



Special Abilities of North Texas

ACE and Caregiver Handbook

About Us

All persons with special needs deserve the opportunity to become better accepted and included in the community. We believe that persons with disabilities should enjoy the same rights and opportunities for pursuing happiness in life; and that we must be relentless in our advocacy for this often-silent population as one of the most underserved populations in society.

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide the highest quality care, training, and support to adults with special needs, giving them opportunities to succeed in life, family, and the community, while offering respite to their caregivers.

Our Five Program Pillars

Community Inclusion and Social Development

We believe strongly that each citizen with special needs has the right to be an accepted and productive member of the community. Our ACEs frequently attend local events and activities and volunteer with public organizations. These include museums, zoos, festivals, libraries, and sporting events, to name a few.

Home and Independent Living Skills

Seeking independence is a part of life for every human being. Through this program, ACEs are trained in home living, money management, communication, public transportation, shopping, personal care, and more.

Pre-vocational and Vocational Training

This program creates an opportunity for ACEs to develop and improve their vocational abilities. Examples include customer service, clerical work such as filing and computer skills, custodial maintenance, and inventory control.

Creative Arts

In this program, ACEs learn by igniting their creativity. In addition to creating beautiful works of art, motor skills are honed, and hidden talents are discovered.

Health and Fitness

This program is dedicated to educating ACEs about ways to maintain and improve their overall health, in mind and body. Clients participate in physical training exercises that match their abilities and learn about healthy nutrition through engaging activities.

What is an ACE?

We believe that each person, regardless of diagnosis, disability, or circumstance, can excel with the support of their loved ones, staff, and the community. Every day our clients learn new skills, foster friendships, create art, and enjoy being a part of an inclusive, caring group. That is why we call them Adults Creating Excellence, or ACEs.

Staff Contact Information

NAME	TITLE	PHONE	EMAIL
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Holidays and Closings - 2021

January 1st – New Year's Day
January 18th – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
February 15th – President's Day
April 2nd – Good Friday
May 31st – Memorial Day
July 5th – Independence Day
September 6th – Labor Day
November 25th – 26th – Thanksgiving Break
December 24th – Christmas Break
December 31st – New Year's Eve

In addition to these dates, Special Abilities of North Texas may close for major fundraising events or staff training days. We will notify all caregivers in advance of these additional closures.

In case of inclement weather, Special Abilities of North Texas will follow Lewisville Independent School District's closing decision. If LISD announces that they will be closed or have a late start, Special Abilities will be closed the ENTIRE day. In this case, we will put notifications on our website as well as Facebook. If we need to close early, Special Abilities will notify all caregivers via our website, Facebook, and phone. All ACEs must be picked up within 2 hours of notification; otherwise, a late fee will be assessed.

Hours of Operation

Our core program hours are 9:00 am – 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

The State of Texas funding only covers up to five (5) hours of day habilitation service per day. Special Abilities provides day habilitation for six (6) hours per day. For families needing

additional hours of service, Special Abilities will offer Extended Hours at a private pay rate, or will contract with your provider to bill for Respite during those hours.

Enrollment

Before enrollment, caregivers will fill out an application with some basic information about the future ACE. Special Abilities staff will review the information, determine if the individual may move forward with enrollment at Special Abilities of North Texas, and contact the caregiver with additional forms that need to be completed. Acceptance into the program is determined upon the availability of space and assessing the individual's needs. Special Abilities of North Texas reserves the right to deny enrollment to any individual that we feel we would not be able to serve appropriately.

Waitlist

The Director of Program Services will manage the waitlist. When a spot becomes available, the caregiver will be notified.

Pods

ACEs will be divided into Pods, similar to homerooms. When it is safe, we want all of our ACEs to socialize with one another and rotate classrooms as we did before, but for now, we must remain in pod groups to lower the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Even when we resume our class rotations, we will continue to use pod groups. This will be the first place ACEs go in the morning and the last place they go in the afternoon before dismissal.

Pod groups will be determined by Special Abilities staff, who will consider the personalities, needs, and interests of ACEs. Pods will be announced in December of each year and will go into effect in January. There will be a minor mid-year reassessment, and staff may move some individuals into different pods if needed. All pods will be reassessed at the end of the year, and Special Abilities staff will announce new pod groups.

