what Joseph's morning picture schedule might look like. At first glance, it might seem a bit controlling. What many people don't know, however, is how secure structure can make a child with an ASD feel. While many children know they'll get dressed sometime in the morning, Joseph will probably want to see it on his sheet because it means it's really going to happen.

### A Few Productive Structural Ideas

#### 1. Pursuing Favorite Interests

Summer can be a fantastic chance for children with Autism to learn on their own timeline. Kiddos with Autism often have obsessions: they do what we call perseveration. The Glossary of Terms from Autism Speaks defines perseveration as, "repeating or "getting stuck" carrying out a behavior." This can also include interests, hobbies, or thoughts, which end up as the obsessions we often see in children with Autism. And while these obsessions can be a bit distracting at school, they're often great topics to study when children are out of school. For example, Joseph might be obsessed with sharks. While his teacher probably doesn't want to discuss sharks while she's trying to teach the class about the Revolutionary War, Joseph can study sharks as much as he wants during the summer. He can borrow books from the

library, watch documentaries, and learn his little heart out. It'll keep him reading, and he'll be learning the whole time.

**2. Assign Practice Homework** Children will usually moan and groan when given work over the summer, but a little bit is good for them. It will keep their brains active, and they'll be more ready to learn when they begin the next school year. Because children with Autism often have learning disabilities, studying over the summer can help them stay closer to their target reading or math levels, and it's one more productive daily event that can go on their schedules. *Note: I'll be including some summer learning resources in my Weekly Newsletter this Friday for all my subscribers.*

**3. Get them out of the house.** Children with Autism are often quite happy to be by themselves or with the people they trust...and no one else. While other children are likely to go out and play with neighbors and friends during the summer, children with Autism often need to be put in environments with others before they'll interact if they're not comfortable. In Elizabeth I Field's article, "Autism Fieldwork," she suggests summer camps or school summer programs. (There are quite a few summer programs specifically designed for children with Autism, such as Camp WANNAGOAGAIN (a longer camp), or Kidstar Summer Day Camp in Utah. *Note: I will be sending a link with a compiled list of Autism Summer Camps in my newsletter this week as well.*

A closer-to-home option would be to spend time together out of the house, but around town. Here are some ideas:

- The local library
- Purchasing a seasonal pass to a favorite place, such as a zoo.
- The dollar theater
- A bookstore
- Local museums
- A local pool or community center

It will all depend on your child. No one knows your child as well as you do. For some, the local pool might be too stimulating. Others might be afraid of animals. It's important to find something that stretches your child's comfort boundaries while giving him something to enjoy.

**4. Physical Activity** Autism.com's article, "Advice for Parents," says that many children with Autism have low muscle tone, and that it can also limit their gross and fine motor skills. It's particularly important for children with Autism to get exercise during the summer since they're not participating in P.E. Instead of making simply doing boring calisthenics, however, there are lots of fun alternative to get kids moving on their own.

If your child struggles with playing outside (severe fears of bugs or dirt can make being outside an uncomfortable experience), there are indoor options such as the Wii or the Xbox Kinect. Zumba Kids has great videos on Youtube that the students at my school love. Physical activity can also be another chance to get your child some social exposure in a controlled environment. Local community centers often offer dance classes, basketball teams, and karate classes for children. While your child might not be thrilled at the idea of going (he might throw a fit, actually), being in a class with an instructor and instructions will probably be much more beneficial to him than if you simply threw him in with a bunch of other children and no structured setting.

**5. Vacation** Ah, the inevitable summer vacation. In all fairness, Mom and Dad probably need this vacation like no one's business, as can the child's siblings. Don't be hurt, however, if your child pitches a fit when you tell him you're interrupting his routines to take him somewhere he's never been. In his eyes, you might be ripping away nearly all that makes him feel safe. It really is good, however, for children with Autism to experience some changes. No matter how much we want to shield our children, life just comes with changes, and we might as well help them experience changes in the best ways possible while they're young and learning. Here are three steps to planning a vacation that you and your child can enjoy:

**A. Tell your child ahead of time.** – While planning a trip for a child with Autism, it's important to tell him ahead of time. Even if you're going somewhere he loves, surprising him probably isn't a good idea. Just as he adjusted to a new summer schedule because you made the change part of his schedule, he'll need time to adjust to the idea of going somewhere new.

