

## Top Ten Summer Activities for Children with Special Needs

Summer can be a challenging time for children with special needs and their parents. Many families face a decrease in school and therapeutic hours. This may leave parents with extra time to fill during the day. Parents are also on alert as children with behavioral or social skill challenges encounter bullies and controlling peers at parks. A trip to a recreational center may seem like an easy answer for some families, but not always the most accommodating for a child with physical disabilities or special needs.

Here is a list of summer activities that you can do with your child that does not require weeks of planning, a loan or travelling further than your backyard.

1. **Backyard Water Park.** You can quickly create your own water park in the backyard for an afternoon of fun. If your child's tolerance is low for water play, sit them on your lawn (if they are sensitive to grass, put them on a shower curtain or towel for more comfort) and use your finger and a hose to create a variety of sprays for your child to experience.
2. **Sloppy Sensory.** With the nice weather, partake in some "goopy" activities outside that will help your child to integrate their senses. Spray an outside table with shaving cream and let your child smear it around or fill a bin with rice and dig your fingers in. Lastly, create a mud pit to roll around in. All you need afterwards is a hose! This type of sensory play has many benefits.
3. **Train Time.** Most children love trains. Make a day of it and ride the train with your child. Choose departure times during non commuting hours so you can get a seat next to a window and deal with fewer crowds. If you don't have commuter trains in your city, check out other public transportation options. A bus ride could be just as exciting as the train when presented as an adventure and not an everyday experience.
4. **Tent Building.** Make "the best tent ever" by pulling out all your blankets and chairs and have the tent overtake your backyard. Tent play can occupy your children for hours. It may also be a great resource to soothe a child, providing a hide-out or quiet place.
5. **Fossil Find.** Take a trip to a sandy beach or to your backyard sandbox and bury some "fossils" (a.k.a. painted rocks). Provide your child with a small shovel and bucket to dig up these archeological finds. Afterwards, you can dust them off, just like Indiana Jones, with a paintbrush. You and your child can take turns hiding and discovering these wonderful fossils.

6. **In Door Play Zones.** Visit local indoor play areas. These are typically filled with gigantic inflatable slides, bounce houses, obstacle courses and more. Many offer times for children with special needs to work on their social skills and/or sensory development.
7. **Mall Meandering.** Need to escape the heat? Take advantage of someone else's air conditioning by walking the mall on hot days. Malls are cool and not too crowded on the weekdays. It is a good way to keep your child moving and active as you pace back and forth in a controlled environment; less worries about children darting in front of traffic.
8. **Movie Madness.** A home cinema experience is a great way to get your children out of the sun for a couple of hours and allow some down time. Instead of just plopping down in front of the TV, make it a production – homemade movie tickets and a bowl of popcorn with pillows and blankets in front of the flat screen. It will seem like a special event in your child's day with these little extras. Just be cautious of 3-D movies since some may cause over stimulation.
9. **Firehouse Visit.** Call your local fire department and ask if you can stop by with your children for a quick visit to see the fire trucks and meet the firemen. This is a great way to break up your day, learn about fire safety and introduce your child to rescue workers (especially if your child wanders). Firemen are often good with children and will spend time talking to your child about what to do in an emergency. Take pictures of your visit and make it into a social story.
10. **Soothing Swing.** If nothing else, find a swing with your child this summer. Swings are beneficial for physical, social and cognitive development, and they offer certain therapeutic benefits. They promote movement and perceptual skills, spatial awareness, general fitness, social interaction, mental representation, and sensory integration, including vestibular development. If your child has trouble with crowds, visit the park in the morning during summer camp hours.

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