Sleep Issues in Individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) often have problems with sleeping, resulting in sleep deprivation for both the individual and their family. This Information Sheet offers some strategies that may help to improve both the quality and quantity of sleep if a child has problems with bedtime routines, going to sleep and staying asleep.

This article has been developed for information purposes only. Autism Victoria does not endorse or advocate any remedies or therapies. For more information, please call Autism Victoria on 1300 308 699 or consult a health professional.

As every person with an ASD is different, you may find that some of these techniques are helpful while some may not be as effective. The techniques or strategies that will be most beneficial may be determined or influenced by what is causing the sleep problems. It is important to bear in mind that establishing a new sleep routine is not an overnight task; it may take 2-4 weeks before you see a change. Parents need to be prepared to commit to a new sleep routine, and it is a good idea to consider whether you need to take time off work or reschedule other activities in the initial stages.
Preparing for Bed

The time before bed is important as it allows the child to relax and prepare for sleep. The following suggestions may be helpful in assisting a child with an ASD to get ready for bed.

- Try to avoid caffeine and sugar in the afternoon and evening. If this means a change in routine, there could be adverse behavioral effects so you might want to do it gradually. To eliminate something like soft drink from a child’s diet, you could mix this with increasing amounts of sugar-free and caffeine-free alternatives over a few days or weeks.
- If eating energizes your child, try to eat dinner at least 2-3 hours before going to bed.
- If activities like TV, video games and exciting stories energize your child, you may want to limit these immediately before bed.
- If watching TV relaxes your child, you may want to try and limit the child’s physical activity while doing so. Emphasizing that watching TV is a time to let the body slow down and relax may help them to prepare for sleep.
- Try having a period of ‘quiet time’ before bed to help the child wind down and prepare for sleep. Children with ASDs may find it difficult to go from ‘wide awake’ to ‘ready for sleep’, and may need this period to help them adjust. Dimming the lights, speaking in quiet voices and ensuring the rest of the house is quiet may alert the child to the fact that it is time to calm down and prepare for sleep.
- Be aware that interfering with the existing sleep routine means you need to offer an equally rigid, more appropriate routine. Creating a consistent, scripted bath time/bedtime routine that everyone can follow may make this easier. Specific directions will allow the child to follow more easily, and representing this visually with images or words may also be useful.
- Avoid using the bed (or bedroom, if possible) for activities other than sleeping. If a child associates the bedroom with jumping on the bed, playing games or eating, they may have trouble understanding that this area is used for sleeping.
- If it is not possible to reserve the bed or bedroom solely for sleeping, you may want to implement a toy box where all the child’s toys and games are packed into at the end of the night, and locked into a cupboard so they can ‘sleep’ too. Alternatively, you could keep the toy box in a separate room at night.
- Massage techniques may also be beneficial. You could experiment to see whether a child enjoys this, and what kind of pressure is most comfortable.

Going to Sleep

- Once in bed, some children find it difficult to fall asleep. These strategies may help a restless or distressed child to fall asleep more easily.
- A weighted blanket can help some people fall asleep. These are regular blankets filled with weighted pellet-like materials, and people who are sensory-seeking often find the pressure of a weighted blanket helpful in getting to sleep. It is recommended that you contact an occupational therapist to discuss the appropriate use of a weighted blanket before purchasing one for your child, as the weights and guidelines for use will vary with your child’s size, age and sleep issues.

Sensitivity to light can make it difficult to fall asleep. Some individuals with ASDs are hypersensitive to this and you may need to consider things like heavy, dark curtains to block out light.

Similarly, sensitivity to tactile sensation can be problematic. Ensuring the child’s pajamas and bedding are made of comfortable, non-irritating fabrics may make it easier to get to sleep.

Hypersensitivity to noise can make it difficult for children to fall asleep (and stay asleep). An air purifier, fan or white noise machine can help block out other noises and allow the child to fall asleep more easily.
Wandering

Getting up during the night is common in children with ASDs. Below are some tips to help ensure the child stays safe and other family members are not always disturbed.

