

## Summer 2013

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### Comments? Tips? Suggestions?

To send in comments, suggested topics for our next newsletter, or grandparent tips, please [email us](#).

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## Welcome to Our New GAN Members!

### *GAN members are a vital resource for autism ... and each other!*

The **Grandparent Autism Network** is an all-volunteer, international nonprofit organization that supports grandparents of children with autism and their families. GAN's mission is to promote awareness and understanding of autism and to enhance the resources essential to community responsiveness.

The Board of Directors is pleased to extend membership to grandparents internationally. The rate of autism is rapidly increasing *everywhere* and we look forward to giving support to grandparents who share our desire to make life better for their families.

GAN's current focus is on the development of lifetime supports for people with autism. Our eNewsletters address issues that universally impact grandparents and we encourage our members to develop new resources in other communities.

***All of GAN's programs and projects can be replicated, however, GAN's name and logo are trademarked and may not be used without permission.***

**We know that the best recommendations come from our members and we welcome your feedback and suggestions about how we can increase support for you and your family.**

## Safety Issues: At Home and Away

Typically, grandparents spend more time with their grandchildren during the summer months. Whether they visit your home, travel with you or you take them for outings, there are many safety measures you can employ to ensure that your time together will be safe, carefree and comfortable. Planning ahead will reduce anxieties for you as well as your grandchildren.

### **Preparing Your Home**

- Add locks for security or to limit access to potentially dangerous areas. Safety locks may be needed on bathroom, kitchen and laundry room cabinets. Cover over electrical outlets and limit access to electrical appliances.

- Provide gates or barriers to prevent falling down steps or to limit access to certain areas.
- Arrange furniture simply and practically. Clear table surfaces, provide appropriate chairs, and move furniture away from shelves or where a child may climb.
- If your grandchild is at high risk for running away (also referred to as "eloping"), place locks or alarms on exterior doors and windows that provide exits from the home. Contact the local police and fire departments and provide them with a photo and description of the child in addition to contact information for family members.

### **Outside the Home**

- Plan together and prepare your grandchild for the outing. Provide pictures or talk about your activities before you go so that your grandchild will know what to expect. This will reduce anxieties and make the day much more enjoyable.
- Before leaving home, make sure your grandchild is wearing identification. Attach it to the back of his shirt with a pin, clip it on shoelaces or write it on his arm with a marker. Include his name, diagnosis and your cell phone number. Be sure you take a recent photo of the child and your own identification information to show police in case the child is lost.
- If your grandchild has impaired mobility and is at risk when walking to or from public parking areas, inquire at your local Department of Motor Vehicles if you can obtain a special parking placard for easier access to venues.
- Call ahead to ensure that your intended destination is open. Try to avoid visiting restaurants without reservations or amusement parks that require long waits. Some venues provide special passes for faster access if you bring documentation from a physician or school to validate that your grandchild has a developmental disability. Upon entering, inquire if the park has special wristbands or other devices for locating young visitors. Identify areas where lost individuals can get help.

## **Grandparents Are Great Community Resources**

Grandparents can be the best advocates for grandchildren with autism. Increasing understanding and support for the autism community will ensure a better future for your grandchild. Grandparents are typically well connected in the community to politicians, business owners and community philanthropic organizations. Here are several simple, very effective ways you can help:

**[Sign up to be notified of any state or federal initiatives on the Autism Votes website](#)**

You will receive information about national and local legislative issues and learn how you can advocate for them. Contact your elected officials to encourage them to sign on to support any proposals that will benefit people with autism. Notify your family and friends about how they can help, too.

**[Contact business owners you know and local merchants or companies you patronize.](#)**

Inquire if they have jobs or training positions for people with developmental disabilities. If they are receptive to learning more, contact someone on the staff of a local employment agency that serves people with disabilities or a job recruitment specialist in a high school Transition Work Program who can explain employer benefits. Plan to join them at their appointment.

**Summer is the perfect time to contact your philanthropic organizations to offer speakers on autism topics.**

Because autism is so prevalent today, there are many topics of interest to the public. Here's an easy way you can increase information and support in your community. Ask local physicians, staff members at autism organizations or autism service providers if they will be presenters. Determine what timelines they have available for speaking engagements. Inquire if they have a favorite autism topic. Here are some suggested topics:

**What is Autism and How is it Diagnosed?**

**Early Signs of Autism: What Therapies are Available?**

**Autism: Its Affect on Families, Schools and the Workplace**

**Employing people with Autism: What Types of Jobs Optimize Their Skills?**

Call or write a letter to the president or program chairperson of the philanthropic organization and offer to provide a speaker for one of the meetings. Follow up within 2 weeks with a call, email or letter to see if you can confirm a presentation date. Notify the speaker to schedule the event. Ideas for additional topics and presentations can be found on the GAN website, [www.ganinfo.org](http://www.ganinfo.org) in *Past Events*.

## **New Assistive Technologies Are Helpful for Most People with Autism**

New technologies are enhancing the lives of people with autism by improving their communication skills, helping them to learn social skills and assisting them to learn in educational settings. "AT" is defined as any equipment that can be used by an individual to diminish or eliminate barriers to education or independence.

New applications for all ages and skill levels are being developed daily as a result of collaboration between parents, students, teachers, autism service providers and software developers. Most software is inexpensive and can be used on iPad, iPhone, iTouch or Android devices. Some people with ASD respond especially well to this type of teaching. Experts recommend that before purchasing apps, buyers should consider the developers' knowledge in the area for which the app was designed, the app ratings, ease of use and functionality

Some voice communication apps developed for non-speaking children and adults help them to communicate with pictures that are pre-installed or uploaded. You can view one of them [here](#):

There are many websites that recommend autism applications. Here is some information from *Autism Speaks*:

- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-apps>
- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/makerfairehandout.pdf>

Families residing in Orange County can test software options at TECH Labs offered by the nonprofit organization, [Team of Advocates for Special Kids](#). TASK is a Parent Training and Information Center. Everyone can request

TASK's free monthly Technology E-Newsletter that features the newest assistive technology and apps. The following information is from the **June 2013 TASK E-Newsletter**:

- **Getting Started: iPads for Special Needs** [iPads for Special Needs](#) is an excellent guide for any parent or caregiver seeking to learn how to make best use of iPads on behalf of the learning needs of their child. You can choose to order the book or you can choose to read the entire book online for FREE! They also have many helpful "how to" videos available online.
- **Learning Games for Kids** [This site](#) has tons of learning games, videos and lessons on a variety of topics such as math, spelling, vocabulary, health, geography and more! [One particular area on the Learning Games for Kids site](#) has 21 different games to teach keyboarding. Learning keyboarding skills is important for today's learners and tomorrow's earners. These free typing games are a great way to build typing skills.

***Last, but not least, here's an application recommended by TASK that I believe may benefit grandparents, well as our grandchildren:***

- **It's Done! App (\$2.99)** Did you remember to lock the door? Turn off the stove? Take your vitamin? [It's Done!](#) remembers for you and helps you confirm whether you did it. Routine everyday tasks are quickly done, but soon forgotten. It's Done! eliminates that feeling of uncertainty by instantly confirming whether the task is done. Simply mark tasks "done" as you do them. It's Done! app is designed to make your life easier and more enjoyable with every remembered task!

The board of directors of the **Grandparent Autism Network** and I invite you to share this newsletter with your family and friends. Help our members to be ... ***a vital resource for autism ... and each other!***

Warm regards,

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