**B. Research places that your child might enjoy** – While I'm a Disney fanatic, there are many people (including those without Autism) who find large theme parks to be overwhelming. As children with Autism often struggle with sensory processing problems, theme parks may not be the best places to go. Or perhaps your child hates to get dirty. The beach may not be the best place to expose him to sand. If you're looking for places that can accommodate special needs, here's a list of 32 Vacation Destinations for Individuals with Special Needs, some of which include Autism.

**C. Include your children in vacation planning.** If your child with Autism loves animals, try to plan a visit to the zoo, etc. This gives them time to mentally prepare and gives them something to look forward to, especially if they're struggling with the idea of leaving on a vacation. Our example child, Joseph, loves sharks, as we mentioned earlier, so his parents might include an aquarium or two in their list of vacation destinations.

Between June and September my kids have 82 days of summer vacation, and I've promised them something fun every single day. That means I need 82 fun summer activities for one child with a developmental disability and one child who refuses to participate in most activities. It'll be a piece of cake, right?

Borrowing the weekday "Summer Schedule For Kids" at [somerwhatsimple.com](http://somerwhatsimple.com), scouring the internet for more ideas and adding some of my own activities, here are 82 days of summer fun and learning:

## Safety Sunday

1. Teach your child his or her full name.
2. Teach your child your full name.
3. Have your child memorize your home address – show where the house number is located outside and show where the street name.
4. Have your child memorize your phone number. Practice reciting key information.
5. Learn how to cross the street safely.
6. Practice an escape route in case of fire.
7. Practice saying "no:" make it a game in which you take turns asking each other to do increasingly absurd things.
8. Play hide-and-go-seek to teach your child how to remain calm while looking for you.
9. Teach your child the buddy system.
10. Teach your child what an emergency is and how to call 911.
11. Practice asking for help with things that are hot, sharp, dangerous or too high to reach.
12. Start swimming lessons.

## Make Something Monday

13. Arrange 5 or 6 photos to make a poster or scrapbook page.
14. Sweetened condensed milk makes a beautiful, edible fingerpaint.
15. Plant a seedling outdoors.
16. Dig for worms – it's a great exercise for fine motor skills and tactile defensiveness. Re-home the worms next to that seedling you planted.
17. Bubble snakes.
18. Make a leaf scrapbook.
19. Color the sidewalk with chalk. Wash it all away with water.
20. Paint using different types of paintbrushes: a fly swatter, a flower, a cotton swab, a sponge, a leaf, etc.
21. Build an obstacle course with hula hoops, lawn furniture and empty boxes.
22. Tie-dye some t-shirts.
23. Make a magic wand using all available materials.
24. Build a "fairy house" outdoors with sticks, pebbles, pine cones, bark, leaves and other natural materials found outdoors.

## Time to Read Tuesday

25. Sign up for your local library's summer reading program.
26. Read a book under a tree.

27. Read all but the last page of a storybook and ask your children to suggest an ending.
28. Have your child dictate and illustrate a story, and read it together. It's OK if the story is 1 or 2 sentences long.
29. Make a home video of your child reading a story aloud, or of you reading aloud to your child.
30. After you finish reading a book such as *The Lorax*, go see the movie.
31. Read some books on a specific topic, such as insects, then do a related activity such as a bug hunt or catching fireflies.
32. Have your child create a summer schedule for the family and read off the schedule every morning.
33. Check out a book of simple science experiments and try some of them at home.
34. Check out a book about a historical figure and play dress-up at home.
35. Have your child write out a checklist for a scavenger hunt, and find everything on the list together.
36. Swap favorite books with your friends.

## What's Cooking? Wednesday

37. Fruit smoothies in the blender.
38. No-bake oatmeal cookies on the stove.
39. Pizza.
40. Spinach-artichoke dip in the blender.
41. Banana muffins.
42. Roll-up sandwiches.
43. Fruit kebabs.
44. Chicken soup in the crock-pot (plug it in on the porch so that it doesn't heat up the house).
45. Roasted marshmallows.
46. Scrambled eggs and pancakes for dinner.
47. Lemonade from scratch.
48. Guacamole.

## Thoughtful Thursday

49. Wash the car together. No driveway and no car? Then wash the toy cars.
50. Call someone just to say hello.
51. Pick some flowers (dandelions and clovers are OK) and give the bouquet to someone who isn't expecting them.
52. Write a top ten list of a person's best attributes and give the list as a gift to that person.
53. Write a thank-you letter to someone and mail it.
54. Donate clothing, books and toys to charity.
55. Teach your child to do one chore.
56. Give someone a homemade art project.
57. Volunteer at a food bank.
58. Collect bottles and cans, and donate the money to charity.
59. [REDACTED]
60. Hug someone who needs a hug.

