

DECEMBER 2009



A Division of The Association For Community Living

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

*Creating Opportunities, Building Relationships, Improving Lives
for children and adults with developmental disabilities since 1952*

www.communityresourcesforautism.org



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Dear Parents and Friends of Community Resources,

Thank you for your advocacy with the Governor and the State Legislature to preserve family support services for families with children and adults with autism. Your advocacy helped limit the cuts that were made to Department of Developmental Services (DDS) family support funding at the beginning of the fiscal year, in July 2009. We also believe that strong advocacy by the disability community persuaded the Governor not to make further cuts in family support this month in his efforts to balance the state budget.

Despite these efforts, Community Resources' budget for family support for children was cut by 57% by the state. This resulted in virtually all funding for stipends/respite being eliminated, along with direct in-home work on issues such as communication, behavior, transitions, sleep, etc. We feel these were very effective services and will continue to seek the restoration of funding for them.

In addition, the state cut funding for basic information and training services provided through our Autism Center and made significant cuts in special initiatives that prevent placement of children in residential schools.

To respond to these cuts we have cut staff hours and reorganized staff roles and responsibilities. We are exploring new initiatives that we hope will allow us to provide critical services that were cut using grants, increased fundraising, partnerships, and fees for service arrangements.

We are still providing a wide range of services including intake for DDS services, information and referral, workshops, parent-to-parent contacts, support groups, and stipends (to a very limited extent through grants and fundraising). Please continue to give us feedback on our services and how we can be most helpful to you.

However, our advocacy work is not done. The Governor recently announced cuts in personal care attendant services (and other services) that will have a profound negative effect on many families. We have been told that the next fiscal year (FY 2011) may bring more cuts. We continue to work with statewide and local disability groups to prevent more cuts. Training for families on how best to advocate are being planned. Advocacy plans include town meetings with representatives of the Governor before he issues a 2011 budget in January, and meetings with western Massachusetts legislators.

Your advocacy, especially your descriptions of your needs, your concerns, and how these cuts have affected your family, is the most powerful advocacy tool. We will let you know about all the advocacy efforts that will be happening. As some efforts will require quick responses from all of us, email will be the most effective tool. **Please be sure we have your email addresses.**

Together we will work to protect and eventually rebuild the services that are so important for families with children with autism.

Sincerely,

David I. Specht, Ph.D.
Director

P.S. You may also want to register with The ARC of Massachusetts www.arcmass.org to receive updates on the budget process and calls for action directly. Community Resources website www.communityresourcesforautism.org also has a link to the ARC.

December 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11 Chanukah (sunset thru December 19)	12
13	14	15	16	17	18 Annual Family Holiday Party	19
20	21	22	23	24	25 Christmas	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Community Resources for People with Autism

Cordially Invites You to Our

Annual Family Holiday Party

Friday, December 18, 2009
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Holy Cross Parish Hall
23 Sycamore Street
Holyoke, MA

So that we have a gift for every child, please R.S.V.P. by December 11 to:

Community Resources for People with Autism
greaneyk@theasn.org
(413) 529-2428

*****We will need each child's name, age, and gender*****

Potluck—if your last name begins with:
A-G please bring a dessert
H-Z please bring an appetizer

Let's enjoy the evening with
friends, food, entertainment, Santa,
and a present for every child!

COMMUNITY RESOURCES' UPCOMING EVENTS

Berkshire Transition Series (4 part series)

Transition Planning 101 (Part one of a four part Transition series)

Date & time: Tuesday, January 5 (snow date: Tues. Jan. 12); 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, RSVP by Mon. Dec. 28.
 Speaker: Julie Sinclair--Federation for Children with Special Needs
 Location: Nessacus Middle School, Dalton, MA

Deciding how best to use the high school years in order to ensure that the teen emerges at graduation as well prepared as possible to lead a fulfilling, independent life is a complex process crammed into a very short window of opportunity. Transition goals and services should be written into the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) when the student is 15 years old, so discussions should begin by age 14. Julie's expertise can help you and your son/daughter make the best use of the time and resources available.

