

Children's Therapy Connection Newsletter

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Summer Tips for Parents of Children with Special Needs

by Miss Jenna, Family Resource Coordinator

Before we know it, summer will be here! Summer brings sunshine, longer days, and opportunities for new adventures. For families of children with special needs, it can also bring changes in routine, sensory challenges, and unique safety considerations. With thoughtful planning, summer can be a season of joy, growth, and connection for the whole family.

1. Maintain a Predictable Routine

Children with special needs often thrive on structure. While school schedules may pause, you can create a summer routine that includes consistent wake-up times, meal schedules, and bedtime rituals. Use visual calendars or daily charts to help your child anticipate activities.

2. Prepare for Sensory Needs

Summer outings can mean loud noises, bright lights, and unfamiliar textures. Here are some ways you can prepare:

- Pack noise-cancelling headphones for crowded events
- Bring sunglasses or hats for light sensitivity
- Keep a comfort kit with fidget toys, weighted lap pads, or familiar snacks

3. Choose Inclusive Activities

Look for sensory-friendly events at museums, theaters, or community centers. Many pools now offer quiet swim hours or adaptive swim lessons. Nature walks, art projects, and gardening can also be calming and engaging.

4. Plan for Safety

Water safety is especially important in the summer. Parents should consider enrolling their child in adaptive swimming lessons, always use life jackets near open water, and teach clear safety rules for playgrounds, parks, and other public spaces.

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CTC Superstars



Reagan
OT Superstar

Miss Melissa is incredibly proud of the progress Reagan is making with her self-feeding skills. Reagan is learning to use a fork, successfully manages handheld foods like tacos and burgers, and can place her thermos cup into the cup holder on her tray. Best of all, she can hold and enjoy her very own ice cream cone—one of her favorite motivators—and she never misses a lick!

"I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream." Keep up the amazing work, Reagan.

K'Shaun
Speech Superstar

K'Shaun has been working incredibly hard to strengthen his communication skills. He arrives at each session with a contagious smile and an eagerness to learn. K'Shaun loves playing with toys and is now using sentences to express himself. His amazing progress is a reflection of his consistent attendance, positive attitude, and strong family support.

Great work, K'Shaun—we are so proud of you! Ms. Jodi and Ms. Kara always look forward to seeing your happy face.



Landen
PT Superstar

Landen has been working incredibly hard during both land and aquatic physical therapy sessions. Landen is standing and walking with less assistance and is even asking to walk more at home. He loves splashing Ms. Caroline in the pool during therapy and enjoys drawing and playing with balls in the clinic. We are so proud of you, Landen, and can't wait to see all the progress you'll continue to make!



Physical Therapy

Need Adaptive Equipment?

By: Mr. Nate, PT, DPT

The physical therapy department plays a vital role in helping patients achieve safe, functional mobility. Our team writes letters of medical necessity (LMN) and coordinates the ordering of a wide range of mobility and positioning equipment—everything from wheelchairs and gait trainers to walkers, standing frames, adaptive seating, beds, bikes, and more—to support each patient's unique needs.

Who is involved

Several partners work together throughout this process, including an Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) from a Durable Medical Equipment (DME) company, your child's pediatrician or medical specialist (such as Orthopedics, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, or Neurology), and your insurance provider.

The Process (Typically 3-6 months)

First, your physical therapist schedules an equipment trial with an ATP, which often takes place during your child's regular therapy session. After the trial, your therapist writes a detailed Letter of Medical Necessity explaining why the equipment is needed. This letter is then reviewed and signed by your child's physician.

Next, the DME company submits all required documentation to your insurance provider for approval. If approved, the equipment is ordered—hooray! If denied, the care team can submit an appeal with revised documentation. Families are strongly encouraged to appeal denials, as many cases are ultimately approved with persistence.



Activerehab.net: Rifton Pacer

What you should know

- A 30-minute trial in a Standing Frame is required for insurance approval.
- Insurance requires at least 5 years between wheelchair orders.
- There is no limit to the number of devices your child can have **if** they meet different functional needs.

Other Equipment Resources:

<https://www.reagansjourney.org/rj-closet/>



<https://www.variety.pittsburgh.org>



Tadpoleadaptive.com: EasyStand Zing
DMEsuperstore.com: Circle Specialty ZIGGO

Speech Therapy

Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC): Using Speech Generating Devices in the Community

By: Miss Kara MA, CCC/SLP

Why use a speech generating device in the community?

One of the most important goals for all AAC users is to be able to carry over skills into other environments.