## Somewhere Fun Friday

61. Petting farm or petting zoo.
62. A playground in a different neighborhood.
63. An art museum – check first to see when general admission is free!
64. The beach.
65. Pick fresh fruit at a local farm or visit the farmer's market.
66. Ride a train.
67. Find a carnival or a street fair.
68. Ice cream shop.
69. Waterpark or sprayground.
70. Visit a friend.
71. Nature trail or botanical garden.
72. A skyscraper or another high place with a grand view of the world.

## Social Skills Saturday

73. Tell a story from your own childhood. Have your child tell a related story from his or her life experience – yes, even if your child is nonverbal.
74. Lie in the grass and take turns looking for shapes or pictures in the clouds.
75. Go around and ask every family member at home the same silly question, and share the answers.
76. Look at some old family photos and name all the people in them.
77. Practice making emotional facial expressions on cue with your child: neutral, happy, sad, fearful, angry, disgusted, surprised. Take turns and make it fun.
78. Practice listening skills by responding only with nonverbal communication for 1 to 5 minutes – then switch roles.
79. Be someone's mirror: imitate a person's actions as if you are that person's reflection in a mirror for 1 minute. Then switch roles.
80. Play Follow the Leader. Match the leader's pace for as long as possible, then let a new leader take over.
81. Play the statue game: one person freezes like a statue and the other person has to make the statue laugh. Take turns.
82. Develop family traditions: sing a song together, recite a poem. [REDACTED]

## Keep up on those skills over the summer!

Did you know that students lose a lot of the information learned at school that year over the summer? It is a common occurrence known as the "summer dip." If you are looking for ways to keep your child from losing that valuable information over the summer, here are some ideas to try!

Summer is upon us once again, and parents are beginning to plan for their children's days without a school schedule. Dreams of days filled with family, friends, freedom and laughter are in students' heads as they say goodbye to another school year. However, a nonacademic summer can cause students at every grade level to digress two to three months in their academic skills. Half an hour to an hour set aside daily can help students close learning gaps and perform at higher levels during the upcoming school year. Summer is an ideal time for students of all ages to strengthen their academic skills while still having plenty of time left over for summer activities.

### 1. Make Time for Learning

Set aside time for your student to read each day during the summer break -- 15 to 30 minutes per day is all it takes! During the summer, students have more time to read for enjoyment, which also offers a great opportunity to preserve and strengthen their reading skills. Your summer activities should include taking your children or teenagers to the public library to check out books of interest and/or any summer reading groups they'd like to join.

A great way to track how much reading your child is doing during the summer months is a tally on your regular activities calendar. This will help keep the daily reading time from being overlooked because of other summer activities -- and we know there are many!

Parents of students reading *below* grade level should read with their children in order to assist with sounding out words they might not be able to decode themselves. In addition, keep a dictionary or online source close by to help students figure out those words by using the phonetic spelling provided.

### 2. Learn and Practice Affixes

Children and teens of all grade levels can improve their reading and spelling skills by learning affixes. Most multi-syllable words include prefixes and suffixes added to a base word. You can find a list of affixes and their meanings in a dictionary or in many online sources. To make this practice appealing, turn it into a game! Students can create flashcards of prefixes and suffixes. On the reverse side of each affix flash card, they should write the meaning. All children love guessing games and can point out what they think the affix means. You can also use this game to help them learn new vocabulary words.

### 3. Develop Math Skills

Though it may not seem fun to them at the time, working on just three to four math problems per day during the summer can prevent students' mathematical skills from getting rusty. They can look at it as a daily challenge that they must complete, or a daily "to-do" to proudly check off their calendar. Parents can purchase a math workbook for their child's academic level at most bookstores. Working on just a few problems daily (or more, if your child enjoys math) can help students of all ages close the gaps in their math skills, preserve what they learned during the previous school year, and prepare for the next.