Self Advocacy (Part two of a four part Transition series)

Date & time: Saturday, January 16 (snow date: Sat., Jan. 23); 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, RSVP by Monday, Jan. 11.
 Speaker: Panel of Speakers
 Location: BCARC Social Development Center-65 Depot St. Dalton, MA

This workshop is designed for young people with developmental challenges and their families to learn the importance and power of their own voices. This workshop will also offer a panel discussion of self advocates from Berkshire County.

Guardianship (Part three of a four part Transition series)

Date & time: Tuesday, January 26 (snow date: Tues., Feb 2); 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, RSVP by Tuesday, Jan. 19.
 Location: Nessacus Middle School, Dalton, MA
 Speaker: TBD

This workshop is to inform parents and caregivers of when guardianship is needed, the different kinds of guardianship, and to explain the process of applying for guardianship for a loved one who may not be able to make decisions for themselves.

Self Advocacy (Part four of a four part Transition series)

Date & time: Tuesday, February 23, 2010
 Location: Nessacus Middle School; Dalton, MA

Meet, greet, and gather information on the topics that are important to your family as your child makes the transition into adulthood. We will have representatives from local support providers on hand to answer your questions about home, work, community, guardianship, and estate planning. We encourage parents and family members who have a child with special needs going into middle school, high school, or turning 22 to attend.

**For more information or to register, contact Rhonda Ward at (413) 529-2428 x 117, or wardr@theassn.org (A collaboration of Community Resources, Central Berkshire Regional School District - SPED PAC, Berkshire County ARC, United Cerebral Palsy of Berkshire County, Berkshire Family And Individual Resources and the Department of Developmental Services Berkshire Area Office)

Insight Into Autism Spectrum Disorders

Date & time: Thursday, January 7; 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm; RSVP by Monday, January 4.
 Speaker: Jason Litto
 Location: SCAN 360; 11 Wilbraham Rd., Springfield, MA

An interactive workshop designed to introduce families and caretakers to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Characteristics and strategies to help individuals are discussed, as well as some of the social and cognitive difficulties that people with autism experience. The workshop will also provide an opportunity to meet other parents of children and young adults with an ASD. We encourage friends, family members, and support persons to attend this valuable workshop.

For more information or to register, contact Community Resources at (413) 529-2428.

* ATTENTION PARENTS of SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN *

Designed for parents and caretakers of school age children who are on the autism spectrum.

An educational series offered by
Community Resources For People With Autism
as part of our Parent Education Program.

We encourage attendance at all five sessions to gain the most from the workshops:



Basic Rights



An IEP For My Child



Strategies for Effective Communication



Strategies for Effective Advocacy



The Hidden Curriculum



Please refer to the next page for session topic details, dates, and times.

Workshop Series Location:

Community Resources for People with Autism
116 Pleasant St., Suite 366; Easthampton, MA 01027

For more information or to register, please contact:

Community Resources for People with Autism
Phone: 413-529-2428; Email: greaneyk@theasn.org

Educational Advocacy Workshop Series

Basic Rights

Date & time: Tuesday, October 27; 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm; RSVP by Friday, October 23.

Speaker: Julie Sinclair--Federation for Children with Special Needs

Location: Community Resources for People with Autism

This workshop provides families with an introduction to their rights and responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Massachusetts Special Education Law and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is designed to help parents learn how to be effective partners with the school, to decide the child's eligibility for special education, to plan, make decisions and to monitor the educational progress of their child.

For more information or to register, please Community Resources at (413) 529-2428

An IEP for My Child

Date & time: Tuesday, November 10; 6:30 - 8:30 pm; RSVP by Friday, November 6.

Speaker: Julie Sinclair--Federation for Children with Special Needs

Location: Community Resources for People with Autism

Every child with a disability who receives special education services must have an Individual Education Program (IEP). This workshop takes parents step-by-step through the development of the IEP including how to articulate a Vision, using evaluations to write annual measurable goals and how to measure their child's progress.