- If you concerned about the child getting up during the night and disturbing others or putting themselves in danger, you may want to consider installing a ‘dutch door’ or ‘half door’ which enables you to secure the bottom half while leaving the top half open or unlocked. This would allow a young child to see outside the room but not wander throughout the house at night time. It also enables parents to see into the child’s room without entering.
- A peep hole or other viewing device would allow parents to ensure the child is safe in their room if awake and out of bed during the night.
- Custom made alarm systems can also notify parents when a child leaves their room at night, allowing parents to redirect the child or ensure they are not putting themselves in danger.
- A rewards chart for staying in bed or in the bedroom all night can be a good way to reinforce the child’s positive behaviors. For example, a child might get a star or sticker for each night they remain in their bed, and after getting 5 stars, receive a favorite treat such as a new DVD, book or toy.

Problems Sleeping Alone

Sleeping in the parental bed or having a parent sleep in the child’s bed can become a habit that is difficult to change. The ideas listed below may be useful in helping to reduce or eliminate such behaviors.

- Try setting aside some “time with dad” or “time with mom” each night, emphasizing that this is instead of sleeping the parental bed or having a parent sleep in the child’s bed. This time might include stories, chatting, or cuddles once the child has gotten ready for bed. You might like to place a chair next to the bed and reinforce the idea that the parent always sits in the chair, not on the child’s bed or in it.
- If the child has become used to having a parent sleep in their bed, you may like to try a gradual withdrawal over a number of weeks. Graduating from having a parent in the bed to on it, then next to the bed, closer to the door and finally outside the door (or in the hallway) may help the child adapt to the idea that they are to sleep alone.
- If the child is prone to coming into the parental bed, you may want to ‘short circuit’ this desire by sleeping outside their door for a few nights. If the child gets up to go to the parent’s room, seeing mom or dad sleeping outside may make them feel secure enough to return to their own bed.

Alternative Remedies

Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone that is naturally produced by the brain and helps regulate sleep cycles by causing drowsiness and lowering body temperature. Some research suggests individuals with ASDs have lower than average levels of melatonin, and an oral dose of melatonin has been shown to help insomniacs and other people suffering from sleep disorders since the mid-1990s, but there are no long term studies on side effects or interactions with other medications.

Melatonin is commonly taken in capsule, tablet or liquid form a couple of hours before bed.

It is essential you discuss this option with a doctor to see if it is appropriate for your child.

Tryptophan

Tryptophan is an amino acid the body uses to make serotonin (which can be converted to melatonin). Eating foods high in tryptophan means the body has access to more serotonin and melatonin, which helps to induce drowsiness and may allow a better night’s sleep.

Clinical research has presented varying results, and it is a good idea to discuss the use of tryptophan with your doctor before trying it. Eating an after-dinner snack high in tryptophan can promote sleepiness and help individuals with ASDs fall asleep more quickly.
**Suggested Snacks:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cottage Cheese</th>
<th>Warm Milk</th>
<th>Plums</th>
<th>Yogurt</th>
<th>Peanuts</th>
<th>Oats</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sesame Seeds</td>
<td>Hazelnuts</td>
<td>Chick Peas</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Mangoes</td>
<td>Tofu</td>
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**Other Suggestions**

- Keeping a sleep diary for a few days or weeks will allow you to pinpoint each of the sleep related issues and figure out which strategies may be most successful to alter these behaviors. If you are seeing a psychologist or other professional, they may also need to see what has been going on and could use the sleep diary to devise an appropriate intervention program. Suggestions on information to include in a sleep diary are listed on the next page.
- Caregivers need to be prepared that interfering with the existing sleep routine may be difficult to begin with. It is important that all caregivers are unified in their approach to the new routine, and have agreed upon how they will respond to unexpected behaviors. This will allow caregivers to support each other and also ensure maximum consistency in the responses the child receives.
- You could try creating a social story to help your child understand the need for sleep. This could include information and pictures on why we sleep, how often we sleep, where we sleep and how people know it is time to sleep.
- In addition to correcting maladaptive sleep behaviors, you may need to look at why the child is having trouble sleeping. Issues like anxiety, fears, depression, and physical discomfort or pain can all affect sleep patterns. Discussing fears, discomfort and other problems through language or communication tools may reveal things which are not immediately obvious.
- Realize that things may get worse before they get better. In implementing strategies to promote better sleep behaviors, you may need to persevere for 2-4 weeks before seeing the effects.

