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# *Tips on Caring for People with Special Needs*

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## **Tips on Caring for People with Special Needs**

By: Sami Wnek, CTRS

When working with people with special needs, it is important to use an open mind. We live in a world that has a certain set of rules but sometimes, when working with people with special needs, we need to question these rules and decide whether they are appropriate for them and whether these rules are right in the first place. It can be helpful to the client, the staff, and the community if we, as recreation professionals are easy going and let certain things slide. As long as no one is being hurt, this is usually acceptable. It also helps to have a sense of humor. Some things are just plain funny and need to be acknowledged as such. Laughter is a proven stress reducer and it puts people at ease. It makes us feel comfortable and accepted, and I strongly encourage laughter in the workplace.

We can better serve our clients if we communicate openly with them. This includes talking, but more importantly, listening. Some of our clients are non-verbal, but we can find other methods to gain their input such as facial expressions, behaviors, and information obtained by family members, etc. We need to set attainable and appropriate goals for them. We must first and foremost believe that they can be successful because they can be. It can be helpful for us to ask our clients who are alert and oriented what types of goals they'd like to work on and then write them into our care plans because, who knows our clients better than themselves? If we ask for their input, they are more likely to be successful in attaining their goals. We want to set them up for success and this can be a good way to do that. If they are aware of and have input into their goals, and are successful, then that can be a good motivator for them to set new goals and accomplish more, and we want our clients to function at the highest level possible. In that same vein, if they are not successful, we need to be nonjudgmental and support their efforts. We need to be sensitive to their feelings and enable them to set different goals without feeling like they have failed. Often times, explaining ahead of time that if something doesn't work, we can just change it, is effective.

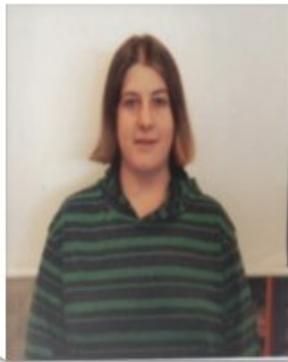
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Do not neglect your own recreation needs! Make time for yourself. As recreation professionals, we are very concerned with the leisure lifestyles of others but it is very important for us to participate in our own recreational activities that we enjoy. This helps prevent burnout, gives us time to reflect on the situations of the clients we work with, relieves stress, and it helps us remember why we got into this field in the first place – it's fun and it feels good to help other people.

One of the most important things that we can do to care for our clients is to model good behavior. By setting a good example, we give our clients, no matter what age or ability, the opportunity to learn how to behave appropriately within society. We can also use positive reinforcement by praising good behavior. The bottom line is that we have to take the time and attention to really get to know our clients. Nobody wants to be a number and every person is different. When you take the time to get to know their particular intricacies and personality traits, which is when you can best help them to achieve their goals.

Sami Wnek is also the illustrator of *Me, Myself, and My Autism* By Jamie Quaranta.



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