

FOR CAREGIVERS

Tips on Encouraging Engagement in Leisure Activities at Home and in the Community

① WHAT ARE LEISURE ACTIVITIES?

Leisure activities play an important role in every person's life. They are activities a person chooses to do during their free time. They should be enjoyable for a person and not work-oriented. Examples include bicycling, painting, walking, listening to music, playing sports, and reading.

② WHY IS LEISURE IMPORTANT?

Developing leisure skills improves overall quality of life. Finding enjoyable leisure activities can lead to independence and help build relationships in the community. Leisure skills also enhance communication and social skills.

③ HOW CAN CAREGIVERS ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY?

The home and community are natural places to discover new interests during free time. Autistic individuals typically do not participate in leisure or recreation activities as often as their peers. Caregivers play an important role in helping children pursue leisure activities. However, it can be difficult for caregivers to know how to encourage their child, no matter what age, to participate in leisure activities and build skills.

Here are some tips for caregivers:

Expose your child to a lot of different activities—even if they aren't initially interested in them. Do not force the individual to participate, but try not to let them opt out too quickly. Consider developing a system where a child is provided reinforcement to try a new activity at least once.

Think about ways to encourage your child to participate in a wide variety of interests:

- » Solo activities (outdoor play, reading, painting, playing an instrument)
- » Group activities (sports, church youth group, board games, movie nights with family)
- » Community activities
 - Look for regular community events they can plug into.
 - Look for structured activities where social interactions and engagement are automatically built in.

Here are some tips for caregivers:

Focus on your child's strengths when choosing activities.

Set up leisure activities or stations with options to provide choice and set clear boundaries.

Provide reinforcement.

- » Older children can play an active role in choosing the reinforcement options available to them.
- » Make reinforcement fun! Example: The child could be encouraged to play with their sibling outside for at least half an hour. Child and sibling play a basketball game in their backyard. They get a reinforcement of iPad time for playing outside for at least 30 minutes. If they win the basketball game, they get an extra 10 minutes on the iPad.

Make sure there are clear rules and expectations for activities.

Consider having the child develop a one-page personal profile they can take to community activities that explain strengths, interests, and needs.

④ REFERENCES

Billstedt, E., Gillberg, I. C., & Gillberg, C. (2011). Aspects of quality of life in adults diagnosed with autism in childhood: a population-based study. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 15(1), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361309346066>

Ratcliff, K., Hong, I., & Hilton, C. (2018). Leisure participation patterns for school age youth with autism spectrum disorders: Findings from the 2016 national survey of children's health. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48(11), 3783–3793. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3643-5>

④ RESOURCES

[How to Reinforce Play and Leisure Skills at Home](#)
[Social and Leisure Skills](#)
[Benefits of One Page Profiles](#)