Please understand that Special Abilities staff take an extraordinary amount of time sorting pod groups and determining placement, and the decision is not made lightly. With decades of combined professional experience, multiple degrees and certifications, and genuine care for each individual served, Special Abilities staff is highly qualified to determine pod groups. The organization is confident in their decisions. If there is a concern regarding your ACE's pod assignment, please reach out to the Director of Program Services to schedule a meeting.

Remaining in stable groups throughout the year will help Special Abilities staff get to know each ACE in a more meaningful way, and we will be able to provide the highest level of individualized support for them. Furthermore, this will allow ACEs to have a set place where they can store their belongings, get to know their peers and work towards goals in a smallgroup setting.

Daily Schedule

The typical daily schedule is as follows:

9:00 – 9:45 am: Pod time

10:00 – 10:45 am: Activity Period #1

11:00 – 11:45 am: Activity Period #2

12:00 – 12:45 pm: Lunch

1:00 – 1:45 pm: Activity Period #3

2:00 – 2:45 pm: Pod Time

2:45 – 3:00 pm: Clean Up and Dismissal

Drop Off and Pick Up

Special Abilities has specific drop off and pick up time windows. In the morning, all ACEs are expected to arrive between 8:30 am – 9:30 am. In the afternoon, ACEs will be dismissed to go home between 2:30 pm and 3:30 pm. ACEs will enter/exit through the Cafeteria door at the west end of the building during these hours. If it is outside of drop off and pick up hours, please utilize the Program entry towards the middle of the building.

For morning drop off:

- ACEs that are able to quickly and independently exit the vehicle may be dropped off in the drive through lane, located on the west end of the building. Please enter the drive through from behind the building.
- As always, you may park and let your ACE enter the building independently, or you may bring them to the door if they need assistance.

For afternoon pick-up:

- Staff will do their best to identify your vehicle, but you may need to roll your window down or verbally let staff know who you are there to pick up.
- If you utilize the drive through lane: there will be a staff member or camera on the corner of the building that you need to pull up to and announce who you are there to pick up.
- Once staff is aware of who you are picking up, they will use a walkie-talkie to call to your ACEs pod room, and your ACE will meet you at the door.

Extended Hours

Extended hours are available to those who need to attend earlier in the mornings and/or later in the afternoons than our typical Program Hours. Morning Extended hours are from 7:30-9:00, and Afternoon Extended Hours are from 3:00-5:30. We staff Extended Hours based on how many ACEs have signed up, so we must know who will be attending. To sign up, go to www.specialabilities.net/portal and follow the prompts.

Fees:

Morning Extended Hours = \$7.50 per day

Afternoon Extended Hours = \$10 per day

Both on Same Day = \$15 per day

General Parking Policy

We understand that nearly, if not all, of our caregivers will have disabled parking placards or tags, but we have a limited number of these spots with direct access to the ramps up to the sidewalk of the building. Please reserve the use of the wheelchair-accessible spots for the caregivers who need the additional space for wheelchair ramps for their ACEs. If you have a meeting scheduled or need to enter the building for any amount of time, please park in a spot facing the garden. This will help keep the parking spots closest to the building free for ACE drop off and pick up times.

Late Policy

ACEs not picked up by 3:30 pm will be charged an additional Late Pick-Up Fee.

The Late Pick-Up Fee is assessed at the following rate: \$5 for every 5-minute increment. Example: 3:31-3:35 = \$5; 3:36-3:40 = \$10

Upon late pick up, staff will ask that you sign a form stating you acknowledge your ACE was picked up late and that a late fee will be assessed. Late fees will be mailed as private pay invoices to the primary caregiver's address.

Attendance & Scheduling

When completing enrollment paperwork, caregivers also fill out a schedule request. Staff will do their best to consider these requests when organizing pod groups. Once set, ACE schedules must be strictly followed. *ACEs will not be allowed to attend on days that they are not scheduled.* If you need a change of schedule, you may submit a written request to the Director of Program Services. Since schedule changes affect not just the individual ACE, but also staffing and the structure of each pod, please limit schedule change requests as much as possible. Special Abilities staff will review the request and will notify the caregiver of the decision within 7 business days. If the request is approved, information regarding their new pod, daily schedule, and Pod Leader will be delivered. We will do our best to accommodate your family's needs, but Special Abilities will approve no more than one schedule change request every three months and are not required to approve a schedule request for any reason.