Opportunity: They need the same opportunity to communicate their wants and needs in all settings as other children who are currently practicing verbal skills. Having the device with them provides that opportunity.

Effectiveness: Having the device present in other settings shows the child that his/her wants/needs can be met in the same cause/effect way demonstrated in the speech therapy room.

Behaviors: Negative behaviors often take place when there is a communication breakdown. Having a device gives quick, accessible visuals for trouble shooting why they are upset and working towards a solution.

Modeling: "If AAC learners only see symbols modeled for communication twice weekly for 20-30 minutes, it will take 84 years for them to have the same exposure to aided language (modeled language) as an 18-month-old has to spoken language." - statistic from Jane Korsten -QIAT Listserv 2011, RachelMadel.com. Therefore, more modeling can equal faster learning!

What if I am not yet very familiar with the device and can't locate a word I want to model/show my child?

Most applications have a "word finder" feature located in the keyboard that will guide you to the word's location.

We are going on a trip to visit relatives, and their names are not in the device.

Work with your speech therapist to personalize the device. Use the camera feature to take pictures of family members, favorite foods, favorite toys, TV show characters, places you go, etc. Your child can't access something that isn't on the device. They will hopefully be more motivated to talk to others about their favorite things.

Do you really mean I should bring the device everywhere?

Yes! Examples for use:

- **School** – Make sure to have a conversations with school teachers and therapists. The device should be accessible and not kept in a backpack all day. Your speech therapist is happy to have a conversation with them as well to discuss how to best incorporate its use.
- **Park** – Model "slide", "swing", "go", "run", "sunny", or "fun"
- **Restaurant** – Model "eat", "drink", "all done", "chicken nuggets", "pizza", or "milk"
- **Trampoline park** – Model "help", "more", "jump", "happy", or "tired"
- **Grocery shopping** – Model "put in", "yes", "no", "get", or "want"
- **Car** – Ask questions about what you see as you are driving

I'm a little hesitant to try.

Have fun with it. Children are more likely to communicate when something feels exciting and engaging. Keep it simple—choose a few target words for the day (often called "core" words, which are among the most commonly used in English) and find as many natural opportunities as possible to use them.

Always reach out to your speech therapist(s) for more ideas. We are here to help.

Miss Sara's OT Activity Corner

Hop into Spring!

Warm weather is approaching so it's time to plan those fun outdoor activities. Here are a few activities you can do with your kids to promote their OT skills.

Activity 1: Painting with Cars or Trucks

This is a fun indoor or outdoor activity. Save cardboard boxes and flatten them out. Provide washable paint along with cars, trucks, or other toys, and let the fun begin. Drive the toys through the paint and watch a colorful masterpiece unfold.

This activity supports sensory processing, visual-motor skills, and even color recognition.



Activity 2: Nature Name Collage

Grab some cardboard or thick paper, and gather items like flowers, leaves, sticks, and grass. Write your child's name on the surface, then provide glue (liquid or stick). Help outline each letter with glue and have your child place the collected materials along the outline of their name.

This activity helps strengthen name and letter recognition, while also supporting bilateral coordination, fine motor skills, and visual-motor development.



Activity 3: Counting to 100

Start with a large, flat piece of cardboard and draw lines to divide it into sections. Label each section with the items you plan to sort. Then gather 100 (or any number you choose) of those items and have your child sort them into the correct sections.

This activity builds occupational therapy (OT) skills and supports visual perception, fine motor skills, executive functioning, and visual-motor development.



Activity 4: Playdoh ABCs

Most kids love playdough, and this activity combines fun with alphabet learning. Roll the playdough out flat, then use letters (such as magnetic letters or puzzle pieces) to press into the dough and create impressions.

This activity supports OT skills, including letter recognition, hand strength, fine motor development, and sensory exploration.



Children should be supervised when completing these activities for safety purposes.

Occupational Therapy

When Big Feelings Take Over: How OTs Support Kids with Anxiety

By: Miss Olivia OTD, OTR/L

Most kids don't say, "I'm feeling anxious." Instead, anxiety often shows up as meltdowns, avoidance, or becoming upset over small changes. For many children, anxiety appears in the body first.

Anxiety is a nervous system response. It happens when the brain thinks something is unsafe (even if there is no real danger). When this happens, it can be very hard for a child to calm down, focus or listen, transition between activities, and/or deal with frustration. This is why telling your child to "calm down" or "just relax" doesn't often work. Their nervous system isn't ready.



