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Comments? Tips? Suggestions?

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

Join Our Mailing List!

Welcome to Our New GAN Members!

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

The **G**randparent **A**utism **N**etwork 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 support grandparents who want to make life better for their families and increase autism resources in their communities..

GAN's current focus is on the development of lifetime supports for people with autism. Our eNewsletters and websites address issues that universally impact grandparents. ***All of GAN's programs and projects may 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.

Got Too Much Stuff? Donate it to GAN!



**Got Too Much Stuff?
Donate to GAN's eBay Site, [gan_charities!](#)**

Grandparents have lots of "stuff" like

collectibles, unused gifts and household goods, clothing, vintage jewelry and things in good condition that our children "do not want."

Your "stuff" can benefit other grandparents and families affected by autism. The Grandparent Autism Network welcomes donated goods, each valued at \$25 or more.

You can drop off tax deductible items at Jay's Catering, 10581 Garden Grove Blvd., Garden Grove, CA - or send them C/O GAN at 23785 El Toro Road, #103, Lake Forest, CA 92630 (USPS flat rate boxes may lower mailing costs!)

Please contact GAN at info@ganinfo.org for additional options. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.
Tax ID #20-5230144

Advocate for Our Families

It is estimated that 90% of autism resources today are allocated for children under the age of 10 years. Virtually every community will be impacted by the burgeoning number of adults with autism who will need lifetime supports such as job training, employment, transportation, medical care, housing and social opportunities. How can grandparents help? There are many ways you can help to advocate and develop needed resources. Here are some suggestions:

- Join a local autism organization or support group for families. Learn about the community needs and volunteer to take a role in the efforts to increase resources. If there are no groups, ask autism service providers what programs and services are needed in your area.
- Contact your congressman or senator to ask if they are supporting autism legislation that will help in your community. If "yes," ask how you can assist in their efforts. If "no" contact Autism Speaks at <http://www.autismspeaks.org/advocacy> to learn about current issues and what relevant information you can provide for your elected officials to increase their interest and support.
- Ask managers in stores you patronize if they have job training positions for people with developmental disabilities. If they do, thank them for their employment policy. If no program exists, ask if they are receptive to learning about the advantages of providing training opportunities. You can contact your State Department of Developmental Disabilities at <http://www.acl.gov/Programs/AIDD/Index.aspx> or your local high school with a special education program to arrange for a professional to meet with the prospective employer.
- If you are or were formerly employed by a company, encourage the management to learn more about the corporate advantages of hiring people with special needs.

Grandparents Can Help to Support Siblings

Because children with autism frequently require more attention, therapies and time, the needs of their brothers and sisters are sometimes overlooked. Siblings share many of the same concerns their parents have like wanting more information about autism and they worry about the caregiving expectations their parents have for them in the future. At times, they may feel resentment, embarrassment and under great pressure to achieve. They are frequently in the waiting room when "family centered" counseling and services are offered and they are often overlooked by support agencies.

Here are some ways you can help them:

- Plan to spend special time alone with siblings and be a good listener. If you provide a safe, comfortable environment, they may express their feelings and concerns to you.
- When siblings argue, try to remember that typically developing children deserve a life where they, like other children, sometimes misbehave, get angry and fight. Try not to intervene with statements like *"Leave your brother alone. You are bigger, you are stronger, you should know better. It is your job to compromise."* They are already more likely to feel guilty about their sibling's developmental needs and most typical siblings have disagreements from time to time.
- Siblings deserve to feel personally safe as much as their brother or sister with special needs. If they are in vulnerable situations due to aggressive or challenging behaviors, plan separate activities for them so you can give your full attention to only one of them at a time.
- Offer to care for your grandchild with autism so that his/her parents can spend personal time away with their other children. It enables parents to be more supportive of all of their children and siblings will have more opportunity to express their feelings to their parents.
- **Important to Remember:** *One grandchild's special needs should not overshadow another's achievements and milestones. Celebrate and reinforce the accomplishments of **all** of your grandchildren.*

More information about sibling support groups is available on these websites:

<http://www.siblingsupport.org>

<http://siblingleadership.org>

<http://www.sibs.org.uk>

Local children's hospitals may also have resources.