Suggestions for information to include in a sleep diary can be found on the following page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Dinner (what and when)</th>
<th>Snack (what &amp; when)</th>
<th>Time in Bed</th>
<th>Time asleep</th>
<th>Awake during night (time &amp; duration)</th>
<th>Time awake in morning</th>
<th>Naps (time &amp; duration)</th>
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As with any therapy, it is advisable to undertake additional research before commencing treatment and always seek the advice of trained and experienced professionals.

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Please visit Autism Victoria’s website at: http://www.amaze.org.au
Because I have ordered so many things from Dr. Leonard’s in the last few years, I have been getting their catalogs on a regular basis and they often come up with new and intriguing products. The Luma Candles, with the remote control that lets you choose one of 12 colors, flicker mode and a 4 or 8 hour timer caught my eye. I thought that they would make a nice gift for some friends of mine who have a daughter with autism and other kids living in their newly remodeled house, but I wanted to get them for myself first to see if I liked them.

I looked on Amazon first, but was stuck with a higher shipping fee than I wanted, so I canceled the order and ordered them on the Dr. Leonard’s website www.drleonards.com which had free shipping. I called them and asked them to cancel the replacement fee so I was able to order them for less than $25. When I got the candles, I opened the box, put in the AAA batteries and turned them on. A cascade of beautiful pastel colors greeted me and I tried different colors; the greens and blues looked different than on the little corresponding buttons on the remote, but they were still lovely. That first night, I programmed one candle for green, the other for orange and the third one for yellow for Halloween. I set them to flicker and they looked great. But I was unaware of how strong the vanilla fragrance was; it was overpowering! The fragrance started to dissipate after a while and while it is still strong, it is not so bad now. This can be a way to keep the air fresh in a small, enclosed space, but may be too much of a sensory bombardment for a child or adult with autism. But the colors are just lovely and I like the flickering effect. After about two hours, the candles seemed to get dimmer as the batteries wore down, but when I turned them on again they became brighter once again.

I am enjoying these candles, with their beautiful colors, that I can program for different occasions such as red, white blue for the recent election and red, green and white, for Christmas. These would be a great Christmas gift a long as one doesn’t mind the strong vanilla scent, at first.

Photos courtesy of Anne Carpenter
BLOG REVIEW: A Quiet Week in the House

(http://www.aquietweek.com)

Reviewed by Anne Carpenter

Among a veritable sea of blogs written by parents about their loved ones with ASD, here comes another—a real gem called A Quiet Week in the House written by Lori who is the mother of a boy with Asperger Syndrome and who was also diagnosed with it later on in life in addition to having bipolar disorder. Her father was also diagnosed with AS. When the user enters the site, they are greeted by a touching story of loss; their beloved cat Pearl, who was seventeen years old, passes away. Yet, Tyoma, her son with AS, seemed to show no emotion or grief. The author goes on to describe all the questions he asked, including “Are you sad?” “Do you miss Kitty Pearl?” “Do cats go to Heaven?” She describes his way of processing grief with an eventual outpouring of love and remembrance in writing and drawings as her ghost lingers in Tyoma’s heart.

The author of this blog married a Russian man so her son was given the Russian name, Tyoma. She describes a trip to Russia near the Sear that’s so beautiful, yet she couldn’t enjoy it because it was too bright and she has Summer Onset Depression where the increase of sunlight and the longer days throw her into a depressed state which she describes in that same post.

The site is divided into several sections: Home, Info about the site, Adult Autism, Asperger’s Parenting, Details, My Family and Tourette’s Parenting. Because many of these neurological conditions overlap, Lori devotes part of her blog to describing the relationship between these conditions and how they affect parenting. This is reflected nicely in a delightful post about Tyoma’s number board obsession where he plastered the walls with numbers and even made a number wall out of glow in the dark stars! The reader also sees the effects of the tics that are a part of Tourette Syndrome that is more common in people with ASD than in the general population. Lori describes the tics that her son does, along with his compulsions, including “hinking” his mother’s bosom and saying “shut up” and “stupid.” The reader can really see the interconnection between all of these conditions and how AS, Tourette Syndrome and OCD intersect with each other to create an interesting yet difficult whole that isn’t easily understood or managed.

