



# The Complete Special Needs Summer Guide

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/06/24/the-complete-special-needs-summer-guide/>

School is out and summer is in. The summer months provide for some of the most memorable moments for families. It can also cause some stressful situations for special needs families.

In this post we have put together a list of 13 summer resource articles that have been posted to this blog over the last couple of years. We hope this helps make your summer a memorable one!



## A. Transitioning to Summer: 9 Tips for Special Needs Parents

Transitions are never easy for a child with special needs. Here are 9 tips that will help your child transition into a summer routine.

Spring is here, and yet there is talk about the end of the school year. With less than two months to go, summer vacation will be upon us. Teachers and children are anxiously waiting for school to end, while parents are anxiously scrambling to plan for what to do with their children for two months at home.

Here are some tips to think about as the school year winds down:

### 1. Evaluate & Review

Schedule a time to sit down with your child's teachers to reflect on how the school year went. It's a great opportunity to evaluate what strategies and approaches worked well so that these can be maintained in the next school year. You may want to schedule this now, because meetings are likely more difficult to arrange in June, especially if you want certain teachers or educational specialists to attend.

### 2. Plan Retention Activities

Find out if your child's present and future teacher have any recommendations for **activities over the summer** that can help maintain and practice skills that will be beneficial for the next school year. This can include skills to increase independence and social skills.

### 3. Visit Next Year's Classroom

If possible, find out who your child's teacher and where his/her classroom would be. Perhaps your child could meet the new teacher and visit the room a couple times before the school year is out.

#### 4. Break out a social story or video

Take photos or videos of next year's teachers and school areas that your child will be spending time in next year. You could write a **social story** or make a small video that your child can watch in the summer to help them prepare for next year.

#### 5. Make a countdown calendar

Create a **countdown calendar** for the last couple of weeks of school. Some children will be anxious about the upcoming change in routine. Children may not be able to verbally express this, however, they will be able to sense the upcoming changes. The last month of school is filled with field trips, more "fun" days, end-of-year activities and the excitement of the other students (and let's be honest, the **teachers** too). The schedule may not be as consistent as it was during the school year, which may be confusing for your child.

#### 6. Schedule Playdates with familiar faces

Talk to other parents of your child's classmates to find out if there is interest to get together over the summer for **play dates**. This is a great way to help your child have opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with classmates outside of school.

#### 7. Prepare for summer camp

If you are planning to send your child to **summer camp** contact the camp program staff to find out more information about the daily schedule and activities. This is so you are able to prepare your child each morning before camp (i.e. verbally, visual schedules, social stories). Pass on any strategies or information that would be important for the staff are aware and can ensure that your child has a great time at camp.

#### 8. Plan a daily schedule

If camp is not part of the summer plan, think of other ways to create some **activities** for your child. This is especially important if your child has limited and restricted interests. They may settle into routines of playing video games or watching television for long periods of time. This may result in more challenging habits to break when it comes time to transition back to school in September. Setting up other activities helps to break up the time and to give your child new experiences.

#### 9. Plan family activities

Whether it is vacation, day trips or **fun activities** on the evenings and weekends. Take photos, draw pictures and write down all the fun things that your child enjoys at the summer. This is a great way to work on skills, but captures memories of summer for him/her to remember and share when they return to school.

**Summer** is a time for your child to enjoy himself/herself and to get a break from the academic expectations that come from the school year. I hope that these tips can help the school year end on a successful note and ease your child into a fun-filled summer.



## B. How to get through 82 Days of Summer Vacation

82 Days of summer vacation with no school or respite care is a scary feeling. Here is how writer Karen Wang gets through the long summer.

## C. 9 Creative Sensory Ideas for a Summer of Fun

Summer is finally here! Warm days are ahead and your children will soon be looking to you to fill that time with fun activities. Here are some fantastic ideas for development of sensory processing and gross/fine motor skills.



## D. 19 Summer Tips From Special Needs Parents

The challenge of providing a structured and fun summer are weighing heavily on the minds of parents. To make you a little less worried [Netbuddy](#) has collected 19 tips from parents of children with special needs on who to get through the summer break.



## E. 10 Activities For Practicing Life Skills This Summer

The summer is a perfect time to model and teach life skills. Here are 10 summertime activities that introduce concepts in social skills, communication, organization, self-care and respect for self and others.

Summer vacation means a relatively relaxed daily routine. For my family, it's the perfect time to model and teach life skills. Here are 10 summertime activities that introduce concepts in social skills, communication, organization, self-care and respect for self and others.



### 1. Get a library card

Most public libraries have some type of summer reading program with incentives, so it's a good opportunity to get a library card and learn how to find and check out books, music and movies. This means that your child will need to approach the librarian's desk in the library, ask for a new card and answer all of the questions that follow. In most cities, the only requirements for a library card are being able to sign one's name and proof of residency from a guardian.