Increase Social Opportunities for Your Grandchild

Most grandchildren are supported by their school districts until they are 22 years old. During that time, they typically have some opportunities to engage socially with classmates, sports teams, or interest groups. After age 22, if they are not in job training positions, employed or in post secondary educational programs, they typically become socially isolated. Here are some suggestions for you to encourage friendships and increase community integration for grandchildren of *all* ages.

- ***If you live nearby,*** offer to take your grandchild and his/her friends on outings. Consider visits to restaurants, parks, movies, libraries, bowling alleys, miniature golf courses, video arcades, fitness centers, museums, amusement parks or concerts. Take public transportation to local city attractions or to spectator sporting events. Encourage friendships and, if possible, try to schedule frequent or regular activities together with them.
- Invite your grandchild and their friend(s) for popcorn and movies in your home. Download or rent a movie they will enjoy. You might also offer them board or card games. Serve pizza or something easy to prepare.
- Welcome their friends and families to your home for a potluck dinner. After dinner, your grandchild and his/her friends can play games, share hobbies or other activities in one room while their caregivers meet in another area for discussions on topics of mutual interest or to plan a day trip, a picnic or other future activities.
- Invite your grandchild and his/her friend to shop at a grocery store with you. At your home, reinforce life skills such as how to set a table, prepare a simple meal, use a dishwasher, etc. Engage them in practicing household tasks that will enable them to live independently in the future.
- Research in your community for special needs sports teams or a Special Olympics program that is age appropriate. Some "Spirit Leagues" pair typical players with players with developmental disabilities. Playing ability is not important... the focus is on building friendships and increasing understanding and good sportsmanship.
- Seek music, dancing, art, reading, acting, martial arts, computer tech, horse riding, surfing, or other special interest programs that your grandchild might enjoy. If they do not exist locally, encourage them to be offered. Contact local sports teams, after school programs, YMCA/YWCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs, junior colleges and parks and recreation departments for their event schedules and to ask if they will provide new or additional resources for people with developmental disabilities.
- ***If you live far away,*** consider sponsoring some of these activities by sending theatre tickets, restaurant gift cards or offering to pay for admission for your grandchild and his friend(s) to local attractions. Encourage "friend-raising" activities for grandchildren of any age.

GAN's Recent Activity

The programs and projects GAN develops in the Orange County California area can be replicated in communities world-wide. If you do not have a local grandparent support group, there are likely to be other philanthropic groups, churches or businesses you can approach to sponsor, partner or underwrite projects that will benefit your local autism community. (Check to see if Autism Speaks' has a local support group in your community or a chapter of Autism Speaks' U for students at your local college.)

Here's how GAN sponsored a very successful recent **SOCIAL for Adults with Autism (ages 16 and up) and their Caregivers**. It was held on a Sunday afternoon and it was **cost-free for 130 guests**.

- The venue was a room donated by a local church after services
- A local 9 piece band contributed professional music and

entertainment

- Salads, sandwiches, desserts, beverages and serving help were donated by a catering company in the community
- Graduate students from three local universities volunteered to host our adult guests with autism
- GAN grandparent volunteers greeted and introduced caregivers, most of whom were parents
- Adult guests were matched by interest areas and left the event with contact information for possible new friends
- Caregivers exchanged ideas, resources and information for future networking
- Volunteers received Community Service Hours for their time

Everybody left smiling and our volunteers felt it was the most rewarding event ever in which they had participated. We encourage you to sponsor social events or outings for families affected by autism in your own communities. For additional ideas for events and presentations, visit our website, www.ganinfo.org and review *past events*.

The board of directors of the **Grandparent Autism Network** and I welcome your suggestions and requests for newsletter topics. We invite you to share this newsletter with your family and friends.

Thank you for making GAN members
... a vital resource for autism ... and each other!

Warm regards,

Bonnie Gillman
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Grandparent Autism Network
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