Is it difficult to convince your child, tween, or teen to step away from the video game and find something else to do? The lure of electronic media is a force to contend with in this age of parenting, and perhaps this is even more challenging for parents of kids on the autism spectrum. Many kids with ASD are drawn to video games because they can be instantly rewarding, visually stimulating, and don’t require face-to-face social communication. In a research study published in the August 2013 issue of Pediatrics, it was found that children with ASD and related profiles are at a higher risk for excessive video game use.

Many professionals, however, believe that video games themselves are not necessarily the problem. Various social skills programs, including MGH Aspire, use technology to help individuals with social competency, stress management, and self awareness. Practicing these skills with peers, with the guidance of a skilled clinician, using an engaging format such as Nintendo™ Wii, can improve emotional regulation and build confidence. It’s the length of unstructured time at home that many kids spend on screens, when they could be participating in other recreational or social activities, that can be concerning to adults. As common characteristics of autism can include social and communication challenges, as well as highly focused and restricted interests, it’s easy to understand why many parents are looking for ideas for motivating their kids to turn off the screen and tune into their real life surroundings!

Here are ideas for 20 screen-free activities that your son or daughter might enjoy. Each activity includes a link to a suggested website for more information. Not all activities are geared toward all ages:

1. **Build an indoor fort**

2. **Create an outdoor obstacle course, and practice Parkour with friends**

3. **Design a scavenger hunt around the house, in backyard, or in neighborhood**

4. **De-stress with yoga**
   [www.mghaspire.org](http://www.mghaspire.org)

5. **Draw a comic strip with weekly installments**
   [http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Comic-Strip](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Comic-Strip)
6. **Earn money by offering services to family, friends, and neighbors**

7. **Experiment with science**
   [http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/experiments.html](http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/experiments.html)

8. **Join a cooking group**
   [www.mghaspire.org](http://www.mghaspire.org)

9. **Join a local theater group**

10. **LARPing with friends**

11. **Learn to play a rock band musical instrument, such as drums or guitar**

12. **Make an art project with recycled materials found around the house**

13. **Organize an interactive Nerf game**

14. **Participate in an orienteering club**

15. **Play board games: Rediscover old favorites or create your own**
    [http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Your-Own-Board-Game](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Your-Own-Board-Game)

16. **Put on a talent show**

17. **Start a collection**

18. **Take up photography**
    [http://www.biglearning.com/treasure-photography-for-kids.htm](http://www.biglearning.com/treasure-photography-for-kids.htm)

19. **Volunteer in your community**

20. **Human Sized Game Board**
21. **BONUS IDEA!!** Wii™ with Friends!

If your child really loves video games, turn it into a more cooperative, social experience:

www.mghaspire.org

---

Kathrine Lewiecki, MEd, LICSW, *Clinical Assessment Coordinator at MGH Aspire*, is a licensed independent clinical social worker and educator with 18 years of experience in the fields of mental health, health care, and education. She has worked with children, teens, adults, and families in a variety of settings including public and private schools, community based early intervention, partial hospitalization programs, and outpatient mental health clinics. Before joining ASPIRE, Ms. Lewiecki worked as a clinician at the League School of Greater Boston, working with students with high functioning autism spectrum disorder and their families. Ms. Lewiecki holds a Masters of Education from Lesley University and a Masters of Social Work from Simmons College.

MGH Aspire is a program of the Massachusetts General Hospital and the Massachusetts General Hospital for Children. For information on our cooking, yoga, Wii™ and other programs for children, teens and adults with a high cognitive autism spectrum disorder or a related profile, visit to our website at MghAspire.org.