### Websites/Apps for learning over the summer:

#### All skills

- Mobymax on the computer- for all subjects including reading and math. Our students have access over the summer to Mobymax. [www.mobymax.com/signin](http://www.mobymax.com/signin)
- Open Ed on the computer. Skills in all subject areas. [www.opened.com](http://www.opened.com)
- Kahn academy on the computer. Math, science and other subjects. [www.kannacademy.org](http://www.kannacademy.org)

### Other great websites for various skills such as math, reading, writing, creative thinking:

- <http://www.abcya.com/>
- <http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com/>
- <http://www.wonderopolis.org/>
- <http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>
- <http://www.clpgh.org/kids/storymaker/>
- <http://www.kerpoof.com/>
- <http://www.e-learningforkids.org/>
- <http://www.starfall.com/>
- <http://www.pbs.org/parents/fun-and-games/online-games/>
- <http://www.gameclassroom.com/>
- <http://lightupyourbrain.com/>
- <http://www.prongo.com/>
- <http://www.factmonster.com/>
- <http://www.multiplication.com/>
- <http://www.scholastic.com/kids/stacks/games/>
- [www.scootpad.com](http://www.scootpad.com) (For Math)
- Go to [http://www.homeschool.com/articles/Top100\\_2015/#](http://www.homeschool.com/articles/Top100_2015/#) for a list of many good websites.
- <https://www.typingclub.com/typing-qwerty-en.html> for free keyboarding (typing) training

### Finding learning games/resources on your own:

- On an iPhone or iPad, if you go to the App Store, go to the magnifying glass (to search), and type in learning games for kids (or the skill you want to work on). Many apps (either free or pay) are listed that can be downloaded onto that device.
- On a computer, do a Google Search for learning websites for kids (or the skill you want to work on), and many websites are listed. Pick one and have fun!

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- Open Ed on the computer. Skills in all subject areas. [www.opened.com](http://www.opened.com)
- Kahn academy on the computer. Math, science and other subjects. [www.kahnacademy.org](http://www.kahnacademy.org)

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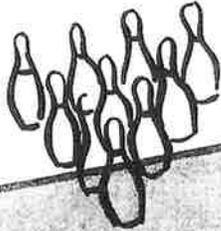
- <http://www.abcya.com/>
- <http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com/>
- <http://www.wonderopolis.org/>
- <http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>
- <http://www.clogh.org/kids/storymaker/>
- <http://www.kerpoof.com/>
- <http://www.e-learningforkids.org/>
- <http://www.starfall.com/>
- <http://www.pbs.org/parents/fun-and-games/online-games/>
- <http://www.gameclassroom.com/>
- <http://lightupyourbrain.com/>
- <http://www.prongo.com/>
- <http://www.factmonster.com/>
- <http://www.multiplication.com/>
- <http://www.scholastic.com/kids/stacks/games/>
- [www.scootpad.com](http://www.scootpad.com/) (For Math)
- Go to [http://www.homeschool.com/articles/Top100\\_2015/#](http://www.homeschool.com/articles/Top100_2015/#) for a list of many good websites.
- <https://www.typingclub.com/typing-qwerty-en.html> for free keyboarding (typing) training

#### Finding learning games/resources on your own:

- On an iPhone or iPad, if you go to the App Store, go to the magnifying glass (to search), and type in learning games for kids (or the skill you want to work on). Many apps (either free or pay) are listed that can be downloaded onto that device.
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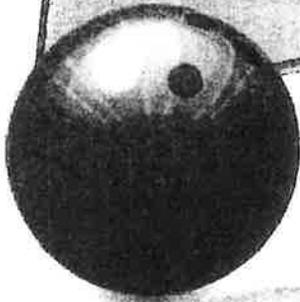
# Summer Activities

Choose 1 or 2 activities to do EVERY WEEK to work on visual skills!



## Pop Bottle Bowling

- Use a flat space outside to set up 5-10 bottles as pins.
- Use any kind of ball for your "bowling ball".
- Aim before you roll. Practicing your aim helps your hands to do what your eyes want.
- See how many pins you can knock down!



## Burst Your Bubble!

- Take turns with someone blowing bubbles.
- Watch where the bubbles float around you. This helps your eyes move in different directions and get stronger.
- Try reaching and bursting as many bubbles as you can with your pointer finger!

## PLAY OUTSIDE!

Play sports or games outside that use your eyes and hands! This helps them work together. Try baseball, basketball, kickball, football, bean bag toss.

## Balloon bop

Play alone or with a friend

- Bop a balloon into the air with one hand.
- Follow where the balloon floats with your eyes. This helps them move smoothly.
- See how many times you can bop the balloon without letting it touch the ground!



## Eye-Spy

- Look around and think of an object for your partner to guess (Don't tell!)
- Say "I spy something ..." And name the color, size, or shape of what you saw.
- Take turns *spying* and *looking* for the right answer! Practice helps your eyes find things.
- Go to [www.scholastic.com/ispy](http://www.scholastic.com/ispy) to play more *spying* games!