The author also describes her family, including her mother, who was raised as a Quaker and who has a strong mechanical bent and loves machines and cars! She is a whiz at fixing things, which is still thought to be unusual for a woman, so I cheered and shouted Bravo! to myself. She also describes her Russian husband, Egor, who is a physicist and a genius to boot. Certainly an interesting and colorful family, if you ask me! She describes her son Tyoma in loving detail and he always looks so adorable in the pictures. The text is arranged in blog segments marked by gorgeous artwork that is a combination of drawing, paper cutouts and collages, all adding up to something amazing and beautiful. I found this website both delightful and fascinating and I love the extra doses of humor—a necessity if you have AS and are the parent of a child with AS and TS. Way to go, Lori!!
Anne’s Book Review

TITLE: The Autism Discussion Page on the Core Challenges of Autism: A Toolbox for Helping Children with Autism Feel Safe, Accepted and Competent

AUTHOR: Bill Nason

SUBJECT AREA: Autism-General

PUBLISHER: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

PUBLICATION DATE: 2014

NUMBER OF PAGES: 381

Bill Nason is one of Michigan’s own pool of professionals who has worked extensively with children on the autism spectrum and who has become an expert on working with kids with ASD to help them deal with their challenges and to feel more comfortable in this complex and ever-changing world. This is the first volume of a set of two that are based on his Facebook discussion page that serves to help parents and teachers.

This first volume, focusing on the “Core Challenges of Autism,” does just that. First of all, Mr. Nason starts out with describing how to use the two books in the series, then goes on to discuss how to help one to accept and understand autism in a non-punitive, non-judgmental way by helping parents to address the child’s problems with Central Coherence, anxiety, and a general feeling of discombobulation. His message is that of accepting and embracing autism in all of its wonder with the heightened awareness of this beautiful world and heightened sensitivity. He then goes on to describe how the cognitive difficulties in autism can affect functioning; but he always finds ways to work around the problems and he offers a mix of plain facts with potential solutions using very detailed descriptions and analysis of each problem. This provides a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of autism and how they can affect every single nuance of life—this is especially true for children in school who have to deal with multiple streams of input—from the teacher, the other kids and the school environment.

Subsequent chapters in this very meaty book cover such areas as helping the child work around difficulties with executive functioning, sensory processing issues, relating to others, self-stimulation, communication and teaching one how to think more dynamically; he feels that children with ASD need to learn to be more flexible in their thinking as Murphy’s Law can rear its ugly head at any time. He promotes such techniques as inserting a glitch into a situation so that the child can learn to handle things when something goes awry. He accepts self-stimulation, but is all for addressing the reason behind it and for managing it in children with cognitive impairments. In addition, he is all for getting into the child’s world—if Johnny is spinning pot covers to see them shine in the sunlight and to hear the “clang! Clang! Clang!” of metal on the kitchen floor as I did, when I was a child, Mother or Dad should join in and play right along with them! To Nason, this is a way for the child to feel validated and accepted for who his is and not for who he should be, but isn’t. This is his approach throughout the book; a warm, caring acceptance, following the child’s lead and doing everything possible to help that child feel loved, accepted and safe is the watchword here and this permeates every single part of this massive tome.

The author is all for really relating to the kids he works with and like a benevolent father, he makes exaggerated facial gestures, plays with the kids and has fun! This helps them to break through their barriers and be more comfortable with others and I thoroughly applaud him for doing this! There is no punishment here, just gentle encouragement and practical strategies, such as helping the child or adult with ASD to identify his emotions by using an emotions chart that can be laminated and carried around throughout the day and ways to understand and deal with meltdowns and shutdowns. Bill Nason’s combination of practical knowledge, sheer brilliance, caring, compassion, and playfulness just brings tears to my eyes. He is the perfect example of how we should relate to and help those on the autism spectrum, but frequently don’t. If we had more people like Bill Nason, the autism community would come out miles ahead.
How-to- Indoor Camp

