

# *Disability Campaign.org*

## Library Programs for Children with Disabilities



Image: OpenBooksOpenDoors.com

For most children, going to the library can be a fun and exciting activity. From getting a library card to reading at story time to picking out a new book — a library trip can be exciting for a young child. Yet for children with disabilities and their families, a trip to the library can be stressful. Rules of being quiet, thousands of book choices and new faces can make a library difficult to navigate with a child with ADHD or autism, for example. But just because your child has a disability doesn't mean a trip to the library is out of reach. There are many library programs offered for children with disabilities. Some libraries offer programs specific to children with autism or special needs; others have programs that are inclusive to all children.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires facilities and services regularly used by the public to be accessible to people with disabilities. Most public libraries have eliminated barriers and offer programs specially designed to serve adults and children with disabilities. Even those that do not have programs tailored for people with disabilities still have a lot to offer your child. Below are ways in which a visit to the library benefits all children, especially those with disabilities and special needs.

### **Benefits of Visiting the Library**

- **It can help with functioning skills.** Going to the library will help a child articulate a plan. Using visual tools, a schedule or a children's book about library visits, work with your child to develop a plan for your visit. You can also practice from home by pretending you are at the library. In addition, consider questions such as which section of the library you will visit first and how long will you be there. By giving your child a plan, he or she will become more accustomed to library visits.
- **It improves a child's ability to pay attention.** Many libraries have signs that imply that some areas are quiet zones. Showing your child these signs and putting them into practice will make your child more aware of his or her surroundings. You can practice these listening exercises at home by making and posting similar signs around the house.
- **It develops your child's ability to behave in social settings.** At first, proper behavior might be a challenge because of hyperactivity or social anxiety, but frequent library visits will help develop cooperation and may lead to improved behavior.
- **It will be an educational enhancement.** This is the perfect age to enhance your child's learning. Show your child that learning something new is fun. Participate in your child's learning by sitting with him or her and reading together. Not all learning has to be done through books. Remember the library also carries video and audio materials for children.

- **It provides opportunities for friendships.** Walk into any public library and you will find children and their accompanying parents, many of whom are open to meeting new people. Give your child the opportunity to connect with other children and make friendships. Your child will develop social skills through interactions with other children and library staff.



Photo Credit: CRLibrary.org

- **It will develop your child's interests.** Picking out new books or videos will broaden your child's horizons. The library is the perfect place your son or daughter to pursue his or her interests; whether it is gaming or horseback riding, the library has it all! Moreover, your child will learn skills that will aid him or her throughout life.

As you can see, library visits should be considered no matter what the disability of your child. Whether you have a boy with ADHD or a daughter who is blind, your child will gain much by partaking in library activities that are open to all children, as well as programs that are tailored for children with disabilities. To find a program for children with special needs, contact your local library.

If your library does not provide such programs, ask the librarian or supervisory staff member if they would consider initiating such a program. Organizations such as the Association for Library Service to Children and universities offer educational courses to train library staff and volunteers on how to serve people with disabilities. For more information on library services for children with disabilities, visit the following websites.

## Websites on Library Programs for Children with Disabilities

Libraries and Autism

<http://www.librariesandautism.org/strategies.htm>

Public Libraries Online (A Publication of the Public Library Association)

<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2014/04/implementing-programs-for-children-with-autism-spectrum-disorder/>

Libraries Serving Children with Autism

<http://www.readingpl.org/autismblog/>

National Library Service

<http://www.loc.gov/nls/>

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