# DON'T BE BORED!

cut out strips  
put in jar  
choose one

SCOOP AND POUR MATERIALS

DIG WITH TOOLS OR YOUR HANDS

PLAY WITH PLAY DOUGH

MAKE SLIMY RAINBOW NOODLES

MAKE CLOUD DOUGH

PLAY WITH SAND

FINGER PAINT

MAKE CORNSTARCH + WATER

PLAY WITH A BIN OF DRY RICE

PLAY WITH A BIN OF DRY BEANS

PLAY WITH A BIN OF POPCORN SEEDS

CREATE A SENSORY BIN

LOOK UP A NEW SENSORY PLAY IDEA

PLAY WITH WATER

PAINT OUTSIDE WITH FROZEN CUBES

PLAY WITH SIDEWALK CHALK

DECORATE A CARDBOARD BOX

MAKE A TISSUE PAPER COLLAGE

COLOR WITH SHORT CRAYON PIECES

PAINT WITH Q-TIPS

DRAW OR DO ART ON AN EASEL

PLAY WITH STICKERS

PAINT ON THE GROUND WITH WATER

MAKE A HAT OR CROWN

DRAW A PERSON

MAKE A MASK

MAKE A CARD FOR SOMEONE

DRAW A FUNNY PICTURE

ART ACTIVITY: [HTTP://DLTK-KIDS.COM](http://dltk-kids.com)

WRITE A LETTER TO SOMEONE

CREATE YOUR OWN BOOK

WALK LIKE AN ANIMAL

PLAY WITH A SQUIRT BOTTLE

INVENT A SILLY WALK

GO FOR A BIKE RIDE

PLAY A BALL GAME

BUILD A FORT

JUMP ON THE TRAMPOLINE

CREATE YOUR OWN COSTUME

CREATE AN OBSTACLE COURSE

PLAY WITH BUBBLES

BLOW COTTON BALLS WITH STRAWS

LEARN TO WHISTLE

BLOW BUBBLES WITH BUBBLE GUM

## HELPFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES:

HOMEMADE PLAY DOUGH: <http://mamaot.com/2012/04/26/easy-homemade-playdough>

SLIMY RAINBOW NOODLES: <http://mamaot.com/2012/07/25/messy-play-with-rainbow-spaghetti>

CLOUD DOUGH: <http://happyhooligans.ca/cloud-dough>

HOMEMADE FINGER PAINTS: <http://www.learnplayimagine.com/2013/03/homemade-paint-recipes-safe-for-babies.html>

CORNSTARCH + WATER: <http://tinkerlab.com/goopy-cornstarch>

FROZEN PAINT CUBES: <http://handsonaswegrow.com/art-frozen-paint-cubes>

MORE FUN SUMMER ACTIVITIES: <https://pinterest.com/ckiley/summer-fun>

MORE SENSORY PLAY IDEAS: <https://pinterest.com/ckiley/sensory-play-ideas>

MORE SENSORY-RELATED INFO: <http://mamaot.com/category/sensory-posts>

COLORING, ART, AND CRAFT IDEAS: <http://dltk-kids.com>

MORE FINE MOTOR-RELATED INFO: <http://mamaot.com/category/fine-motor-posts>

# Recipes

For

DIY Sensory Tools

A practical booklet of DIY sensory tool building ideas, made for parents by parents.



By Wendy TeSellen-Hinden

 AUTISM SOCIETY

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This booklet can be downloaded from the Autism Society of Oregon's website- [autismsocietyoregon.org](http://autismsocietyoregon.org). This booklet has lots of sensory ideas that can be done at home.



<http://handsonaswegrow.com/fun-kid-activity-lines-of-colored-tape/>

### **What you will need**

Multi colored electrical tape \$8.00 (or could use just one color)