Additionally, we require that ACEs attend for at least 5 hours during the Day Habilitation program. This helps ensure the ACEs can participate in all of the offered activities daily, and so that Special Abilities can submit billing for a full day of services rendered to your provider.

If an ACE has an appointment, is sick, or will need to be absent for any reason, please notify the Care Services Coordinator as far in advance as possible. If you do not notify staff in advance, an absence will count as an unapproved absence. All absences will be tracked, and if an ACE falls below 85% attendance, they may lose their spot in their pod or on their current schedule. Unless otherwise approved, tardiness beyond 10:00 am, and departure before 2:00 pm will be considered a half-day absence and will go towards the ACE's attendance percentage.

Please notify the Director of Program Services if your ACE plans to be absent from the program for an extended amount of time. Any ACE not in attendance for 30 consecutive days without prior approval will be discontinued from the program. The ACE would then have to re-apply to attend Special Abilities of North Texas' program again.

If you have specific scheduling needs due to therapies or if the ACE is employed, please contact the Director of Program Services. We may be able to make custom scheduling arrangements on a case-by-case basis. Priority for custom arrangements will be given to those that attend full-time and have a limited number of absences.

Therapies

Special Abilities will allow therapists and other professional visitors to use the meeting room to meet with ACEs. Since there is limited space, therapists must go to www.specialabilities.net/portal to sign up. Please have therapists contact us if they have any questions about how to sign up. All visitors must wear a mask at all times and will have their temperature checked upon entering the building.

Billing

Special Abilities of North Texas can contract with your Medicaid Waiver Program provider to provide Day Habilitation services to your ACE at no cost out of pocket to you. **If your service provider changes, it is your responsibility to notify the Director of Program Services in writing immediately in order to avoid a lapse in service or you may be required to pay for day habilitation services privately.** In the case of repeated nonpayment, we may discontinue our contract with a provider. Special Abilities will notify you within no less than 30 days if we are planning to end our contract with your provider, and you may either choose to switch to a provider we do contract with, or you may pay privately when the contract ends.

If your ACE is not on a Medicaid Waiver Program, the responsible party will be expected to pay the private pay rate. Contact the Finance Manager for rates. Private Pay will be billed monthly.

Medicaid Waiver Programs:

- HCS (Home and Community-based Services)
- TxHmL (Texas Home Living)
- CLASS (Community Living and Assistance Support Services)
- GR (General Revenue Fund)

Meals

All ACES should come to the program having already eaten breakfast. Should an ACE have specific dietary requirements, (allergies, dysphagia, food restrictions, etc.) please communicate these in writing to the Care Services Coordinator.

Lunch time is typically from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm. Each ACE is expected to bring their own lunch daily. Staff will assist ACEs in heating and/or cutting up food as needed. Lunches will be taken to the ACE's pod room, along with their other belongings. Please ensure that lunch bags are labeled clearly with the ACE's name. If the lunch needs to remain cold until lunchtime, please make sure it is in an insulated bag with an ice pack.

It is incredibly helpful to send lunches that do not need to be heated up. We understand that this is not possible for those with sensory concerns or modified diets. We have a limited number of microwaves available, and the line to microwave can get quite long if everyone is heating up their food for 5+ minutes each. Please be mindful of this when packing lunches. If the ACE arrives without a lunch and the caregiver is unable to bring one by lunchtime, a \$5 fee will be charged to cover the cost of a lunch.

Clothing

The dress code is expected to be in keeping with accepted community and workplace standards. ACEs who do not follow dress code may be asked to change clothes. General dress code rules include, but are not limited to:

- Shorts, dresses, and skirts must be longer than the fingertips
- Shirts must overlap the waistband of skirts, shorts, or pants
- Items with provocative offensive, violent, or drug-related pictures or words are not permitted
- Please ensure clothing is in good repair, free from holes and tears

We request that you bring an extra change of clothes if your ACE is likely to need to change for any reason. Clothes will be kept in the ACE's personal supply box in their pod room. Please coordinate with your Pod Leader if you have specific instructions for your clothes (send them home wet/dirty, wash them at SANT, etc.) Please ensure clothing is clearly labeled.

