



AUTISM ACADEMY

for Education & Development

AUTISM NEWS

September 2022 Edition

CELEBRATE FRIENDSHIP MONTH WITH US!

Started in England in the 1730's, September is called The Oddfellows Friendship Month. The Oddfellows are officially known as The Grand United Order of Oddfellows Friendly Society (G.U.O.O.F.S.). G.U.O.O.F.S. is an international fraternity that is believed to have been established in 1730s England with the mission of encouraging people to make friends. Oddfellows came up with the idea of Friendship Month to bring people together and help people fight loneliness.

At Autism Academy, one of our Building Blocks is "Kids are friends with each other and welcome new students with open arms." We encourage our students to socialize and teach social-emotional skills at every level. Our students learn to talk with each other, play together, and build connections that we hope will last a lifetime.

So what are some ways that you can help your child build friendships and connections at home?

1. SPEND TIME TOGETHER

You are your child's most important role model, so the connections they make with you and the rest of your family help them build a foundation. You can model many of the skills they will use with friends doing everyday tasks like playing, eating as a family, and even reading together.

2. BE THE HOST

Hosting playdates or a party can be a lot of work, but they can also be a good way to start building friendships. By hosting, you can arrange the situation with your child's needs in mind. This includes providing foods that both your child and their potential friend will eat and encouraging activities that your child loves to do.

3. START SMALL

Large groups can overwhelm many autistic people, so start with 1 or 2 other children. If your child isn't able to tell you who they might want to invite, talk with their teacher to see if there is another family they can connect you with. Potential friends can be anywhere that you have connections as a family, so don't be shy about reaching out to other parents in your neighborhood or religious group.

4. PLAN FUN ACTIVITIES

Because children with autism often need help when they socialize, planning ahead make things go much more smoothly. Before the play date, plan and prepare fun activities that both kids will enjoy. Help your child think through the other child's interests and what they might want to do. You can prepare your child to take turns with their friend in choosing from a list of activities. During playtime, you will need to be ready to jump in if the conversation lags or if the kids need help finding something to do. If all else fails, you can always do something crazy and a bit messy like playing with shaving cream or an art project. Who doesn't love a little sensory-friendly fun?

5. BE PERSISTENT

The reality is that other children and their parents may not understand your child's needs. You may hear "no" often or have some playdates that don't go well, but don't give up! Once you find the right friend, it will be worth all of the effort.

Looking for a way to connect with other families? Join in on a P3 meeting or attend one of our family events. Autism Academy is a community ready to help your child achieve social success!



Looking for more information?

<https://www.oddfellows.co.uk/about/friendship-month/>

<https://www.parentingspecialneeds.org/article/five-ways-to-cultivate-friendships/>

<https://www.parentingspecialneeds.org/article/5-tips-to-help-your-child-with-special-needs-make-friends/>



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Celebrating 10 Years

Staff Spotlight - Casey Davies



This month we would like to introduce you to Casey Davies, Autism Academy's Paraprofessional Trainer. Casey can be found working on all of our campuses in every classroom as she helps prepare our supportive staff to meet the needs of all of our students.

How Did It Begin?

Casey's journey to Autism Academy started while she was working towards her bachelor's degree at ASU. Her sister, Shannon, had discovered our schools and was soon filling her in on what a great place it was to work and how amazing our students are. In 2018 Casey decided to see for herself and immediately felt great about her new job as a paraprofessional. She worked at the Chandler location (now Gilbert) in several classrooms including in classrooms with our youngest students. Growing up in New York state and already having begun studying early childhood education, she had never encountered a program specialized for children with autism. She was so impressed with the supports available and the "kids first" mindset that was instilled in everyone on campus. Casey briefly left Autism Academy to finish her degree, earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. She rejoined the Gilbert campus in 2022 as a paraprofessional and accepted the position of Paraprofessional Trainer in July 2022.

These Days?

These days, Casey can be found introducing new employees to our schools and providing training on our program and supporting our students. Most days, Casey is in classrooms working shoulder-to-shoulder with our paraprofessionals as she coaches them. Throughout this process, she teaches our newest employees how to communicate with all of our students, build positive relationships with them, and support the students as they learn and grow. Casey says that the most important lessons that she gives them revolve around helping students see that learning can be fun and the adults around them are here to help.

Traveling to different classrooms at all of our different campuses gives Casey a unique perspective. While each school has its own personality, she says there are so many things that she sees at them all. She says that all of the schools are so welcoming from the moment that she steps in the door and is greeted by the office staff. She also says that at every campus she sees the staff working together to support students and, especially, provide praise for their hard work. Staff from all over the campus often know what students are working on and working for, so they all give tons of praise and rewards when they see them succeeding. This could be as small as giving a high five for walking quietly in line or as big as helping to celebrate when they bring a positive referral to the office for a reward. Casey loves seeing the "kids first" mindset that she trains in action every day!

We would like to thank Casey for her part in making Autism Academy a place where our students can learn and grow. Make sure to say hello when you see around our campuses!

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Parent Partnership Program

Need more information? You can email P3 for your campus. We would love to see you there!

Tucson - p3tucson@aaed.org

West Valley - p3westvalleyaaed@gmail.com

Gilbert - p3.gilbertcampus@gmail.com

Tempe - p3tempe@aaed.org

September Trivia

Trivia Time!

A small gift will be sent to the first 10 families to send the correct answer to autismnews@aaed.org.

September Question: "Students are friends with each other and welcome new students with open arms" is one of Autism Academy's Building Blocks. How many Building Blocks are there?

Thank you to everyone who responded to the August trivia question. Congratulations to the Harrell, Longnecker, Coronado-Molina, Araiza, Fajardo, and Manubag-Casillas families!

August Answer: The scholarship program used by 99% of Autism Academy's families is the Empowerment Scholarship, also known as ESA.

Upcoming Events - Valley & Online

September 28 & 29 - Half Days for Conferences

October 3-14 - No School - Fall Break

October 17 - School Resumes

Upcoming Events - Tucson

October 5 & 6 - Half Days for Conferences

October 10-14 - No School - Fall Break

October 17 - School Resumes

Upcoming Events - Off Campus

October 15 - Autism Speaks Walk

October 22 - Tucson AAED Car Show Benefit

October 23 - Yes Day For Autism!



Transition Program Corner

Students Hard at Work - Pre-Employment Transition

Happy September! It has been a busy August. Students are acclimating to their college and technical classes, beginning work adjustment trainings with Vocational Rehabilitation, and we will be beginning Pre-employment transition classes for our 12th graders to learn and practice skills for life after high school. We had our first quarterly parent meeting with Vocational Rehabilitation and would like to thank all that attended.



Student Council Newsletter Portion

In the Bridge room at Tempe all the students have been hard at work within the multiple elements of our program. Cozy Cafe has been working on inventorying supplies, creating a menu, and creating flyers with news for the upcoming opening of the cafe. Students that are working in the PAES Lab have been so amazing at jumping in and completing many different jobs. When in the training room, students have been working in their college classes, taking inventory for school store, and working on job related interest and preference inventory surveys. We are so proud of them and how quickly they have adapted to their new schedules.