

The solo nature of gymnastics can be beneficial to autistic children

Children at a young age learn to crawl, walk, climb, tip-toe, run and jump.

While they all do these at different stages, most accomplish it by the age of five. For children who struggle in one or more of these areas, gymnastics can be a huge stepping stone to reaching these milestones.

For my oldest son, he hit all of these milestones earlier than most, but it was language and social skills that he struggled with in his younger years. Gymnastics was a part of his life from early on, due to my job as a gymnastics coach, and his gym class was always a favourite part of our week. We didn't receive his diagnosis on the spectrum until he was in elementary school, but gymnastics at a young age definitely assisted in development of his gross motor skills.

Most children enjoy playing actively, and gymnastics can be especially enjoyable for children with developmental delays or other special needs.

The social nature of gymnastics classes helps children to form bonds with other children, yet the exercises themselves are individual so children are less likely to feel the need to impress their peers than they may in

team sports.

Studies have shown the benefits of gymnastics for some autistic children, allowing them to get necessary activity and exercise while maintaining a sense of control over excessive stimulation. Autistic children have difficulty when they are exposed to too much stimuli, but the solo nature of many gymnastics events allows the children to keep their environmental stimuli to a manageable level. With sensitive coaching and parental support, children with autism and other special needs can gain confidence while getting fit and having fun.

My son has gone on to enjoy other sports and programs, all of which benefit from his early start in gymnastics, but he still loves to jump on the trampoline.

There are a few gymnastics programs in the area that offer programming for children with special needs. I would recommend that you do your research to find the program, facility and coach that suit your child's needs.

—Article by Jenn Unsworth,
co-owner of Cartwheels
Gym Centre, with Patricia Murphy



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