Recreational Activities for Children on the Spectrum

Participation in recreational programs has shown extensive benefits for children with Autism. It can reduce behavioral and emotional disorders, help develop social skills and build relationships, improve physical and mental health, and help children develop their interests. Many different types of therapeutic recreational activities exist today, all catering to the unique needs of participants. These therapeutic activities should be taken advantage of to encourage the short and long term well being of individuals with Autism.

Music Therapy
Music therapy is a well-established professional health discipline that uses music as the therapeutic stimulus to achieve non-musical treatment goals. Research supports connections between speech and singing, rhythm and motor behavior, memory for song and memory for academic material, and overall ability of preferred music to enhance mood, attention, and behavior to optimize the student’s ability to learn and interact. Some of benefits of music therapy include:

- Increased attention
- Decreased self-stimulation
- Improved cognitive functioning
- Increased socialization
- Improved behavior
- Enhanced auditory processing
- Decreased agitation
- Improved verbal skills
- Enhanced sensory-motor skills
- Successful and safe self-expression

Learn more at: [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org)

Art Therapy
Arts and crafts can be a particularly effective therapy for people with autism. Because they tend to have difficulty processing sensory input and are often non-verbal, autistics respond well to visual, concrete, hands-on therapies. Art making is an effective, clinically sound treatment option for autism when supplemented with studies from the fields of art, art education, psychology, and other creative arts therapies. Some benefits of art therapy include:
• Increased self-esteem
• Improvements in learning social cues and norms
• Improved ability to identify nonliteral and non-verbal language
• Formation of comfortable interpersonal relationships

Learn more at: www.arttherapy.com

Therapy Yoga & Gymnastics
Therapeutic yoga and gymnastics delivers pediatric occupational and physical therapy in a sensory rich environment that promotes growth, independence and balance of the mind and body. Some benefits of therapy yoga and gymnastics include improvements in:

• Sensory regulation
• Focus and awareness
• Speech and language skills
• Fine and gross motor coordination
• Upper and lower body extremity strength
• Confidence and independence

Learn more at: www.therapygymnastics.com

Karate
The Karate for All is a unique program developed specifically for children and adults with special needs that will allow them to achieve their full potential and independence by enhancing their skills and abilities needed to be successful in their communities. KFA uses an occupational therapy approach to enhance the following skills:

• Attention span and focus
• Strength and flexibility
• Cardiovascular functioning and fitness
• Motor planning skills
• Gross motor skills
• Sensory processing skills
• Social skills
• Self esteem and confidence
• Ability to defend oneself

Learn more at: www.karateforall.org

Hockey
Created in 2000 for players with developmental disabilities, the American Special Hockey Association (ASHA) gives people of all ages and abilities a chance to learn and grow by playing hockey. Some of the goals of ASHA include:
• Educate, motivate and encourage individuals, who have developmental and physical disabilities in the sport of ice hockey in an environment that is adapted to the level of ability of the participating athletes
• Integrate individuals with disabilities with people without disabilities in order to promote teambuilding
• Help participants in developing characteristics such as: dependability, self-reliance, confidence, concentration, willingness to share and personal accountability

Learn more at: www.americanspecialhockey.org

**Dance/ Movement Therapy**
Dance/Movement therapy focuses on movement behavior as it emerges in the therapeutic relationship. Expressive, communicative, and adaptive behaviors are all considered in-group, individual, and family treatment formats. Dance/movement therapists’ unique facility for understanding, reflecting, and expanding nonverbal expressions can help those with autism to:

• Improve socialization and communication
• Build body awareness
• Directly affect motor deficits.

Learn more at: [www.adta.org](http://www.adta.org)

**Aquatic Therapy**
Aquatic therapy is treatment performed in the water by qualified physical and occupational therapists, to aid in the restoration, extension, and maintenance of an individual’s quality function. Benefits of aquatic therapy include:

• Sensory issue improvements
• Promotes positive mental attitude, which promotes self-esteem
• Help children engage in interpersonal relations
• Improve cognitive abilities: range of motion, body awareness, attention span, concentration, impulse control, frustration tolerance, ability to follow instructions
• Increase water safety

Learn more at: [www.angelfishtherapy.com](http://www.angelfishtherapy.com)

**Horseback Riding**
Therapeutic horsemanship uses the pleasures and skills of horseback riding and horse knowledge to build developmental, emotional, social, and physical skills for each individual rider. Benefits of horsemanship therapy include improvements in:
• Self regulation
• Adaptive expressive language skills
• Motor skills
• Verbal praxis/motor planning skills

Learn more at: www.gallopny.org