For more information or to register, please Community Resources at (413) 529-2428

Strategies for Effective Communication

Date & time: Wednesday, January 13; 6:30 - 8:30 pm; RSVP by Friday, January 8.

Speakers: Laurel Peltier (Educational Advocate); Susan Hackney (Mediator); Jeanne Troxell Munson

Location: Community Resources for People with Autism

This *interactive* workshop will focus on communication skill building and conflict resolution for parents as members of their child's IEP team through role-playing and one-on-one advice from the panel of speakers.

For more information or to register, please Community Resources at (413) 529-2428

Strategies for Effective Advocacy

Date & time: Tuesday, February 9; 6:30 - 8:30 pm; RSVP by Wednesday, February 3.

Speaker: Jeanne Troxell Munson

Location: Community Resources for People with Autism

Does your child need a 1:1 paraprofessional, longer day or longer year, social skills training, or a particular related service not currently in your IEP? This workshop will help you learn how to use strategies for effective advocacy to turn your child's needs into appropriate services and supports.

For more information or to register, please contact Community Resources at (413) 529-2428.

The Hidden Curriculum

Date & time: Tuesday, March 2; 6:30 - 8:30 pm; RSVP by Friday, February 26.

Speakers: Jason Litto and Jeanne Troxell Munson

Location: Community Resources for People with Autism

This topic introduces you to the importance of the "hidden curriculum"—the unwritten social rules and expectations of behavior that we all know but were never taught—and how a lack of these skills impacts individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Individuals who have ASD do not come equipped with the same ability to understand the hidden curriculum. As a result, they break many social and behavioral rules without intent or even knowledge that they are doing so. This, coupled with their difficulty in generalizing information from one situation to another, leads them to making the same mistakes over and over again at a tremendous social cost. This workshop includes strategies and techniques to help children and adults understand social cues and un-stated expectations, guidelines for what to do (or what not to do) in specific social situations, and practical tips.

For more information or to register, please contact Community Resources at (413) 529-2428.

Stepping Up and Stepping Out for Autism Proves to be a Great Success!

Community Resources would like to extend our gratitude to the many individuals who helped make our *1st Annual Stepping Up and Stepping Out for Autism* event a wonderful success.

On October 23, at Western New England College, more than 150 individuals joined us for an evening full of fun and friendship. The event which was emceed by Brenda Garten, was also highlighted by speakers, Dr. Anthony Caprio (Pres., Western New England College), Dr. David Specht (Director, Community Resources), Carrie Lemelin (Board President, Community Resources), and Michelle Lemelin (a young adult with ASD and served by Community Resources). In addition to dining on delicious food from many local restaurants who donated their services, those who attended socialized and enjoyed both the raffle and silent auction.

The event raised approximately \$12,000! The proceeds will be put directly towards helping the families we serve in the areas of educational advocacy and family support services. This will be a great benefit to many of the individuals who were dramatically affected by this year's budget cuts.

We look forward to seeing you all again next year!

To view pictures of the event, visit
www.communityresourcesforautism.org

A special thank you to the many individuals who helped make this event possible:

Event Committee

Betsy Benton	Peter Benton	Carrie Lemelin
Bill Loomis	Kathy Malborg	Moirra Murphy
Kelli Ann Ross	Deena Shriver	Jill Scibelli

Event Volunteers

Deb Bell	Sue Brunno	Lynn Dwyer
Brenda Garton	Jim Greaney	Paul Farnsworth
Phyllis Keenan	Michelle Lemelin	Kelly Rimondi
Ann Ruette		

Service Donors

Aramark Catering
Coldwell Banker Real Estate
DJ Tom Lamica
Moirra Murphy
The Association For Community Living
Western New England College

Platinum Sponsor



Silver Sponsor



Table Sponsor



***Kelli Ann Ross
in
Honor of Ian***

Patron Sponsor



Stepping Up and Stepping Out for Autism

Community Resources would also like to recognize the many individuals and businesses who contributed to the success of this event through In-Kind Donations

