Community Inclusion for your Child with Autism

Presented by: Cori Wickett, M.S. BCBA
LeafWing Center

Have you said this before??

- I just can’t do it!
- It’s so embarrassing…
- He just won’t leave whenever I go to the park, I can’t do it anymore!
- People look at me like “what are you doing to your child?!”
- We can’t enjoy even 5 minutes of dinner before *something* happens.

Community Trips

- Parks
- Restaurants
- Grocery shopping
- Movies

Parks- benefits

- Parks are fun places for most kids
- They are typically wide open spaces for your child to run around
- They have a variety of activities (swings, sand, play structures, grass) to choose from
- They are good places to work on social interactions if appropriate with your child

Parks- difficulties

- Your child may have elopement issues and so the large space may be difficult
- Your child may have a preference playing in one area (e.g., the swings) and has difficulties transitioning to other areas
- Your child may not have good social skills and so you worry about your child around other kids
- Your child may like the park so much that she tantrums when it's time to leave

Parks- solutions

- Elopement- Why?
  - He likes to run around?
    - Teach your child to play tag, or chase
  - He does not like the park?
    - Going to a park may not be the best outing if he does not like it at this time
  - He likes to go somewhere near the park that he sees when at the park?
    - Teach him to request to go to that place

Parks- solutions

- Varying play
  - Create a visual schedule

First	
Then	
Then	

Parks- solutions

- Varying play
  - Create a visual schedule
  - Be sure to engage with your child and make each activity “fun”
    - Bring extra toys for the sandbox that you know your child likes
    - Help your child across the monkey bars and give high fives and jump up and down in excitement when she reaches the other side

Parks- solutions

- Social skills
  - Many typically developing children approach kids independently, and are gravitated towards adults having fun with kids
    - Be present!!
    - Help your child to respond, to play, and to interact
    - To explain to other kids, use phrases like “you do that so well, he’s just learning how to do that, do you want to help?”

Parks- solutions

- Leaving
  - Leaving such fun places can be so hard!
  - Prepare your child from the beginning with some sort of timing tool
    - Give reminders often
  - Use an “if-then”
    - Be very clear with the expected behaviors and follow through!

Parks- solutions

- If-then chart example

			(enter # earned) **You need 3**
Stop activity when told	No crying	Walk to car with mommy	**Frozen Yogurt!!**

Restaurants- benefits

- Enjoying food outside your kitchen!
- Social time with other families
- A break from your nightly routine at home

Restaurants- difficulties

- Waiting in line
- Sitting at the table for the food
- Finishing food quickly
- No food at the restaurant that your child likes

Restaurants- solutions

- Waiting in line (counter ordering)
  - Provide your child with a hand-held toy
    - Use if your child needs to be kept busy the whole time
  - Use a token board if your child is ready
    - Introduce at home first
  - Engage with your child in line about food preferences
    - Use visuals if needed

Restaurants- solutions

- Waiting for food (at the table)
  - Bring small snacks
    - Why??
    - Give for good waiting
  - Bring a “bag-of-stuff”
    - Small toys, coloring, electronic devices/headphones, small puzzles, squishy toys

Restaurants- solutions

- Waiting for others to be done
  - Use the “bag-of-stuff”

Restaurants- solutions

- No food that your child enjoys
  - Plan your restaurant choice accordingly
  - Bring food your child will eat if you have no choice

Grocery shopping- benefits

- You don’t have to get child care so you can go grocery shopping
- Grocery shopping is a great teaching experience!
- Exposes your child to independent life skills that he will need later in life

Grocery shopping- challenges

- Seeing all of the cookies, candy, and other treats may lead to tantrums
- Your child does not like to walk for long distances

Grocery shopping- solutions

- Tantrums for store-bought items
  - Bring equally preferred items from home (cookies) and provide ONLY for good behaviors
    - Small pieces, often at first
    - Be clear on the expectations
  - Sometimes, use store-bought items as the reward (NOT always)

Grocery shopping- solutions

- Walking
  - Does you have your child sit in the cart?
    - Start with small increments
  - Engage your child in the shopping process
    - Give your child a list with pictures
    - Use the small shopping carts for your child to push
    - Let your child push the big cart

Movies- benefits

- It’s a socially appropriate activity to take your child to
- It’s fun for you and your other children
- It teaches your child community behaviors such as waiting in line, sitting for long durations, and watching movies without being in pajamas under a blanket at home

Movies- challenges

- The noise may be too loud for your child
- Your child may have loud vocal stimulatory behaviors
- Your child may like to jump up and down during movies at home
- Your child may not like to sit for long durations

Movies- solutions

- If the movie is too loud for your child, or your child likes to make noises or jump around,
  - AMC has sensory friendly movie times
  - Visit: https://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films
  - Their advertisement says: Get up and Dance, Walk, Shout, or Sing!

Movies- solutions

- If your child wants to leave after a short period of time,
  - Go to matinee movies or discounted sensory friendly movies
  - Set a short time expectation and use an if-then schedule
    - Use tokens to show good waiting behaviors
    - Be firm and follow through!

Summary

- Parks- benefits, challenges, solutions
- Restaurants- benefits, challenges, solutions
- Grocery shopping- benefits, challenges, solutions
- Movies- benefits, challenges, solutions

Questions?

Thank You!!

Cori Wickett, M.S., BCBA
cwickett@leafwingcenter.org