ACEs that ride the SPAN or DCTA bus will be assisted by Special Abilities staff to ensure they go home with their coats. Staff will use their best judgement regarding the need for an ACE to wear a coat home, but can't ensure that the ACE keeps the coat on during their bus ride, nor can we ensure that the weather doesn't change in the duration of the bus ride home.

Illness

We strive to maintain the highest standards of health in our program. Though we do have a nurse on site at the Lewisville location, we are not a medical care program. Any ACE that meets any of the following criteria will be sent home:

- Oral temperature of 100 degrees or greater
- Signs and symptoms of possible severe illness such as lethargy, abnormal breathing, two or more episodes of vomiting or diarrhea, rash with fever, drastic behavior changes, or other signs that the ACE may be severely ill
- A healthcare professional has diagnosed the ACE with a communicable disease, and the ACE does not have medical documentation to indicate that he/she is no longer contagious
- An injury that warrants or may warrant further medical attention, other than basic first aid
- Any condition that our nurse has evaluated through a physical assessment that may indicate that the ACE may require further treatment, evaluation, or care that cannot be provided at Special Abilities of North Texas

Please do not send ACEs if they are ill. If Special Abilities staff determine that the ACE needs to go home due to illness, the Care Services Coordinator or Nurse will call the caregiver. Once the initial phone call is made, the ACE must be picked up within 1 hour.

Staff are trained in basic first aid, CPR, and seizure management. However, for any potential life-threatening condition or in the event of a situation that Special Abilities staff is not comfortable handling, staff will contact EMS (911) and the services will be billed to the ACE, family, or provider as appropriate. Unless specifically requested otherwise, ACEs will be transported to Medical City of Lewisville if EMS is called.

ACEs who are sent home with fever, vomiting, or diarrhea will not be allowed to return to the program until they have had no vomiting or diarrhea for a full 24 hours and/or a temperature of less than 99.9 degrees for a full 24 hours.

Please see COVID-19 Addendum for more information regarding policies specific to the coronavirus. The COVID-19 Policies override any other policies regarding illness as long as they are in effect.

Medication Administration

Medication Administration is offered during our main program hours only (9:00am to 3:00pm). Medication will only be administered if the guardian or caregiver signs an authorization form and provides a current Physician's Medication Order Form that specifies name, dose, schedule, and route of administration.

Any medications must be brought in the original pharmacy container with the label intact. Please bring medication directly to the nurse, or the Director of Program Services if the nurse is not available. The nurse will count the pills and have the caregiver sign as a witness. We will not accept, nor administer, any medications that come in anything other than original bottles or blister packs that are fully labeled. Furthermore, if medication is sent in an unlabeled container or bag, we require that the caregiver physically come to our office to pick it up. Over-the-counter medications will only be given if the ACE caregiver has signed the OTC medication permission form. We will not administer any CBD products.

In the event that the nurse is out for the day, another member of staff will administer medications. The staff member will be trained by Special Abilities staff and will have received delegation or assignment of such duties through proper channels.

Behavior Expectations

In order to provide a safe and secure environment for all ACEs, staff, and volunteers, all individuals must meet certain expectations for behavior. The three main tenets of Special Abilities' behavior expectations are as follows:

- ACEs will not be verbally or physically aggressive towards other ACEs or staff.
- ACEs will not be destructive of Special Abilities property or other people's belongings.
- ACEs are expected to be able to remain in their pod room and work in a group setting without being disruptive to their peers.
- If an ACE requires flexible seating, individualized activities, or other accommodations that will help them remain in a group setting, please let the Director of Program Services know and a meeting will be scheduled to determine if Special Abilities will be able to provide the accommodations.

As much as we want to be able to serve any individual in need of day habilitation in North Texas, we also recognize that not every setting is appropriate for every individual. If we are unable to appropriately serve your loved one, we will do our best to refer you to another organization that may be able to do so.