Restaurants

3 Café
Aramark Catering
Atkins Farm Country Market
Black Horse Tavern
Café Leone
Chez Josef
Fazio's Restaurant
Fusion Café
Hot Table
Iron Chef Asian Cuisine
La Fiorentina Pastry Shop
LePage Bakeries
Pazzo's Restaurant
Salvatore's
Storrowton Tavern and Carriage House
Student Prince Café
Tavern on the Hill
The Log Cabin
The Pizza Shoppe
Yourway Gourmet

Silent Auction Donors

Ann Kusiak
Ballroom Fever
Bottle Shop
Cape Air
Cariddi Sales Company
Ciao Bella Salone
Country Side Store
Curves of Sixteen Acres
Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation
Eastside Grill
Edgewood Golf Course
Elements Massage

Silent Auction Donors (cont.)

Erik Rosenthal
Finishing Touch Salon and Spa
Friendly's Ice Cream
Fun 'n Sun Travel and Cruise
Gold's Gym of West Springfield
Healthtrax Fitness
Island Indulgence, Dead Sea
Beauty Products
Jen Sawka
Jim Shriver
John Robison
John W. Scibak
John Sjoberg
Joia Beauty, Lynn Ford
Maddie's Crafts and More
Margo Whitt
Nantucket Sweet Inspirations
Nurture Massage Therapy
Ochoa Hair Salon
Pride Gas Stations
Prospect Mountain Campground
Quantum Life Management -
Belly Dancing Lessons
Reflections by Claudia
Robert Charles Photography
Sixteen Acres Garden Center
Springfield Falcons
Springfield Symphony
Sugar Maple Trailside Inn
The Cruise Store
The Finishing Touch Salon
Whispering Horse
Wicked Tan
Yankee Candle
Yankee Mattress

Chinese Raffle Item Donors

3 Café
Boisjolie Farms
Class Grass Garden Center
Duets Salon
Fusion Café
Graziano Gardens
Kiddly Winks
Ledges Golf Course
Mass MOCA
Mt. View Restaurant
No Small Victories
Polished Nail Salon
Red Sox or Yankees Driveway
Stencil
Rinaldi's Restaurant
Romito and Sons Deli
Salmon Run Fish House
Sanaa Amel Life Dance, Belly
Dancing
Schoen Books
Shaker Bowl
Shobukan Western MA Martial
Arts Academy
Spa Europa
TD Bank
Touch of Garlic
Yourway Gourmet

In-Kind Donations

Aramark Catering
Coldwell Banker Real Estate
DJ Tom Lamica
Final Markdown
Moira Murphy
The Association
For Community Living
Western New England College

JCC Upcoming Events



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One Day Cheerleading and Dance Vacation Camp

Tuesday, December 29th 10am – 2pm

Learn how to cheer and dance from teachers, coaches and award winning cheerleaders.

All ages - fun for beginners to experienced dancers.

Bring a bag lunch and a water bottle, snack will be provided. ~ Wear comfortable clothes and sneakers.

\$25 members, \$40 general public

Register by December 11th by calling the JCC at 739-4715

*** More information will be sent to you after registration**

Bowling Buddies

We had so much fun last year at our bowling parties that we have partnered again with Amy Kimball and her **Don't Just Sit There** program to bring you our newly named **Bowling Buddies** program.

This winter's dates are:

- ◆ Winter Break – Monday, December 28th
- ◆ Martin Luther King Holiday – Monday, January 18th
- ◆ Presidents' Day Holiday – Monday, February 15th



Our fun morning of bowling (10:30 am – 12:30 pm) ends with a pizza party and celebration cupcakes.

Pre-register at the JCC at 739-4715 for \$15 per bowler or if you are undecided, join us the day of for \$20.



Basketball Skills I and II

Level I – Elementary

Wednesday's 3:45 – 4:30pm

\$85 JCC Members, \$100 General Public

8 Sessions starting December 2nd (no class 12/23 or 12/30)

Level II – Teen through Young Adult

Wednesday's 4:45 – 5:30pm

8 Sessions starting December 2nd (no class 12/23 or 12/30)

Call to register 739-4715.

