

Summer is quickly approaching! While many of our children will be busy attending extended school year (ESY), it's important to remember to take time to have fun as a family, and what better time than summer. Subsequent to ESY, our children will have a few weeks off from school which means more time for more fun. Some families may feel pressured to increase their therapy schedule to the maximum extent. However, it's important to remember that children can continue to engage in important learning opportunities outside of the traditional therapeutic environment. Our kiddos can continue to grow and learn while also having fun engaging in community outings with their families. For example, the DuPage Children's Museum, located in downtown Naperville, not only offers sensory friendly hours on every third Thursday (<https://dupagechildrens.org/visit/accessibility/third-thursday/>), but they also offer a variety of tools to help facilitate a successful visit to the museum. Many of the tools they offer will look quite familiar, as these tools are used here at the center and in our home-based ABA sessions.

These tools include:

- noise reducing headphones
- visuals and photos of the exhibits
 - these can be used for both communication and activity scheduling
- time timers
- time trackers
- social stories
- slant boards
- spring-hinged scissors

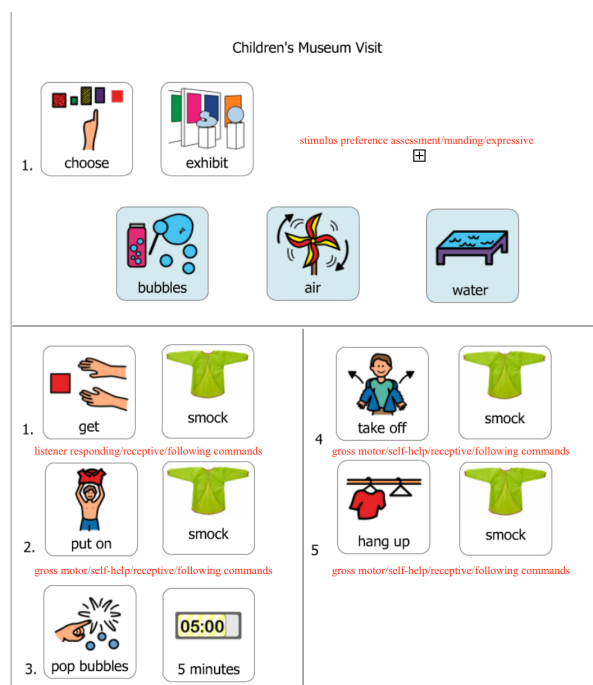
On top of these tools, the DuPage Children's museum also houses a small cafe that offers food for picky eaters and those with allergies and dietary restrictions.

It can be overwhelming to think about how to work on therapeutic goals when out in the community. Therefore, it can be very beneficial to think about your visit ahead of time so that you can plan for what will occur and so that you can prepare your child through a social story or list of expectations if possible. You can also contact your ABA supervisor for assistance with this type of planning.

Some general recommendations for an outing would be to think about the goals that you are already working on within the home environment. For example, you might already be working on having your child request specific actions/nouns or respond to their name. You might also be working on having your child imitate your actions so that they are better able to play functionally. Other skills might include waiting, choice making, responding to social interactions, initiating social interactions, turn taking, and following directions; the possibilities are endless!

Once you have your goals in mind, you can think of different ways to imbed these goals into the activity that will occur in the community environment. By thinking of each step that needs to occur in order to complete the activity, or through the use of a task analysis, you can begin to plan on how your goals will be implemented. As an example, if we're considering a trip to the museum which will likely involve a visit to the bubbles exhibit, we might with the following sequence of steps and use these steps gets we established above to inform a set of visuals to help visit (note the red descriptions on the visual that highlight goal areas being targeted within the activity).

- 1) Get smock.
- 2) Put on smock.
- 3) Pop bubbles for 5 minutes.
- 4) Take off smock.
- 5) Hang up smock.



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Another fun option for the summer could be going to the park or a water park/splash pad. To make these visits more successful, make sure to take toys that your child is familiar with and that might naturally draw other children to the area, such as a bubble machine, chalk, or parachute. Tools like a “First/Then” strip can help to illustrate expectations and fidget toys can assist children who are waiting in a line.

There are many other locales that provide additional support and sensory friendly activities that can be beneficial for our kids. Click on the following link for more fun community options. <https://pediatrtrust.com/3-activities-in-the-chicago-area-that-provide-sensory-friendly-environments-for-children-with-autism/>

With preplanning and visual support, these outings can become less daunting and transform into opportunities for family bonding. Visuals are highly recommended because they can be powerful for our children on the spectrum as our kids tend to process visual information more easily compared to auditory information. By pairing these visuals with spoken language, we can encourage our children to not only engage in activities with independence, we can assist language development, make expectations clear, and even teach that waiting does not mean “no”.

For other summer activity ideas, please refer to our Facebook page for additional information!

Summary:

- Determine 2-3 goals that are being worked on in the natural environment that can be generalized into the community setting.
- Determine a child’s preferences through stimulus preference assessments in order to encourage requesting and language opportunities throughout the process.
- Bring any necessary visual supports, or utilize supports offered through the facility, to help your child wait and understand expectations.
- Use prompt and fading procedures combined with reinforcement to teach new behaviors.