If an ACE violates the Behavior Expectations, the following steps will take place:

- A phone call and/or email to the caregiver notifying them of the current behavior. Staff and the caregiver will discuss possible ideas for decreasing said behavior.
- If the behavior continues, a meeting will be scheduled with the caregiver to discuss a behavior plan, wherein a detailed plan will be developed as a team, including goals and a timeline for expected behavioral changes.
- If the behavior continues after the meeting and initiation of behavior plan:
- Another meeting will be scheduled with the caregiver to discuss the ACE's future at Special Abilities. This step can result in dismissal from Special Abilities of North Texas.

If the ACE already has a behavior management plan in place prior to enrolling, Special Abilities staff must have documentation before the ACE is accepted into the program.

Special Abilities reserves the right to discontinue services immediately if the organization determines the ACE is a threat to the safety of other ACEs or staff, requires a level of supervision that we are unable to provide, or hinders our ability to serve others. As a group day habilitation program, we cannot provide prolonged "one on one" care. Behaviors including (but not limited to) elopement, physical aggression, destruction of property, disruption of planned activities, or pulling the fire alarm/calling 911 can be grounds for immediate dismissal as it compromises the ability of our staff to serve all the other ACEs effectively and safely.

If staff calls the caregiver to pick up the ACE due to behavioral issues, the ACE must be picked up within one hour of the phone call.

Community Inclusion Trips

Community inclusion trips will be scheduled in pod groups. Special Abilities will notify caregivers when a community inclusion trip is planned. To sign up for the trips, caregivers will log into their Bookeo account through the Special Abilities of North Texas website and sign up for the trips that their ACE would like to attend. Payment will be accepted online as a part of the sign-up process. More information regarding updated community inclusion policies and procedures will be sent to all caregivers when we resume these activities.

Transportation is provided by Special Abilities of North Texas' staff on our bus and/or van. If there are behavior issues on trips, Special Abilities staff may suspend an ACE's privilege to attend trips or will require the caregiver to chaperone.

ACEs that have not been signed in by the time of departure listed on the permission slip will be taken off the list. ACEs *must* be clocked in using their badge and check into their pod room before the departure time to go on the trip. The departure time is when the bus is loaded and pulling out of the parking lot. Please arrive at least 15 minutes before departure time.

Family and Caregiver Volunteers

Families and caregivers are encouraged to volunteer to chaperone trips. If you choose to volunteer, we ask that you be present and available to help as needed with all ACEs. On some occasions, we will not be able to take volunteers due to restrictions on the number of people we can bring. All chaperone volunteers must register as a volunteer through our website and agree to all volunteer policies and background checks.

Celebrations

Special Abilities of North Texas will have celebrations for most major holidays. The Program Coordinator and/or Pod Leaders will notify caregivers in advance of these celebrations with details.

We will celebrate birthdays during lunch time. If you want to bring cake/cookies/ice cream, etc. please ensure you bring enough for all ACEs in your pod and notify your Pod Leader in advance. Please understand that any celebrations that are outside of the lunch hour affect the routine and schedule of the day habilitation program.

Communication with Staff

The Care Services Coordinator will be your main point of contact for day-to-day matters regarding your ACE. You may also want to email or send a note to your Pod Leader regarding minor things like how the ACE is feeling that day, something fun they did the evening before they might want to share, etc. If there are any other concerns, or if matters need to be escalated, please contact the Director of Program Services for assistance.

Please understand all staff's primary role is to engage and interact with the ACEs, so emails and phone calls will be returned as the day allows (unless it is an urgent matter).

We ask that all staff, parents, caregivers, and ACEs approach each conversation with a spirit of positivity. While we understand that there are times we may not fully agree on a topic, we expect that our staff treats all ACEs and caregivers with respect and ask for the same in return. Harassment of staff will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to belittling, calling names, repeatedly contacting staff on their personal phone, cursing at staff, or any other inappropriate behaviors. Doing so may result in termination of services for your ACE.

Social Media

We post regularly on Facebook and would love it if you "liked" our page! Just search for Special Abilities of North Texas on Facebook and click the like button. We post pictures (see photo release in your paperwork), updates, events, and share things pertaining to the I/DD community. This will also be a means of sharing announcements in the event of inclement weather or other organizational notifications.