Linda LaPointe, Special Needs Coordinator

Springfield Jewish Community Center

1160 Dickinson Street, Springfield, MA 01108

(413) 739-4715, ext 315

llapointe@springfieldjcc.org

Scholarships are available.

BERKSHIRE SWIM

Community Resources for People with Autism's Berkshire Autism Projects Committee has joined the Berkshire County ARC and Berkshire Family and Individual Resources to sponsor an hour of family swim at the Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center (165 East St., Pittsfield) every Thursday evening (excluding holidays) beginning October 1, 2009, and running through the middle of May, 2010, from 6:00-7:00 pm at no cost to families. There will be lifeguards on duty; however, children will need to be accompanied by parents or care providers. If you plan on attending, please call the Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center by 3:00 pm on the day you plan to attend to ensure that they have enough lifeguards on duty. If you have any questions, please call Megan Sherman at (413) 443-4780 x 15.

Parent Support Group in Amherst

A new parent support group has started with the generous help of several parent volunteers. Starting this fall, groups will meet once per month at the home of Chris and Laurel Peltier. The meeting format will alter from having formal topics to family outings. Childcare will be provided, so be sure to let us know if you will be bringing your child.

For more information or to RSVP,
please contact:

Chris and Laurel Peltier at (413) 230-3287,
cnlpeltier@aol.com

Positive Parenting

Positive parenting—a program serving parents with learning challenges who have a child five or under—offers parent education, referrals, home visiting, and weekly support groups designed to benefit those needing a concrete and slower paced approach.

The focus is on Health and Wellness, Financial Literacy and Family Literacy. Transportation and childcare are provided. Groups held in Northampton and Amherst.

For more information, contact:

Kris Larson
(413) 834-3344

THE SPECIAL NEEDS

SUPPORT SYSTEM is facilitated by Stephanie and Charles McCormick, parents of a special needs child. Support and activities for families who have a child with special needs of any kind. The group meets the first and last Tuesday of every month from 6:00 -7:30 pm at the Tabernacle Baptist Church (603 New Ludlow Road, Chicopee).

They offer parents: topic support meetings, guest speakers, family nights, relaxation ideas, and more.

They offer children: activity time based on learning styles such arts and crafts, puppets, play dough, music therapy, sensory awareness, movies, and more — all with the goal of promoting social and life skills.

For more information and to register,
please contact Stephanie:
specialchildren@yahoo.com
or (413)693-5188.

Autism Blog

Local writer and parent of a child with autism, Cammie McGovern has recently started a blog sharing her experiences as a parent of a child with special needs. Cammie has invited us to share her blog with you. Follow the link below to view her writings and gain a little insight into Cammie's experiences as a parent of a child with autism.

<http://thefastertimes.com/about/?u=cammiemcgovern>



Our Information Packets are now online!

Visit our website at www.communityresourcesforautism.org to learn more about:

- ◆ Asperger's Syndrome
- ◆ Diet and Medication
- ◆ Inclusion
- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Sleep Issues
- ◆ Toilet Training
- ◆ Autism
- ◆ Early Intervention
- ◆ Kids and Siblings
- ◆ Sensory Integration
- ◆ Social Skills
- ◆ Transition: 14-22
- ◆ Behavior
- ◆ Floortime
- ◆ Prior Written Notice
- ◆ Sexuality
- ◆ Stress
- ◆ Transition: Turning 3

Information can be accessed by clicking on Parent Information Packets under the *Services* drop-down menu.

The Disability Law Center (DLC) is a private, non-profit law firm providing legal advocacy on disability issues that promote the fundamental rights of all people with disabilities to participate fully and equally in the social and economic life of Massachusetts.

DLC has received a grant from the Massachusetts Bar Foundation to provide three trainings on special education and transition services in cities with large African American, Hispanic and other linguistic minority populations. The first training will take place on November 14, in Holyoke, the second one on January 30, in Fitchburg, and the third on March 27, in New Bedford. The purpose of the trainings is to inform families about the rights and opportunities available to their child. To register for the trainings on the web at www.dlc-ma.org, phone 800-872-9992, and fax 617-723-9125 or TTY 800-381-0577.

