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THE KEY TO SUCCESS FOR ALASKAN EDUCATORS SERVING STUDENTS WITH  
LOW INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

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LOW INCIDENCE DISABILITIES QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
February 2025

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## Play Activities



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*"Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn."*

- O.Fred Donaldson

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## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year, and welcome back! I hope that everyone had a restful break and enjoyed spending time with family and friends. Hopefully, you were able to escape some of the crazy Alaska winter that we are having this year!

Being able to relax and engage in recreational activities is something that many of our students struggle with. They are not always able to engage in play and leisure skills without direct instruction and varying levels of support. For some students, support is needed to figure out what activities they like, and for others, modifications may need to be made to access their preferred play. This quarter, our focus is on how to help students with low-incidence disabilities choose and engage in play and leisure activities.

Please reach out to your SESA specialist for additional information and support. For more information on SESA services, visit us at [www.sesa.org](http://www.sesa.org).

### Jennifer Schroeder

SESA Multiple Disability Specialist  
Newsletter Editor

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## Paraprofessional Spotlight



February's paraprofessional spotlight is Grace Jackson from Fawn Mountain Elementary! She is an amazing paraprofessional because she:

- Puts students first to ensure they are successful and have the same opportunities as their peers.
- Is kind to all students and takes the time to know them to provide a positive environment at all times.
- Will meet students where they are, even if it means sitting on the classroom floor to complete lessons.
- Is willing to step in to support her coworkers, all with a fantastic smile on her face.

**Keep up the great work, Grace!**

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## Teaching Play and Leisure Skills

by Amy Topmiller, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Individuals with low-incidence disabilities such as cognitive impairment or multiple disabilities often have global delays, impacting all areas of development. Like any other skill, students with complex learning needs benefit from direct instruction in play and rec leisure skills. It may be challenging and even overwhelming to know where to start in teaching play skills, recreation, and leisure activities. A good place to start is to observe same-

aged peers to see what they gravitate towards during these activities. From there, you can investigate how to customize those activities to meet your students' individual learning needs.

Students need exposure to a wide range of activities to get a sense of what they enjoy and what they do not. For younger students, during playtime, introducing a variety of toys/activities and teaching them how to request and reject activities is recommended. This allows the student to learn how to play and promotes choice and self-advocacy skills. For older students, embedding new rec leisure activities into part of the daily/weekly routine so that students have exposure to a large variety of activities, is a great way to provide consistent exposure and build these skills. Accessibility can be a barrier for some students, so exploring ways for students to have some autonomy over how they access free time, breaks, rec leisure activities without adult support can be challenging. Reach out to your SESA specialist to get support in making activities accessible for students.

In the state of Alaska, there are several 18–22-year-old programs that integrate recreation and leisure into the programming for individuals with disabilities in addition to job skills, community-based programming, and independent living skills. The question that remains is why do we wait so long to teach students with disabilities to work on these skills? Start teaching these skills today! Increased access and skills in rec leisure naturally lends itself to increased interactions with peers, thus promoting friendships through common interests.

This article includes a variety of resource links to get you started, including ideas, interest inventories, and the benefits of developing rec leisure skills.

Resources:

[Adapted PE, Recreation and Leisure](#)

[Hope's Disability Programs in Alaska](#)

[The Importance of Recreation and Leisure Activities](#)

[Interest Checklist \(Adapted\)](#)

[Children's Leisure Assessment](#)

[Teaching Leisure Skills in the Classroom](#)

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## **Expanding Social and Leisure Skills by Addressing Students' Digital Device Usage and Social Media Consumption**

By Lyon C. Johnson, MA, NCSP, BCBA, LBA

Educators understand the importance of balancing technology use with opportunities for social interaction and leisure skill development. Still, it cannot be easy to achieve, given society's overfocused attention on gaming and social media. The tech industry has been savvy in its ability to harness behavioral principles to its advantage. The industry knows how to capture our attention, strengthen our focus, and keep this over-focused behavior in our repertoire using customized digital stimuli along with effective and powerful schedules of reinforcement. Below, I have offered some typical scenarios across the grade levels and a few concrete examples of IEP goals, objectives, and interventions that encourage participation in group activities, reduce reliance on devices, and promote positive social behaviors.

### **Addressing Excessive iPad Use in Elementary School**

Many students, especially those with social challenges, may prefer solitary activities like using an iPad. While technology is helpful, too much can hinder social development. Think of a second-grade student who always chooses his iPad during playtime. The student gets so absorbed in games that he ignores other classmates, which costs the student valuable opportunities to learn and practice important social skills and expand their familiarity with other age-appropriate leisure skills.