1 straw \$1.00

1 Pom Pom \$1.00

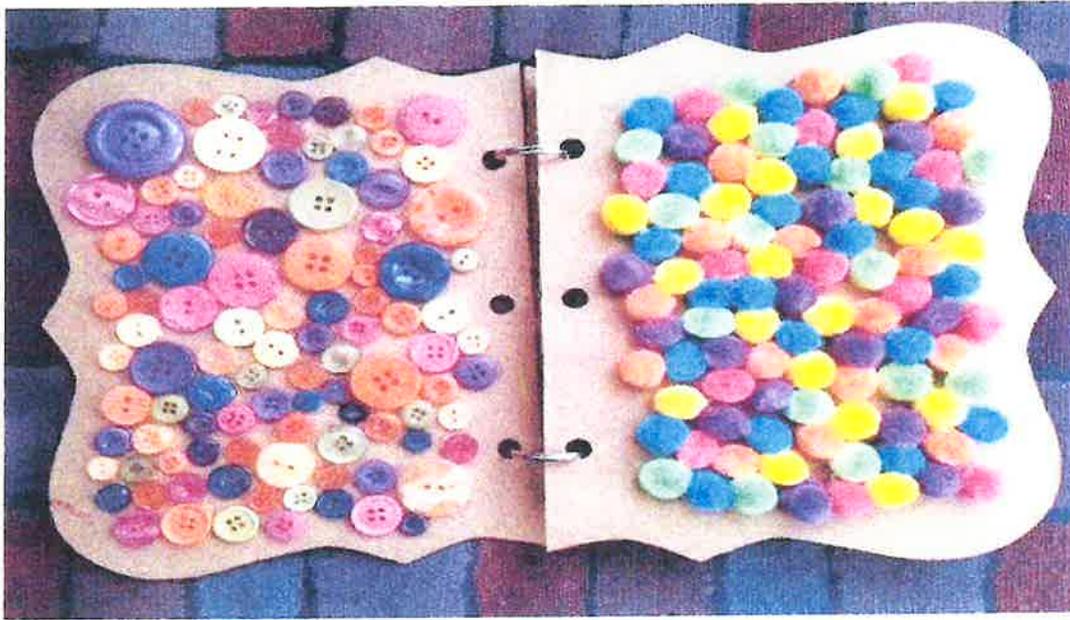
**Total \$10.00**

### **Directions**

1. Place 3 different colored lines on a hard surface floor. You can make them straight, curvy or even into shapes.

At some point, though, the all 3 lines must intersect with one another. Have them place the pom pom on one of the lines anywhere and start blowing through the straw to move the pom pom along the lines of tape.

The idea here is to use deep breathing to help regulate sensory over load. It helps with controlling the inward and outward breath the person takes. It can also act as a preventative, when you notice the person is receiving too much input.



[https://www.etsy.com/listing/215685820?utm\\_source=OpenGraph&utm\\_medium=PageTools&utm\\_campaign=Share](https://www.etsy.com/listing/215685820?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share)

### **What you need:**

Paper dividers \$2.99

1 three ring binder \$2.00

Whatever texture you want to glue \$3.00

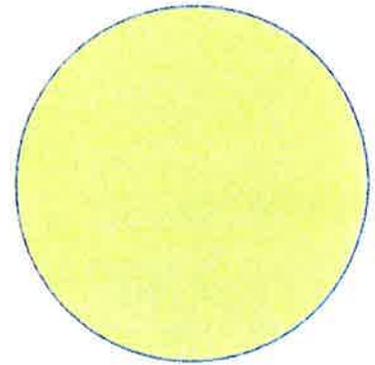
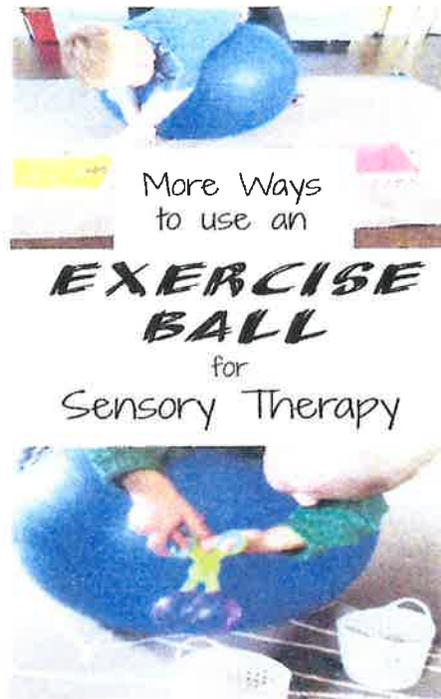
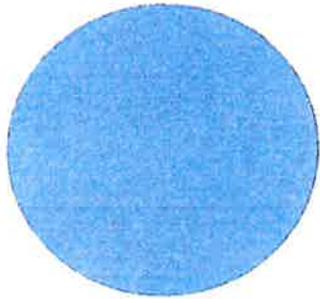
(could get these at a craft or dollar store)

Elmer's Glue \$1.00 (or hot glue gun)

### **Instruction**

Lay out cardboard dividers on a table. Have a plan on what a where you would like to place your tactile sensory items on the boards. Once you fill one side let dry for a half hour and you have the option of flipping it over and doing the other side. One will need to be mindful at the possibility that pieces of the sensory board may be picked off or fall off for those who loved ones like to put things in their mouth.

