

# STAYING CONNECTED WITH PASSIONS & PEOPLE (DURING COVID-19... AND BEYOND)



These have been very challenging times for our world, especially for many Autistic young people. Below are some insights and tips from Autistic young adults on our team of how they are maintaining key connections to personal passions and people during a time when those connections are more important than ever. Here are some ways to remain connected even if things like distance, time zones or COVID restrictions stand in your way.

## TIPS/INSIGHTS FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE:

- Embrace your passions! They are an awesome way of providing comfort and joy, as well as a means for connecting with other people.
- If you have a passion for something, chances are countless other people do too. Try joining forums and communities online centred on your interests. I CAN offers Autistic-led online interest groups that you might enjoy!
- Online courses - both informal and formal - can be a great way to delve into your passions and meet other people who are just as excited about a subject as you are. Outschool, for example, offers everything from coding to Minecraft to Lego clubs to Manga and more!
- Try taking on a project to do with your passion. If you love writing for example, maybe start a blog or write a medium length story. If you love gaming, perhaps try out some different kinds of games you don't normally play. Consider teaching yourself a new skill to do with your interest, like coding, or poetry. There are some awesome online videos and websites that help people develop new skills.
- Feeling a bit uninspired? Even if you really don't feel like engaging in your passion, telling yourself that you'll only do it for 5 minutes might help remind you why you enjoy it so much. Once you begin, you might find that it's hard to stop!
- Look up YouTubers with similar passions for inspiration and motivation. Seeing other people doing things that you enjoy can motivate you to create or delve into your passion even more deeply.
- If your passion takes a lot of effort, see if you can engage with it on a lighter level. For example, if you love painting but don't have energy to start a new work, try sketching and using textas (pens) because they are easier to set up and pack up.
- Demonstrate a willingness to try out something new. As monotony sets in, a new activity or hobby can be energising. Even if performed poorly it can be fun and you can learn something new, and exercise some brain muscles you had forgotten you had. Things like clay modelling, beatboxing, or baking can be really entertaining. You don't have to be good at it to get something out of it.
- Missing your friends, and not able to organize meetups in person? Group video calls can be a good solution; you could do some gaming together, (video or cards/tabletop) have a movie night, or just hang out and chill like you normally would... just virtually!



- Steam has some great games that you can play online with friends. This includes online board games, and word games. You don't have to be a gamer to play online with friends!
- Music is another awesome way to create connections! Make Spotify playlists for your friends and family with songs that bring up good memories or feature artists that you want them to discover. Ask them to do the same for you.
- One of our mentees holds Zoom sessions with their younger cousins to teach them about Pokémon. Another mentee hosts an "Infodump" session on Zoom with their grandmother every weekend. It allows the mentee a chance to share their extensive knowledge base around various topics and for them to engage with their beloved grandmother, who lives interstate. Thanks to those Zoom sessions, Grandma is now a huge fan of The SIMS...at 77!

## **A FEW WORDS FOR ADULTS WHO SUPPORT AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE:**

- Never underestimate the power of Autistic passions. They can provide great joy, opportunities for connection, comfort and security, especially at times when the world around us feels so uncertain.
- Embracing the passions of your Autistic young person is an amazing way to build and strengthen those connections. Show a genuine interest in their passions: get them to teach you about it or find other ways you can participate.
- Help your young person find or create avenues for them to enjoy their passion and/or explore new interests. Autistic-led groups on Facebook for parents & carers, like TARA, can be great forums for identifying other families whose young people share similar passions, connecting with Autistic mentors and sharing intriguing courses, events and other opportunities..
- Please proudly embrace your own passions no matter how "unusual". When adults are enthusiastic about the things they love, it makes Autistic young people feel like it's okay to do the same!

## **FURTHER READING:**

**AWETISM 2020 VIRTUAL EXPO:** A celebration of Autistic passions, talents and knowledge, featuring 50 presentations by Autistic students, keynote addresses by Autistic mentors and mentees from our team, sessions for parents & carers, teachers, employers and more! Free and open worldwide: [awetism.vfairs.com](http://awetism.vfairs.com).

From Chris Bonnelo of Autistic Not Weird, [Autistic 'Obsessions' and why we really, really need them.](#)

From Briannon Lee of Respectfully Connected, [One super important way to forge connections with autistic people in your life.](#)

From Quincy Hansen of Speaking of Autism-Quincy Hansen, [Embrace all of your interests.](#)