### **Example IEP Goals and Objectives**

For a student who avoids group activities and prefers using an iPad alone, consider these IEP goals:

**Goal 1:** Increase participation in group play.

- **Objective 1:** The student will participate in a structured group activity for 10 minutes with minimal prompting in four out of five days.
- **Objective 2:** The student will initiate at least one social interaction (asking a question, offering a toy, commenting) during group play four out of five days.

**Goal 2:** Reduce iPad use during independent play.

- **Objective 1:** The student will choose a non-iPad activity during independent play for 15 minutes with visual prompts four out of five days.
- **Objective 2:** The student will play with a peer for 5 minutes without using an iPad, with verbal prompting, 4 out of 5 days.

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## Expanding Leisure Opportunities with Neurodivergent Learners

By Brian Babcock, SESA Autism Specialist

Leisure represents opportunities to relax and pursue interests and hobbies. In a world filled with obligations and expectations, leisure allows us to unwind and recover, preparing us better to face the demands of our lives. IDEA addresses leisure in the context of Recreation, a related service defined in (§300.34(c)(11) that includes:

- (i) Assessment of leisure function;
- (ii) Therapeutic recreation services;
- (iii) Recreation programs in schools and community agencies; and
- (iv) Leisure education.

Art, travel, exercise, music, food, crafts, science, history, reading, gaming, and collecting are genres frequently associated with leisure and represent a small sample within a world of possibilities. Leisure pursuits are personal and sometimes shifting. Identifying and/or expanding leisure activities implicitly means trying something new, which can be scary. Being in a new place, engaging with new materials, unfamiliar sensory input, and meeting new people are just a few of the intimidating realities of trying new things.

Identifying and increasing leisure opportunities can be difficult for students with autism. A narrow focus on established interests may inhibit a student's curiosity and willingness to explore new categories. It can be helpful to identify links between existing and new interests.

For example, a student who is highly motivated by geography may be more amenable to cooking/baking tasks when the recipes are representative of different countries.

- Search and affix food pictures to a world map
- Invent new flags that incorporate pictures/drawings of cultural foods
- Explore cultural differences in food and eating (e.g., utensils, rituals, costs, local ingredients, etc.)
- Track dishes through history to learn their origin

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## IEP Goals Resources and Examples for Play Activities

by Abby Steer, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

Play activities, or play-based activities, are defined as “purposeful, meaningful activities that help children develop important skills and knowledge. Play-based activities will help them develop spatial awareness, problem-solving, or science concepts, among other skills” (Hershey, 2024). For students who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, play also allows them to express themselves while enjoying exploring. It also improves their communication and emotional well-being and allows them to build bonds with others. When play-based activities are intentional, they can tie into IEP goals.

Here are a few resources to see some examples of IEP goals that may be helpful when creating goals for your student:

### [A Day in Our Shoes](#)

While many of these do not specifically mention play, the reader can visualize different play-based activities when reading the targeted social skills. There are also several goals that specifically target play.

### [IEP Goals](#)

One page of play-based goal examples. The goals are split into early, intermediate, and advanced, and each group has two or three examples.

### [Communication Community](#)

This resource provides many example goals for readers to look at. Communication Community also provides the reader with a visual and formula to assist when going through the steps of writing a play-based goal. From the initial interview all the way to writing it!

Resources:

Arnoldi, K. A. (2011). [Examples-of-IEP-goals-common-core-Stds.pdf](#).

Catherine Hershey Schools. (2024, August 28). [Why play-based learning matters, and tips you can try at home.](#)

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by Samantha Weiland, AKCAM Specialist

School can be a wonderful and safe environment for students to learn social skills. Play skills are important for students to learn social rules, imagination, and self-investigation of how things work. Play can be key for students who are learning to use lifelong tools to help them make their world accessible.

When presenting social skills to students, it is important to build accessibility or allow ways for students to use and explore their personalized strategies or assistive technology to promote access for students with print disabilities. When picking a social activity that is inclusive, there are a few factors to consider, whether it is through structured or unstructured play:

Perceptual:

- Does the student require the directions of the game/activity to be simplified so that they are able to decode and comprehend the rules of the game without having too much text on a page? (consider line spacing and the amount of text presented in a paragraph)
- Does your student benefit from hearing the directions (read aloud)? Remember, just because a student struggles with reading, auditory might not be the best option, but it can be helpful.
  - Do the students need to have the rules of the game visually represented to them at all times to help them navigate the game?

Vision:

- Is the student a braille reader and, therefore, needs the instructions presented in braille?
- Can auditory direction be provided for the game? Would that support student access?
- Do the pieces/board of the game need to have a tactual component for the student to be able to participate?
- Is there any other visual information that needs to be provided in another format?

Physical:

- Does the student require accommodation tools to physically access the game? (card holders, ways to move pieces, etc.)
- Does the student use a mouse replacement system to access educational and leisure activities, and is the activity software compatible with their system?