What you will need:
• *Large blanket(s), sheets, pillows and/or sleeping bags
• *Flashlights
• *Stuffed animals
• *Favorite books or games

Make a cozy tent
• Spread sheets or large blanket between two chairs or over a table
• Make a comfy bed with pillows, blankets and/or sleeping bags

Suggestions:
• Make Indoor S’mores, Hot Cocoa or your favorite snack
• Invite the pets into the tent
• Have a Scavenger Hunt
• Use the flashlight to play “light” wars or write names on walls
• Tell silly stories or sing songs
• Enjoy spending time together

Homemade Hot Cocoa

Ingredients:
¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
½ cup granulated sugar
⅓ cup hot water
⅛ tsp salt
4 cups milk (Dairy or non-dairy)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Marshmallows (optional)

Directions:
1. Combine the cocoa, sugar, water, and salt in a medium saucepan.
2. Over medium heat, stir constantly until the mixture boils.
3. Cook, stirring constantly for 1 minute.
4. Stir in the milk and heat, but do not boil.
5. Remove from the heat and add vanilla; stir well. Serve immediately.

Indoor S’mores

Ingredients:
4 cups honey graham cereal       ¼ c. light corn syrup
3 tablespoons margarine          1 ½ cups milk chocolate chips
6 cups mini marshmallows (reserve 1 cup)

Directions:
Coat a 9x13 dish with cooking spray. Place cereal into a large bowl; set aside. In a microwave safe bowl, place oleo, marshmallows, chocolate chips and corn syrup. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes on high power, stirring after each minute until melting & smooth. Pour over waiting cereal; stir well to coat. Add 1 cup marshmallows and gently fold in. Press into prepared pan. Cool completely before cutting into squares.
The Autism Society of Michigan is floating ideas to parents about “indoor camping” activities to do during the cold winter months to keep their loved ones with ASD from getting bored during holiday vacations and snow days. As part of this, I huddled in the little lunch room at the ASM office to make Indoor S’mores which is a version of the old camp favorite, but that can be made inside with a microwave and Golden Grahams® cereal. We used the microwave to melt the ingredients and then, I had a real sensory experience with stirring the melted chocolate and marshmallow goo so that the brown and white swirled together. Then I stirred in the cereal making for a more challenging workout of my arm muscle and more deep pressure which felt great! I even got to lick the spoon and the mixture wasn’t too sweet.

This is a great activity for engaging the various senses, such as sight (all the better to see the colors of the ingredients blend together to know that you are mixing them in enough), smell, taste (of course!), hearing (to listen to Mom and Dad when they are giving out instructions), and deep pressure (for stirring the melted ingredients with the cereal). The S’mores are then left out to cool in a pan and can be enjoyed for a while, as there is so much. One idea is to light flameless candles at night, turn out the lights and sit on the floor and tell ghost stories, while eating the S’mores. No tent needed! Also, there are no mosquitos to worry about and no rain!
The Incredible 5-Point Scale

- Visual Tool
- Teaches Social & Emotional Concepts
- Helps Reduce Anxiety
- Successful Tool for Non-Verbal & Verbal Students
- Tool can be used at:
  * Home
  * School
  * In the Community

For more information and examples of 5-Point Scales, please visit:
http://www.5pointscale.com

Save the Date!

October 19, 2015
ASM Fall 2015 Conference
Featuring Paula Kluth
Eberhard Center, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI

To Learn More About Paula Kluth
http://www.paulakluth.com
Get Up and Move!
Indoor Activities and Exercise Suggestions

Play Twister
Musical Chairs
Bowling Indoors
Indoor Mini-Tramp
Dancing
Balloon Toss
How To Prepare Your Child With Special Needs For A Job Search
Adam Kaplan

Parents have one wish. To see their children grow into confident adults who can make their own way in the world. As parents, we must encourage our children who have job skills to find employment, to join the ranks of taxpayers and to experience the pride of depositing that first paycheck and earning that first raise.

1. Get Out Of The Way

For the parents of a special needs child who has fought to overcome physical, social or emotional obstacles, in and out of the classroom, the moment is bittersweet when you realize that your child is ready to venture out beyond your view. The instinct to protect our children is natural, but it outlasts its usefulness once our children are grown, educated, in possession of marketable skills, and ready to earn their own keep.