This can provide a great opportunity to journal some of the textures they do and don't like. Journaling this can provide a pattern of behaviors that can be useful in making decisions later. More than likely you have various textures in your home that your loved one already likes and could add to this booklet. This also gives them the opportunity to choose to either seek out or avoid any one texture with the options you provided them.



<http://www.mymundaneandmiraculouslife.com/more-ways-to-use-an-exercise-ball-for-sensory-therapy/>

**What you will need:**

Yoga Ball \$8.00

Total cost \$8.00

**Instructions**

Have them lay on the ball face forward. They can roll around on the ball which will give them vestibular input. Again, you will want to make sure this is done in a safe place so they do not crash into something like furniture. One way to make this even more fun is you could put a piece of paper on the floor to color or they could practice picking up something from one side and putting it in another. Get creative!



HOLIDAYS AND VACATIONS

# Strategies for a Successful Summer Break

Tips for managing your kids' downtime to help make it relaxing for everyone

Beth Arky

**W**hile your average child may be thrilled by the end of the school year, anticipating lazy days and sleeping in, the prospect of summer break isn't quite that unalloyed pleasure for parents.

And if you have a child with emotional or developmental issues who is challenging in the best of times, nothing calls on whatever extra powers you might possess more than the long break that lies ahead.

While all kids do better with structure and routine, those with mental health issues including anxiety, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders are especially dependent on the predictable "safe zone" that school provides.

Without it, they're more prone to anxiety, oppositional behavior, and tantrums. For the parents who care for them, "vacation" can be anything but.

Here are some tips to help keep your child on track so summer can be as rewarding as possible for everyone in the family:

### **Maintain your schedule**

While you may never be able to duplicate the structure school provides, it helps to maintain the school year's daily schedule, right down to meal times and bedtime, as much as possible. It can be very tempting to let your kids stay up late and sleep in—especially on weekends, when you want to do the same—but in the long run, sticking to the same schedule pays off by keeping your child more comfortable, and hence more cooperative.

### **Make it visual**

Kids who thrive on predictability and are prone to panic over transitions—including those on the autism spectrum—benefit from posted schedules that outline what will happen throughout the day (i.e., 7am: Wake up, go to the bathroom, wash face...8am: breakfast...) Depending on your child's developmental level, simple pictures can also help.

### **Make plans**

Try to schedule as many activities as possible, as early as possible, and keep your kids posted. This can mean anything from "we're going to Aunt Mary's Thursday at 5pm for dinner" to having a set routine that every day, weather permitting, we'll be going to the playground or pool. Even one such activity can give kids something to speak around which the rest of the day

can be structured.

It can be tough finding play dates for kids who have difficulty socializing with peers, but some parents have found success through Yahoo! and Meetup groups and other online sites. There, you can get to know other likeminded, nonjudgmental parents who “get” your kids and won’t be offended if a play date has to be cut short. Of course, if you are lucky enough to have family members who are great with your child, don’t be shy about taking them up on offers of help.

### **Get outdoors**

Home can become a safe cocoon, especially for children with sensory issues, who can feel assaulted by extra sights and sounds, or those who have trouble with social interactions. But no child should spend hours in front of a screen. One father of a 9-year-old with oppositional defiant disorder tells us he relies on camp to get his son outside; as well as provide structure and routine. “Without it,” Steve says, his Michael “would sit in front of the TV or play on his Nintendo DS until his eyes fell out.” Even if camp isn’t in the cards, try to find something your child enjoys—riding a bike or scooter, playing tag, or splashing at the community pool, water park, or beach—and do it.

Plus, physical activity is good for everyone’s mind, body and spirit, especially those kids with energy to burn.

### **Maintain—or create—a behavioral system**

Children and teens, especially, may act like they want to be in charge, but the truth is they feel safer knowing exactly what you expect of them and the rewards that result from good behavior. This is never truer than during the

seemingly boundless — and boundary-free — summer break. You should choose the two or three most desired positive behaviors to nurture with consistent and positive reinforcement, and try to ignore as many of the negative ones as possible. This teaches kids the definite rewards of desired behavior, and that acting out gets them nothing — not even negative attention. A chart with stickers for tasks accomplished can work wonders as positive reinforcement for preschool children. And remember: if you have limits, such as 30 minutes a day of earned computer time, you should stick to them.