Please visit the DLC website for more information about DLC and the trainings www.dlc-ma.org

Sincerely,
Richard X. Villavicencio, Intake Paralegal/Outreach Coordinator

Online Support Forum

As a part of our efforts to expand the types of services we provide and ways parents can access and share information, Community Resources for People with Autism has developed an online forum for parents, professionals, and community members to exchange information and knowledge.

On this forum, openly discuss specific autism-related topics, ask other parents for advice or suggestions, share your success stories, alert families and professionals of community events, and so much more.

Visit this new online forum at www.CRPAforums.proboards.com

Please understand that this forum is in its beginning stages, so we need your help to get it started!

Parent-To-Parent Connections

As you know, Community Resources for People with Autism has recently experienced several significant changes, including drastic budget cuts and internal restructuring. As a result, we are no longer able to offer the level of support to families that we once offered. Now, more than ever, parents need to use one another's experiences and insight as a new kind of support. Parent-to-parent connections are vital in these times when other assistance is limited.

We are compiling a list of local parents of children with autism spectrum disorders that have been involved with Community Resources in the past and have demonstrated a strong knowledge of autism as well as local resources. We are always looking for new parents to be a part of this list.

By volunteering to be on this list, your contact information will not be public knowledge but will be offered to parents that are specifically seeking a connection with a local parent. If you are interested in being a Parent-To-Parent Volunteer and added to our Parent-To-Parent Connections list, or if have any questions or comments about this program, please contact Beth Crosby at Community Resources: (413) 529-2428 ext. 115 or crosbye@theassn.org.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Update Your Info!

In an effort to make sure we are operating as efficiently as possible, give us a call and update your contact information. The majority of our communications are now happening through email. If we don't have your email address, you won't receive the most current information and might miss out on important events!

Call (413) 529-2428, or email info@communityresourcesforautism.org

AFAM 2nd Annual Wine Sale

Back by popular demand – just in time for your own holiday needs as well as gift-giving.

To learn how you can purchase private-label wines and benefit Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts at the same time, visit www.grapesurfer.com/afam or click on the link shown at the bottom of the flyer (below), where you can order online. Orders placed by December 16 will be delivered by Christmas; orders placed by December 23 will be delivered by New Years. The sale is conducted by Custom Grapes, which has a great track record of working with many charities in Massachusetts and elsewhere. There are six varieties of wine, and you can order individual bottles of multi-bottle gift packs. It's easy to order online, so visit the website now.

Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts



Attend your next IEP meeting informed, educated, and empowered.



A concise guide to special education, eligibility, regulations, the IEP, and more!

\$20 (plus \$2 shipping and handling)

***Quantity discount: 5 or more \$15 each plus \$6 s/h (based on 5)
(Call for s/h charges for larger orders)***

~ Loan Program available to families ~

Ring of Rights ~ Order Form

Make checks payable to:

Community Resources for People with Autism
116 Pleasant Street; Suite 366
Easthampton, MA 01027

Name:	
Street:	
City, ST, Zip:	
Phone:	Email:
Quantity:	Amount Paid:

Twelve Tips for Helping People with Autism and Their Families Have a Happy Holiday

(Source: Autism Society of America)

While many happily anticipate the coming holiday season, families of people on the autism spectrum also understand the special challenges that may occur when schedules are disrupted and routines broken. Our hope is that by following these few helpful tips, families may lessen the stress of the holiday season and make it a more enjoyable experience for everyone involved. The following tips were developed with input from the Autism Society, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism and the Indiana Autism Leadership Network.

1. Preparation is crucial for many individuals. At the same time, it is important to determine how much preparation a specific person may need. For example, if your son or daughter has a tendency to become anxious when anticipating an event that is to occur in the future, you may want to adjust how many days in advance you prepare him or her. Preparation can occur in various ways by using a calendar and marking the date of various holiday events, or by creating a social story that highlights what will happen at a given event.

