

# Long Island Parent Talk

## Tools and products for children with special needs

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Necessity has been the force behind Aviva Weiss' inventions for children with special needs.

Weiss founded Fun and Function in 2005 after her daughter was diagnosed with sensory processing disorder. A pediatric occupational therapist, she was frustrated by the lack of affordable and kid-friendly products for children with special needs. A therapist working with her daughter recommended a weighted vest for her. But the product was "ugly and the seams looked unfinished. I realized that the only way to have a better alternative was to create one myself."

Her company designs and develops products that help children "meet their therapeutic needs but also help them fit in and not stand out and look different from their friends," said Weiss, of

Merion Station, Pa. The deep pressure from the weighted compression vest, for example, Weiss said, "can help the child function and focus. Think of it as a reassuring deep hug."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, about one in six children nationally have one or more developmental disabilities or delays.

Developmental Disabilities Institute in Smithtown, which serves children and adults, has been using digital tools on iPods and iPads for the past three years, said technology experts Christine Racca and Elyse Cutrone, both at DDI's Ronkonkoma campus.

Proloquo2Go, a communication app for those with limited or no verbal skills, and Pictello, a tool to create talking photo albums and books, both made by AssistiveWare, are "a really good way to teach a variety of skills" from social skills to fine motor awareness, said Racca, education supervisor of DDI's Young Autism Program, and Cutrone, its education coordinator. The apps are available on the iPad, iPhone and iPod touch.

A nondigital game that Weiss designed and plays with her kids is "Guess how I feel," which "helps children learn about their feelings by labeling their emotions and understand what their emotions mean and what to do about them."

Fun and Function welcomes feedback on its Facebook page, where parents can post questions, seek advice and participate in discussions, she said. "I'm a big believer in when you're treating a child clinically, to really have them involved in the process and ask them what their goals are, if they're verbal, and have them participate as much as possible because the outcomes are so

much better."

**A few resources for children with special needs:**

[www.ddiny.org](http://www.ddiny.org)

[www.funandfunction.com](http://www.funandfunction.com)

[www.ableplay.org](http://www.ableplay.org) (which rates toys for various special needs)

[www.achievement-products.com](http://www.achievement-products.com) (offers therapy, exercise and special education products)

[www.assistiveware.com/](http://www.assistiveware.com/) (Proloquo2Go, Pictello and other software)

Apps such as SharingTimer, Video Scheduler and Choiceworks that help with scheduling and transitioning can be found at Apple App store and are used at DDI.

*Photo above: Swings are a popular therapeutic tool, said Fun and Function's Aviva Weiss. The Air-Lite Seal Bolster Swing, known as Sammy the Seal, is lightweight and can help kids develop balance and motor planning skills.*

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