



SUNNY DAYS, INC.

MAKING THE FUTURE **BRIGHTER** ONE CHILD AT A TIME



SESAME STREET DEBUTS JULIA, A MUPPET WITH AUTISM



April is Autism Awareness Month, and what a great way to start the spring! From Niagara Falls to the White House, the world is lighting up blue to show its support.

This month, Sesame Street officially debuted their new character Julia, a muppet who has autism. Until recently, Julia was only featured in books, apps, and supplemental materials by Sesame Street, but now she can be seen on the television screen too. Julia is adorable and bright, and her presence on Sesame Street marks a new development in television programming that promotes inclusivity for all children.

In Julia's featurette, viewers find out that she's an old friend of Elmo and that she's very talented at painting. When she's very focused on her paintings, it can be hard to get Julia's attention. Big Bird initially doesn't understand why Julia won't give her a high five, and the other characters explain to him that she has autism and may do things a little differently. Julia loves to play, and her friends just need to understand her needs and the fact that sometimes she gets overwhelmed by noises. The clip is fun and uplifting as well as educational.

[You can view the full clip and meet Julia on Sesame Street's Youtube.](#)

MAY IS BETTER SPEECH AND HEARING MONTH



**COMMUNICATION
THE KEY TO CONNECTION
BETTER HEARING & SPEECH MONTH**

[May is Better Hearing and Speech Month!](#) In celebration, OSEP's Early Childhood Assistive Technology Model Demonstration grantees and Center on Technology and Disability is partnering with the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Hearing Outreach (ECHO) Initiative to join the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in celebrating this year's theme "Communication: The Key to Connection." Throughout the month of May, ASHA partners with national and local stakeholders to engage in a multifaceted public education campaign to raise awareness about the critical need to intervene early when young children are identified with communication disorders. This will also be a major theme at the [2017 ASHA Convention](#), which will be held November 9-11 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, and at which Sunny Days will continue to be a major Corporate Sponsor.

SENSORY ACTIVITIES TO TRY THIS SPRING



The weather is getting nicer each day, and that means it's time for playing outside! Many sensory activities are perfect for the outdoors. Sensory bins and homemade slimes in particular have gained a lot of popularity, but the mess from these activities can be a problem indoors. Outside, the cleanup is a lot easier. Plus, there's more room for kids to move around and exercise their motor skills.

Check out the [Sunny Days Pinterest](#) for crafts and activities children of all abilities can enjoy this spring.

Sensory bins: A sensory bin is a container filled with materials such as sand, dirt, and toys. They can provide visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory stimulation. Our Pinterest board features a wide range of ideas for creating sensory bins with themes ranging from space to sea life to children's books.

[Follow the Sensory Bins Pin Board](#)

Sensory slimes: It's hard to miss the many blogs and videos about making slime. We put together a Pinterest board that features all kinds of slime recipes. Whether you're looking for DIY slime that's Borax-free, glittery, crunchy, or edible, you'll find it on the board!

[Follow the DIY Sensory Slime Pin Board](#)

Other spring activities: Sensory bins and slimes aren't for every child. Some may need a much slower introduction to new sensory experiences. We also created a Pinterest board with all kinds of other ideas for activities that are fun and educational both indoors and outdoors.

[Follow the Spring Activities Pin Board](#)

STUDIES SHOW: RECENT RESEARCH ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT



Autism Starts Months Before Symptoms Appear, Study Shows

A recent study published in Nature suggests there is evidence of autism in the brain even earlier than thought. According to the study, the signs can be seen on a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan well before a child's first birthday. The study only had 100 participants, and the results are not definitive enough to suggest that doctors should start using MRIs to diagnose autism. Still, the study gives us insight into just how early it may be possible to identify autism. The earlier a child receives a diagnosis and begins treatment, the better the outcome. You can read more about the study in [Scientific American](#).

Stress Linked to Gastrointestinal Issues in Children With Autism

Children with autism have a high prevalence of gastrointestinal issues, and a study from the University of Missouri School of Medicine (MU) sheds some light on a possible cause. "We looked for a relationship between gastrointestinal symptoms and the immune markers responsible for stress response," says David Beversdorf, associate professor in the departments of radiology, neurology and psychological sciences at MU and the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders. "We found a relationship between increased cortisol response to stress and these symptoms." To learn more, you can read the [article about the study on UPI](#).

Children With Autism Find Understanding Facial Expressions Difficult but Make Similar Mistakes as Peers

Many children with autism struggled to recognize faces, and multiple studies have explored the topic, but results have been mixed. A team from Bristol's School of Experimental Psychology aimed to find out whether six basic facial expressions differing in intensity are challenging for young people with autism to recognize. Sarah Griffiths, one of the study's researchers, says, "In this study we used an online platform to run a larger study to answer this question more conclusively and found that individuals with autism are on average a bit less accurate at recognizing emotion from faces." To coincide with this research, the team developed an iPad app to teach facial emotion recognition for people with and without Autism Spectrum Conditions. You can read more about the study on [Neuroscience News](#).

NEWS AND EVENTS



Sunny Days Supports World Down Syndrome Day

Our staff from the Sunny Days PA/DE office wore colorful and mismatched socks to show our support for World Down Syndrome Day on March 21, 2017. The socks you see in the photo are all different, but that doesn't stop them from keeping our feet warm! Wearing mismatched socks on World Down Syndrome Day is a fun way to celebrate our differences.

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Stay in touch with Sunny Days and reach out to us via social media, email, or phone. You can follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#)!

If you're not one for social media,
feel free to give us a call at 732-761-0088 or shoot us an email at
sunnydaysnj@sunnydays.com

JOIN OUR TEAM!

Join the Sunny Days, Inc. Team!

Are you pursuing career path in early childhood intervention? If you're looking to help children with developmental delays and disabilities, working in early intervention is a great fit for you. Applicants who are passionate about the idea of improving the lives of children from ages birth to 3 are invited to visit the Sunny Days, Inc. Early Intervention Career Guide to learn more, [view available positions](#), and make the first move towards helping kids in a fulfilling career.