Anxiety can look different in everyone, but some common signs that your child's nervous system may be overwhelmed are:

- Big reactions to small problems
- Difficulty with transitions or changes in routine
- Perfectionism or fear of making a mistake
- Avoiding schoolwork or social situations
- Needing to be in control

These behaviors are not intentional and should not be mistaken for or labeled as bad behavior. They are signs that your child is struggling to regulate.

Occupational therapy can support children with anxiety by helping them feel safe and regulated in their bodies so that they can participate fully in their everyday lives. OTs can work with your child to understand how their sensory system works, how their daily routines affect stress, and how their environment supports and/or challenges regulation.

Every child is different, but some common OT strategies to help with anxiety may include:

- Movement, deep pressure, or heavy work activities to calm the nervous system
- Visual schedules to reduce uncertainty
- Tools to help children notice body cues (i.e., heart racing, tight muscles)
- Support during transitions and/or new situations

Before a child can calm down, focus, or cope with challenges, their nervous system needs support. OT helps children develop skills to feel regulated, confident, and ready to learn. If you're wondering whether anxiety may affect your child's life, an OT evaluation can help to identify and support these concerns.



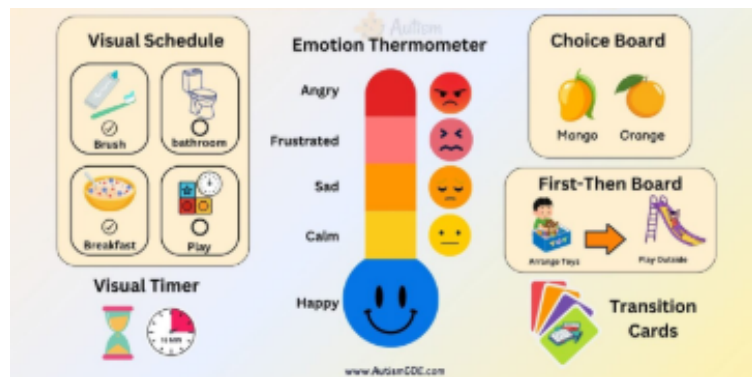
Occupational Therapy

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When Big Feelings Take Over: How OTs Support Kids with Anxiety

In the meantime, there are many ways you can help support your child at home. Children often feel safe with predictability, so keeping routines consistent, giving warnings before transitions, and talking through what is coming next can help to ease anxiety. It is also important to stay calm during challenging moments as children often model behavior and most children need adult support before they learn to calm themselves. Another helpful tip is to practice calming strategies during times

when your child is regulated, not just when emotions are high. If you make these tools a part of your everyday routine, your child will be more likely to use them when they need them the most.



Continued from page 1

Summer Tips for Parents of Children with Special Needs

5. Prepare for Transitions

Before a new activity, talk through what will happen. Use social stories, photos, or short videos to help your child visualize the experience. This can help reduce anxiety and improve cooperation.

6. Take Breaks and Pace the Day

Over-scheduling can lead to meltdowns. Build in quiet time between activities. A shaded picnic, reading corner, or short rest indoors can help your child recharge.

7. Involve Your Child in Planning

When possible, let your child choose between two activity options. This fosters independence and helps them feel more in control.

8. Care for Yourself, Too

Parenting a child with special needs can be demanding. Make time for your own rest, hobbies, and support networks. A well-rested parent is better able to meet their child's needs.

Summer doesn't have to be overwhelming. With preparation, flexibility, and a focus on your child's unique strengths, you can create a season filled with joy, learning, and connection.

Remember: the best summer memories are built on moments of understanding and shared happiness.

Have A Terrific Summer!



Information

Freedom Transit



Families of CTC may be eligible for reimbursement of travel costs to the Children's Therapy Center. If your child receives Medical Assistance call 1-800-331-5058 to inquire whether you qualify for this service.

To view the reimbursement form:

https://www.freedom-transit.org/forms/MATP-Reimbursement-Form-5_26_16.pdf

Free Diapers, Pull-ups and Wipes

Where: The Diaper Pantry
Peters Creek Baptist Church
6300 Library Rd., South Park

When: Every 3rd Saturday of the month

Time: 9:00 a.m. to noon

Other Donations Provided: New and gently used baby/children's clothing, baby equipment, toys, etc.

Contact Information:

DIAPERPANTRY@PCBC.CHURCH and found on Facebook.



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CTC is proud to partner with



**United Way
of Washington County**



Health Insurance

Reminder: If your child's health insurance has changed, please inform us.



UPMC WASHINGTON

CHILDREN'S THERAPY

Office locations:

1000 Waterdam Plaza Drive,
Suite 120
McMurray, PA 15317

289 North Avenue.
Washington, PA 15301