



### **Making Outings Less Stressful**

By Carissa Thiele, MS, CCC-SLP

Going on an outing can be a stressful experience for some children. They may be going to a new place where there is a lot of noise and unfamiliar people. It is important for parents to prepare children for outings and make them feel as if they have some choices in the day's schedule. Here are 8 tips to help alleviate the stress of outings for both children and parents.

- 1. Set expectations** – Be sure that children know what to expect. State clearly, "We are going to the doctor. We will wait in the office and then Dr. Johnson will see you. I will be with you if you feel afraid." If your outing involves more than one activity, let the child know. "We are going to the store, the post office, and then the park." Using the words "first" and "then" can be helpful.
- 2. Provide support for the child to be successful** – For some children, having information in writing or picture form can be beneficial. You may want to read a story to discuss what is going to happen in order to ease anxiety. By providing images, children are able to see what is expected of them.
- 3. Involve children in planning** – Children are often told what to do and have little ownership in decisions. By letting children make a few choices during an outing, they feel more a part of the process. For example, let the child pick which errand the family does first. Most children do best when given two choices. More than two choices can be overwhelming.
- 4. Offer specific praise for a job well done** – Throughout the day, make sure to reinforce children for listening, following directions, and being kind to others. This shows children they get more attention for following the rules than for breaking them. When you offer praise, be specific so that children know exactly what they did well. For example, "I like how you stayed right next to the cart at the grocery store."
- 5. Provide updates regarding schedule changes** – Changes to our schedule often happen, and when they do, let children know what the change is and how it will affect the plans. For example, "The library is not open. We will still go to the park, and we will go to the library tomorrow." If you use visuals, keep an extra set in the car for unexpected changes.

**6. Plan for delays** – Be sure to pack snacks and activities to ease hunger and boredom. Try to have a back-up plan if restaurants or stores are busy. It is best to avoid running errands or other activities when your child is tired.

**7. Get children involved** – If children are kept busy, they are less likely to act out. When you are shopping, have your child help locate groceries. If you are at the doctor's office, have the child help you fill out the forms by eliciting their responses to simple questions like name, address, etc.

**8. Be consistent** – If your child was promised something after going to the store, follow through and be consistent. When children receive mixed messages about rewards, the inconsistency can lead them to expect rewards when they have not met their end of the deal. Children will learn you mean what you say if you hold your ground.



Information for this article was obtained from: [www.sandbox-learning.com](http://www.sandbox-learning.com)

### **Toy Recommendations for Children with Special Needs**

By Laura A. Cole, MS, CCC-SLP

The holidays are right around the corner which means that holiday shopping season is upon us! Our staff at Sovereign Pediatric Therapy is often asked by parents and caregivers for gift suggestions for our special needs patients. In this day and age, it seems that electronic and video/interactive games are all the rage with children and teenagers. However, there are plenty of low-tech gift ideas for children of all ages with varying types of interests, skills, and needs.

Below is a compilation of suggestions to help you get started with purchasing appropriate gifts/toys for children with special needs (adapted from [www.playproject.org/gifts-special-needs](http://www.playproject.org/gifts-special-needs)):

- Ask the child's therapists and teachers for practical suggestions for toys, books, puzzles, and activity kits that are appropriate for the child's current cognitive level, motor skill level, and language level. Avoid choosing toys that are developed for a specific age that correlates with the child's chronological age: manufacturers don't always develop age-specific toys that take into account children with motor, language, or cognitive delays.

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- Consider the child's current sensory needs and communication style when selecting an appropriate gift. Ask yourself (as well as the child's parents) the following questions: Does the child enjoy physical activity/movement? Does the child communicate verbally? With gestures? With eye gaze? Is the child particularly sensitive to specific textures/materials? What is the child's current favorite toy or activity?
- Avoid purchasing battery-operated/electronic toys, particularly for children who avoid engaging with others. Children who are challenged with social engagement show a preference for self-directed or isolated play. Electronic toys promote isolated play as well stereotypical or repetitive play behaviors and limit interactive/social play.

### Gift Suggestions

- **Sensory Box:** Fill a plastic container with various tactile/sensory textures (e.g., dry rice, dry beans, sand, or flour) and add small toys, objects, or coins for the child to "find."
- **A small, individual indoor trampoline:** (e.g., Jump Start Trampoline). This is particularly useful for a child to use on rainy or cold winter days when going outside is not an option!
- **Play dough, finger paint, dot-dot/bingo markers, large grip markers, crayons, or pencils with colored or designed paper, string-beads, Lite-Brite, large and small pegged puzzles, and interlocking puzzles.** All of these promote fine motor and visual motor planning development.
- **Hand puppets:** These are great for engaging the child in interactive and creative play as well as using speech-language skills to "talk," tell stories, or create scenes. Additionally, use of large action figures, dolls, dinosaurs, and animal figurines will engage the child in imaginary play.



- **Monster Toss game (by Alex):** targets gross motor and coordination skills.
- **Children love to "cook" with play food.** Fill a picnic basket or similar container with play dishes and play food, pots, pans, and utensils.
- **Fill a box/plastic container** with a variety of dress-up clothes, hats, Halloween costumes, and safe shoes. Kids love to dress up!
- **Melissa and Doug toys and puzzles:** a great manufacturer of toys and puzzles based on a child's skill level.
- **Games such as:** Hullabaloo, Twister, Electronic Mr. Potato Head, Guess Who, Don't Spill the Beans, Smatch, and Zingo.
- **You can never go wrong with giving a child the gift of a book!** Look for books based on a child's current language level. Purchase books with animated characters with simple themes/messages that a child can relate to (e.g., *No David* series), repeating line books (e.g., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See*), and books that are themed around the child's favorite activities, animals, and topics.

### Resources and Websites

- [www.nationalautismresources.com](http://www.nationalautismresources.com) (search toys and games)
- [www.funandfunction.com](http://www.funandfunction.com) (search toys for Autism)
- [www.austimspeaks.com](http://www.austimspeaks.com) (search toys and games)
- [www.melissaanddoug.com](http://www.melissaanddoug.com)
- [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com) (unique handmade toys)
- [www.findtherighttoy.com](http://www.findtherighttoy.com) (developed by an occupational therapist)
- [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com) (search best toddler books)
- [www.playproject.org](http://www.playproject.org)



**October is National Physical Therapy Month.** We would like to recognize and thank all of our wonderful physical therapists at our Naperville, Chicago, and Crystal Lake locations.

**Want to share this News Brief with your co-workers or friends?** Visit our website at [www.sovrehab.com](http://www.sovrehab.com) and click the Pediatric Clinics tab at the top of our home page. See the informational topics available and click the links for past issues of *News Brief*.

**Do you have questions or concerns regarding your child's development?** Sovereign Pediatric Therapy offers free screenings. Call any office to schedule an appointment.



**Chicago**  
2835 N Sheffield Ave  
Suite 401  
Chicago, IL 60657  
773.755.7566

**Crystal Lake**  
390 E Congress Pky  
Unit A  
Crystal Lake, IL 60014  
815.477.4788

**Naperville**  
1315 Macom Dr  
Suite 103  
Naperville, IL 60564  
630.585.7337