2. Decorations around the house may be disruptive for some. It may be helpful to revisit pictures from previous holidays that show decorations in the house. If such a photo book does not exist, use this holiday season to create one. For some it may also be helpful to take them shopping with you for holiday decorations so that they are engaged in the process. Or involve them in the process of decorating the house. And once holiday decorations have been put up, you may need to create rules about those that can and cannot be touched. Be direct, specific and consistent.

3. If a person with autism has difficulty with change, you may want to gradually decorate the house. For example, on the first day put up the Christmas tree, then on the next day decorate the tree and so on. And again, engage them as much as possible in this process.

4. If a person with autism begins to obsess about a particular gift or item they want, it may be helpful to be specific and direct about the number of times they can mention the gift. One suggestion is to give them 5 chips. They are allowed to exchange one chip for 5 minutes of talking about the desired gift. Also, if you have no intention of purchasing a specific item, it serves no purpose to tell them that maybe they will get the gift. This will only lead to problems in the future. Always choose to be direct and specific about your intentions.

5. Teach them how to leave a situation and/or how to access support when an event becomes overwhelming. For example, rather than having a behavioral episode, the individual should be taught ahead of time that they should go to their room when feeling overwhelmed. This self-management tool will serve the individual into adulthood.

6. If you are traveling for the holidays, make sure you have their favorite foods or items available. Having familiar items readily available can help to calm stressful situations. Also, prepare them via social stories or other communication systems for any unexpected delays in travel.

7. Know your loved one with autism and how much noise and activity they can tolerate. If you detect that a situation may be becoming overwhelming, help them find a quiet area in which to regroup. And there may be some situations that you simply avoid (e.g., crowded shopping malls the day after Thanksgiving).

8. Prepare a photo album in advance of the relatives and other guests who will be visiting during the holidays. Allow the person with autism access to these photos at all times and also go through the photo album with them while talking briefly about each family member.

9. Practice opening gifts, taking turns and waiting for others, or giving gifts to others. You might also choose to practice certain religious rituals. Work with a speech language pathologist to construct pages of vocabulary or topic boards that relate to the holidays and family traditions.

10. Prepare family members for strategies to use to minimize anxiety or behavioral incidents, and to enhance participation. Help them to understand if the person with autism prefers to be hugged or not, needs calm discussions, or provide other suggestions that will facilitate a smoother holiday season.

11. If the person with autism is on special diet, make sure there is food available that they can eat. And even if they are not on a special diet, be cautious of the amount of sugar consumed. And try to maintain a sleep and meal routine.

12. Above all, know your loved one with autism. Know how much noise and other sensory input they can take. Know their level of anxiety and the amount of preparation it may take. Know their fears and those things that will make the season more enjoyable for them.

Our hope above all is that you will have a wonderful holiday season!



A NEW SENSE OF HOPE WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST.

What is the Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund?

The Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund (CICRF) helps families bear the excessive financial burdens associated with the care of children with special health care needs and disabilities. CICRF is a payor of last resort. It provides financial assistance for Massachusetts families with children experiencing a medical condition requiring services that are not covered by a private insurer, federal or state assistance, or any other financial source.

The Fund is designed to act as a safety net for families who have excessive expenses related to a child's medical needs. The family may be responsible for these expenses due to:

- A lack of insurance or dependent coverage
- Expenses that are greater than the maximum benefit allowed by their insurance company
- Pre-existing conditions, co-payments, and other expenses that are not covered by insurance

CICRF is a reimbursement program. The expense must have already been incurred in order to be eligible for the Fund and to receive reimbursement. In cases of extreme medical emergency, the CICRF Commission may grant approval before the expense is incurred.

NOTE: Because the amount in the Fund varies from year to year, and the number of requests varies as well, CICRF cannot guarantee funding in all cases. Families are advised not to assume or make financial decisions based on the expectation that the Fund will pay, even if they have received payment for a similar expense in the past.

For more information, visit: <http://www.mass.gov/cicrf/>