2. Parents Are Not Job Coaches

As parents, we must understand our limitations. We are experts in special needs parenting, but not as job coaches. We are of course able to offer practical assistance on matters pertaining to transportation, dressing and grooming to help our child prepare for the new world of work. Yet we likely do not know what career is best for our child, or what accommodations he or she will need at work depending on his / her activities.

3. Passion Is Important

Allow your child to pursue his or her interests. Passion for one’s vocation is the first requirement for success. Work with your child, his guidance or career counselor, on his career aspirations, but do not lead the conversation. Your child must learn to sell his strengths and qualifications on his own. We have seen too many special needs young adult guided along an unsuitable educational path by well-meaning parents.

4. Companies Like Perseverance

Companies stand to benefit from having your loved one who has a disability or special need in their ranks: an employee who has triumphed over adversity, learned creativity, persistence and flexibility and who can open the door to new markets, collaborations and innovation is an employee who will be in high-demand. Encourage your child to discuss these experiences if he / she is comfortable.

There are no guarantees for any job seeker that the path will be easy. Some rejection is likely. But that’s true for everyone, and makes success that much sweeter when it arrives.

Reprinted from: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/
Needed Transition Services: Coordinated Activities Menu

This is intended to be a partial list of the many activities that an IEP team could recommend for a student to participate in. It is important to note that the activities listed need not be achieved in the life of the IEP nor completed by only school staff. Many of the activities listed could be justified under more than one category. The category is not important - providing the service or arranging the activity is.

**Instruction:** Activities listed in this area have to do with coursework or post-secondary related activities of college, continuing education, or remediation possible activities follow:

- Take study skills or other specific course to increase learning strategies
- Learn about Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act
- Learn about the process for accessing apartments for rent.
- Attend workshop to learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Learn about students’ rights under IDEA
- Learn about community agencies that provide services and support to people with disabilities.
- Meet with the general education counselor to explore elective options
- Meet with the general education counselor to explore scholarship options
- Visit a college campus
- Complete a learning styles test to identify preferences and strength modes
- Take the GED pretest (TABE)
- Take the COMPASS test for community college placement
- Apply for a PELL grant
- Take the ACT, SAT, PSAT, PLAN test
- Meet with the disabilities coordinator / write an information interview letter to the disabilities coordinator for the school of choice
- Take a course in self advocacy skills
- Enroll in a community education course
- Take tutoring services through a private agency i.e.) Sylvan Learning, Access the Math / Writing / Reading lab
- Learn to use augmentative equipment
- Take a computer course
- Take a CPR / First Aid / Childcare / Babysitting course
- Take community Certified Nurse’s Assistant training course
- Take a Hunter's Safety course
- Meet with Disabilities Coordinator of selected college – self-identify needs

Reprinted from Ionia County ISD
The **m&m's** Feeling Game

For every m say one thing that makes you happy.

For every m say one thing that makes you sad.

For every m say one thing that makes you angry.

For every m say one thing that makes you excited.

For every m say one poor choice you made today and what you could have done different.

For every m say good choice you made today.
Special Thank You to All of Our Generous Donors:

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Darlene Dawood
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Our Mission
The mission of the Autism Society of Michigan (ASM) is to assure full participation and self-determination in every aspect of life for each individual. We will realize this vision by opening avenues of self-advocacy and advocating on behalf of others in a way that values equity, respect, dignity and diversity in all communities.

Your “Winter Horizons” Has Arrived!

At a Glance in This Issue….
- Anne’s Blog, Book, Product and Website Review
- Sleep Issues in Individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder
- How to Prepare Your Special Needs Child for a Job Search
- How-to- Indoor Camp
- Indoor S’more & Hot Cocoa Recipe
- Engaging the Senses: Indoor Camping at ASM
- The Incredible 5-Point Scale
- Save the Date!
- Get Up & Move
- How to Prepare Your Child With Special Needs For A Job Search
- Needed Transition Services: Coordinated Activities Menu
- The M&M Feeling Game