### 2. Lemonade Stand

When my son got his library card, he immediately insisted on getting a wallet to keep it in. Once he had his own wallet, he wanted spending money. So he had to think of ways to earn money. A neighborhood lemonade stand is an excellent way to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit as well as basic life skills. Each customer must be greeted, lemonade must be poured carefully, money must be counted.





### 3. Clean out a closet

Cleaning out a closet is a positive rainy-day activity. Put aside the outgrown clothing and neglected toys. Arrange the closet to maximize accessibility.

You can also check out some more ideas for [chores here](#).

### 4. Garage Sale

Now that you have a few boxes of stuff you don't need anymore, start planning a garage sale. Multi-family garage sales are more successful with less work per person than single-family sales.



We recently hosted a multi-family garage sale at our home to raise funds for a new playground at the local elementary school. We had to talk about storing items before the sale, pricing items to make sure they were sold quickly, finding free advertising venues online, and how to organize the merchandise. And then we talked to customers and made change all day!

### 5. Yard Work



Occupational therapists strongly recommend "heavy work," that is, any type of exertion that puts pressure on the joints of the upper body, for individuals with special needs. The benefits of heavy work are increased attention, arousal level, body awareness and muscle tone, as well as decreased sensory defensiveness.

Get out a rake and clean out the old leaves from under the shrubbery, dig up some weeds, pull out the hose and water some plants, use the wheelbarrow to carry mulch to the backyard and compost the yard waste. Since yard work is a multi-step process with unique tools for each stage, you'll also be modeling organizational skills.

### 6. Pick fruit at a local farm

I haven't taken the leap to start a home garden yet, but my family does visit several local farms every summer to pick fruit. It's a basic economics lesson to understand where the food comes from and the resources needed to grow the food.

My children also learn to identify which fruit is ripe enough to be picked, how to pull it gently off the plant without damage and how to handle food safely for the trip home. At the cherry orchard I had each child count 100 cherries as they were picked.



### 7. Explore a new park

Instead of going to the same park 5 minutes from your home, try a different one. Challenge yourself and your loved one on the new playground equipment. If there's a nature trail, pick up a map and find your way together.

## 8. Plan a picnic

Let your loved one pack lunch for everyone on your next outing. Write out a menu, count the water bottles, find the ice packs, and make sure the cooler isn't too heavy!



## 9. Hit the beach

The beach offers a great incentive to learn self-care skills such as dressing and undressing, applying sunscreen and keeping a hat and sunglasses nearby.

The beach is also the perfect place to practice safety skills such as the buddy system and treading water. Many beaches are now wheelchair accessible, so call first to ask if beach wheels are available.

## 10. Camping

With all of my family's sleep and food issues, I was afraid to try camping for a long time. An opportunity arose when our city sponsored an overnight family camp out at a local park. We practiced pitching our tent at home first.



I decided that I wasn't ready to try outdoor grilling in addition to caring for my son, so we packed sandwiches, bagels and lots of fresh fruit to eat. We took long walks in the woods all afternoon, and we roasted marshmallows and sang songs at the evening bonfire. On the way home, my son was already planning our next camping trip.

Some state and national parks offer wheelchair accessible, air-conditioned cabins in scenic locations. Other parks offer yurts with a wood-burning stove for a different type of rustic experience. Whatever your comfort level is, there's something out there just for you.

***How will you practice life skills this summer?***



## F. 10 Things I Won't & Will Do This Summer With My Child Who Has Special Needs

Isn't it ironic that June, July and August is called summer "vacation"? For most parents the summer is no walk in the park. In this post Karen Wang tells us what her summer plans will be.

## G. 82 Summer Activities for Families

Between June and September my kids have 82 days of summer vacation, and I've promised them something fun every single day. That means I need 82 fun summer activities for one child with a developmental disability and one child who refuses to participate in most activities. It'll be a piece of cake, right?





## H. 5 Tips for Preventing Summer Learning Loss

“Summer learning loss” or “the summer slide” is what teachers call the regression in skills which takes place in the time between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next. Here are 5 tips that will help your child retain knowledge.

## I. 14 Tools For Science Exploration In The Summer

Looking for some alternative activities for your child with special needs over the summer? Here are 14 fun science tools that can be used for some very creative activities.



## J. How to expand your child’s vocabulary with summer verbs

Summertime brings loads of options for outdoor activities to fill those hot summer days and nights. Here are some great tips to expand your child’s vocabulary while enjoying the summer.

## K. The 7 things every special educator must do on their summer break

For special educators the summer can be a very important time. Here are seven things every special educator must do to help get ready for the coming school year.



## L. 25 Summer Camps For Individuals With Special Needs

If you think that your child’s special needs will prevent him or her from participating in a summer camp, it’s time to think again. Here’s a run-down of the most popular camps for kids and adults with special needs.

## M. 19 More Summer Camps For Individuals With Special Needs

Looking for some great special needs summer camps? Here are 19 more great summer camps you should know about!