### **Find support**

Parents of kids with developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems often feel isolated and lonely. It can be difficult watching all the other neighborhood children set off for a camp yours can't attend; not only are those kids cementing friendships they may have already formed during the school year, so are their parents. Don't feel bad booking a sitter and spending time with friends; it'll help you keep from feeling marooned, and your well-being is critical to caring for your child.

If you can't afford a sitter, close friends with or without kids can also provide good company and support for parents, even if mom or dad is still doing the supervising and discipline. It's always nice to have an extra adult or even an older child around to help keep an eye on yours.

### **Mimic home routines, even when traveling**

Sally, whose 8-year-old son, Charlie, has Asperger's, has some very practical tips for planning a family getaway. Staying in a hotel and eating in

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Sally, whose 8-year-old son, Charlie, has Asperger's, has some very practical tips for planning a family getaway. Staying in a hotel and eating in

restaurants “is usually a disaster,” she says, given all the change and extra stimulation. Instead, she’s found that renting an apartment online, where she can mimic home routines, works best; many other families do the same. Sally brings familiar nonperishables and several cooked meals, and makes sure there’s a store nearby for things like milk, juice and fruit. “Having to cook and shop is not exactly a vacation,” she says, “but it’s a lot more peaceful” than trying to eat out.

### **Work with your child’s strengths and interests**

When Steve’s son Michael—the child with ODD—was 5, he started out at the day camp that many of his classmates at the neighborhood school attended. It shared a densely wooded site with other such camps, so it was very important from a safety standpoint that Michael stayed with his group. When the boy began to wander off, Steve recalls, “he got reprimanded by the counselors in such a way that it really set him off with a lot of oppositional/defiant behavior.”

“The camp told us that they couldn’t afford to have a staff member shadow him to make sure he stayed on task and with the group,” Steve continues. In short, “they couldn’t take the responsibility of having him there.”

But Steve found that camp can be great for Michael if it is more structured and geared toward his strengths and interests. Today, Michael is busy throughout the summer at a series of camps for typically developing kids that keep him engaged with things like Lego Robotics and skateboarding. While Michael usually does well, Steve makes sure to keep a line of communication open with camp personnel so that any potential problem involving his son can be “straightened out before he gets kicked out.”

## **Pinpoint your child's anxieties**

Summer can bring camp, new activities, and different authority figures like new sitters, all which can be stressful. First, says psychologist Clark Goldstein, you need to figure out your child's fears, whether it's separating from you or striking out at baseball. If you're having trouble doing this, try asking open-ended questions. Rather than pose a yes-or-no question like "Are you worried about camp?" ask "How are you feeling about going to camp?" Once you know, you can encourage her to face her fear. The goal is to teach her that feeling anxious is uncomfortable but anxiety will ebb if you push through it.

## **Give the child time to adjust**

A technique called gradual exposure is a good way of relieving a child's anxiety about a new experience. For instance, says Dr. Goldstein, if he has separation anxiety or social anxiety — he's worried that others won't like him or he'll embarrass himself in baseball — you might watch the entire first game. The next time, you could stand further back or leave at an appointed time. Eventually, you'll be able to drop off your now-comfortable child. It can also be helpful to give those working with him a head's up, without overstepping your bounds. Your goal is to set your child up for success; that includes making sure all the adults are on the same page.

## **Prepare yourself for some tough times**

Even with the best-laid plans, you may see some regression and worsening behavior over vacation. Give yourself a break for not being able to magically avoid it. And be ready to hold your ground in as calm, firm, and consistent a

manner as possible. Yelling or becoming physical only escalates things, while giving in teaches your child that if he screams loud enough, he'll get what he wants.

Shannon Des Roches Rosa, mother to 10-year-old Leo, writes on the [Thinking Person's Guide to Autism](#) blog that her son, who has autism, "is used to 1:1 supervision and engagement all day long, and I can't possibly provide the kind of routine and stimulation he craves, no matter how many camps and grandparent visits his sisters get shuffled off to. I try to keep Leo occupied, and I have a lot of support, and having an iPad helps, but I still worry that—as has happened in summers past—it won't be enough, and Leo's behavior and abilities will keep disintegrating until school resumes at the end of August."

Yet while she remains "scared of summer," she also sees a lot of potential—especially for Leo, a self-taught swimmer who enjoys basking in the family pool. No backyard pool? You may find your child is just as happy playing in a sprinkler and earning music downloads for good behavior. And if you can maintain a sense of fun, there will be many moments of learning and development of the kind that can't happen in a classroom.

#### HOUSING AND ADAPTIONS: PARENTS WHO SERVE THE SPECIAL NEEDS

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