

Back to School Extra Special Newsletter 2023-24 for Extra Special Kids

In this issue, you will find some ways that parents and caregivers can help children with disabilities.

Ways to Help Your Child with Disabilities Keep Skills Sharp:

- 1. Model what you want to see:** First and foremost, never forget that you are a role model. Children will do what they see the adults around them do. Reduce screen time and increase time reading, writing, taking walks, playing games, or having conversations.
- 2. Visit the library:** Children love independence. One of the best ways to allow children to demonstrate independence is to have them browse the shelves of the local library and select books that they can read independently or for you to read aloud to them. Participate in story hours if your local library offers the activity. Establish a habit of visiting the library on a weekly basis or at least several times a month. These library visits will strengthen your child's interest in reading and reading skills.
- 3. Play games during trips:** When traveling, even on short outings, there are games – both word and number – that you can engage in with your children. For instance, you can play "I Spy with My Little Eye," estimate the number of fast-food restaurants you will pass, look for all the words that begin with a certain letter, or look for words that begin with A, then B, etc. These activities keep children engaged and sharpen their skills in a wide range of academic areas such as literacy, numeracy, and communication.
- 4. Encourage your children to keep a journal:** To get them started, suggest one journal entry: "10 Things I Want to Do." The list can include activities like watching the sunrise, going an entire day without wearing shoes, or seeing how far they can spit a watermelon seed. To make the journal more interesting, encourage children to fill it with both writing and drawing.
- 5. Visit landmarks:** Plan visits to acquaint you and your children with local landmarks. Document the visit with a journal entry, drawings or photographs, and some research on the history of the site. The excursions can become even more meaningful if you have children research the landmarks you visit.
- 6. Plan weekly family menus:** Vary the meals to include breakfast, lunch, dinner, or even dessert. Let your children plan the menu and cook with you. Research has found that involving children in the preparation of meals by doing things such as making grocery lists, reading labels, and measuring can help improve their reading, writing, and math skills.



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"We become
what we think
about."
Earl Nightingale



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Parenting Tips to Help Your Child Get More Exercise

adapted from article from Child Development Institute

The American Heart Association recommends that all children, including children with disabilities, and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day.

The great news is exercise comes in many forms and can be a lot of fun! You can easily add some fun physical activity to your parenting style with a little creativity.

- 1. Lead the way.** You need to set a good example. Kids, especially younger children, naturally follow their parents. Make sure you are looking after your health and making physical activity a priority in your life.
- 2. Do it together.** In today's overscheduled world, we need to be sure we are spending quality time with our children. What better way than to be active together? Since kids can no longer be alone roaming the neighborhood, parents need to play with them.
- 3. Make it fun!** Put on some music and dance. Play tag. Roller blade. Basically, just play. Provide them with toys and equipment that encourage them to be active while having fun. Bikes, scooters, pogo sticks, and balls will get your kids moving and active. For preschool children, riding on toys that get them exercising like pedal cars, big wheels, and tricycles is always a great parenting decision.
- 4. Cheer them on.** Create positive reinforcements with encouragement and support. Help them find sports and activities that build their self-esteem. Attend their sporting events and let them know you are their biggest fan whether they win or lose.
- 5. Turn it off.** Of course, we need to limit the time our kids watch TV and play video games. But make sure you do it in a positive way. If they are angry that you just turned off their favorite show, they might not be too excited about going outside to play with you. Allow screen time during designated hours, preferably after homework is done and when physical activity is finished, like in the evening or on Saturday morning when tired parents might need to catch a few extra minutes of sleep.

Adding more physical activity into your family's routine will help you all feel better and allow you to have more fun together. Most importantly, as you model a healthy lifestyle you will help instill lifelong habits and healthy attitudes toward exercise and physical activity in your children.



Screen Time Rules

adapted from The Pragmatic Parent

After school and on weekends, kids need to head outside for unstructured play, run through sprinklers, and explore the outdoors.

It is okay to allow devices, but it is a good idea to set reasonable limits for their use. After all, you do not want electronics to become a free-for-all. Children should not be given free rein to binge on tablets, apps, and TV shows, no matter how educational.

It is up to you how much screen time you allow, but studies show a limit of 30-60 minutes daily is the right amount before sending your kids back outside to explore and play with friends.

To ensure your kids are not glued to devices, it is a good idea to create a checklist they need to complete each day, including chores, personal tasks, and some educational and screenless activities, before they can earn a set amount of screen time.

SCREENTIME RULES CHART

HAVE YOU?

- ___ BRUSHED YOUR TEETH
- ___ BRUSHED YOUR HAIR
- ___ GOTTEN DRESSED
- ___ MADE YOUR BED
- ___ PICKED UP YOUR ROOM
- ___ FINISHED YOUR CHORES
- ___ READ FOR 20 MINUTES
- ___ COLORED or WRITING FOR 20 MINUTES
- ___ PLAYED OUTSIDE FOR 30 MINUTES
- ___ CLEANED UP ALL YOUR TOYS
- ___ DONE SOMETHING NICE FOR SOMEONE ELSE



NOW YOU CAN USE ELECTRONICS 😊

The Developmental Benefits of Chores for Kids & Teens adapted from Robert Myers, PhD

Kids of all ages, with or without special needs, benefit from having chores to do around the house.

Research has shown that the benefits of completing household chores transfer beyond managing day-to-day living. Chore engagement improves executive functions, as engagement in chores requires individuals to plan, self-regulate, switch between tasks, and remember instructions.

Executive functions begin to develop around six years of age and continue to develop during adolescence and into adulthood. They include attention, concentration, impulse control, working memory, emotional regulation, and planning and organization, to name a few.

Research found specific executive functions that benefit from chores include improving impulse control (attending to tasks before playing) and working memory (remembering all the steps to complete the task). In addition, more complex chores improve planning and organization (coming up with a plan that works and is easy to follow, deciding when to start to finish on time), attention, and concentration (staying on task until the chore is completed).

In addition to improving these executive functions, chores help build self-reliance, self-confidence, and pride. Several studies have found that children and adolescents who have consistently completed a few simple chores during the week throughout their childhood do better academically when compared to peers who did not have that experience.

Of course, tasks should be appropriate for your child's age and development. For many chores, you will need to teach your child or teen how to accomplish the task and how to achieve the level of competence you expect.

Toddlers should be able to put their toys away, place clothes in the hamper, and fill up the cat's or dog's food bowl. Preschoolers can help clear the table, water flowers, and dust with a cloth. Elementary school kids should be able to sweep floors, load dishwashers, and clean their bedrooms. By the time kids reach middle school, they should be able to wash the family car, help prepare meals, and take out the trash. Finally, high schoolers can clean out the fridge, mow the lawn, prepare meals, and iron clothes.



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FDLRS is funded by the Florida Department of Education, Division of K-12 Public Schools, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, through Federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B and State General Revenue funds.