Once the accessible tool/needs have been determined for the student to access social activities, an opportunity for the student to investigate or play with the tool with guidance will need to be provided. The child-led play of the accessible tool allows the child to explore its features and become comfortable with its function. An example of allowing the student to self-explore an accessible tool would be providing the student with a handheld magnifying glass and allowing them to look at toys of high interest through the magnifying glass to see how the object appears bigger with the lens. If you have a student who uses a C-pen, have the student do a scavenger hunt for words and letters around the room using the C-pen. The exploring activities are not just for students with print disabilities but can be beneficial for other students to help them understand the needs of students with print access challenges. Keep in mind, always provide visual, modeling, and auditory expectations to your students on how to properly use the accessible tools before letting the students participate in student-led play.

If you are interested in learning more about print disabilities or think that you may have students who qualify under this category and need to locate accessible materials, please contact us at [akcam@sesa.org](mailto:akcam@sesa.org) or 907-334-1300.

Additional Resources

[Supporting Children's Learning Through Play](#)

[Prioritizing Play: The Importance of Play-based Learning in Early Education](#)

## Teaching Individuals with Disabilities Leisure Skills

by Robert Sinclair, Autism Specialist

### What Are Leisure Skills?

Leisure skills may seem contradictory, given that we often do leisure for fun or a break from necessary activities. However, leisure skills are an area where students benefit from—and may require— instruction, particularly for students with disabilities. Leisure skills can be put into three categories: leisure as free time, leisure as activity, and leisure as a state of mind (Hurd and Anderson, 2011, as cited in Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d.). We are all probably familiar with leisure as free time games, sports, and other fun activities, but leisure is also a state of mind. According to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (n.d.), “perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and positive effect are critical to the determination of an experience as leisure or not leisure.” Leisure encompasses activities we engage in during our free time as well as our perception of those activities and events as leisure.

Leisure activities include recreation, games, entertainment, and hobbies. These activities are important to our well-being and sense of fulfillment. Leisure skills are learned over time, and for students with disabilities, these skills may have been neglected in favor of functional and academic skills. It is important that students with disabilities learn these skills to ensure that they maintain an adequate quality of life, independence, and a sense of personal fulfillment.

### How Do We Teach Leisure Skills?

A variety of activities may serve as lessons in leisure skills. Targeting the specific interests of the learner and doing some informal assessment will help identify the appropriate leisure skill to be taught. Consider offering a few options for activities based on the learner’s interests and preferences. It might be obvious what the individual enjoys for leisure; in some cases, the learner can be presented with different activities to determine what they engage with the most. Leisure skills may be social or independent.

Examples of activities to support leisure skill instruction include:

- Board games (Trouble, Chutes and Ladders, checkers, Trivial Pursuit, Operation, etc.)
- Card games (Uno, Go Fish, Solitaire, etc.)
- Sports (basketball, ping pong, darts, bowling, etc.)
- Recreation (hiking, swimming, gardening, fishing, dancing, etc.)
- Puzzles
- Reading
- Exercise
- Cooking/Baking (for leisure)
- Outings (going to the park, the movies, the library, etc.)

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## **Enriching Student Lives: Implementing Recreation and Leisure Skills in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

By Angel Black, M.S.Ed, TSVI, COMS, SESA Vision/O&M Specialist and Director for the Alaska Deafblind Project

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) recognizes recreation and leisure as essential components of a well-rounded education for students with visual impairments. As educators, our role extends beyond teaching traditional academic subjects to helping students develop lifelong skills for meaningful engagement in recreational activities.

### **Understanding the Importance**

Recent research by Martinez and Chen (2024) demonstrates that students with visual impairments who participate in structured recreation programs show improved social skills, physical fitness, and overall life satisfaction. These findings reinforce the critical nature of intentionally teaching recreation and leisure skills within our educational framework.

### **Practical Implementation Strategies**

#### **1. Assessment-Based Planning:**

Begin by conducting comprehensive assessments of students' interests, abilities, and potential barriers to participation. Dr. Sarah Rodriguez's 2023 study in the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* suggests that individualized activity planning leads to higher engagement rates and better long-term adoption of leisure skills.

#### **2. Adaptive Sports and Games:**

Modern adaptive sports programs have evolved significantly. Consider implementing:



- Goalball leagues that incorporate smart tracking technology
- Beeping baseball with wireless bases
- Swimming programs with tactile lane markers
- Rock climbing with audio guidance systems

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## Upcoming Events!

**March 20, 2025**

**ABCDE's of Water Safety for Autism Webinar**

*Registration Opens Soon!*

**April 26, 2025**

**2025 Autism Acceptance & Awareness Walk**

*Registration Opens Soon!*

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