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# AUTISM NEWS NETWORK

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## The month of December

### National Handwashing Awareness

Personal hygiene begins and ends with our hands. And though we're taught as youngsters to wash our hands before dinner, it's important to remember that germs don't care what time of day it is. Clean hands prevent sickness. So it's especially important to learn the basics about hand hygiene so that you, too, can become a champion hand washer! Let's examine some handy tips and info in honor of National Handwashing Awareness Week, which takes place each year during the first week of December, but is also very important not just for this time but in every day life.

Experts recommend washing your hands with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to get a good lather going and clean the back of the hands, between the fingers and under the nails. Dry them using a clean towel. There is a lot of science behind these recommendations, so be sure to follow them each time you wash your hands.

Healthy hands are happy hands  
and happy hands make for happy and healthy homes.

It helps prevent the spread of germs

Think of how many different things we touch during the course of an average day. Now imagine how many of those things were touched by other people's hands. Yuck! Wash your hands to prevent the spread of dangerous microbes.

Let's shake on it

Finally, we love National Handwashing Awareness Week because it reminds everybody else — especially doctors and those who prepare the food we eat — to take cleanliness and hygiene seriously.



# **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

December 3 is a day to help everyone become more compassionate and understanding of the challenges faced by people with disabilities. The day doesn't discriminate between mental and physical disabilities, and the spirit of the day is to ensure that all people in the world have equal opportunities for work, play, health, and success. People with disabilities can be and very often are contributing and valued members of society, and today is all about appreciating them.

## **How to observe international day of persons with disabilities**

Become an advocate for people with disabilities.

Look around your community and the places you visit. If accommodations for people with disabilities are not in place, ask the shop owner, mall manager and/or your elected officials to install them. It's the law.

## **Lend a helping hand**

Inquire at your local senior center or residence, or of the nurses at an outpatient clinic, if they know of someone who needs assistance. Offer to help. Sometimes just delivering a medication, dropping off the mail, or picking up a few things at the grocery —simple tasks for you—would make the world of difference to someone with a disability.

## Show some compassion

When you're tired, harried and in a rush, you know you can sometimes be irritable. Don't snap at someone who's slowing you down, or take your frustrations out on them. They could be a person with a disability. If so, their lives are always like that, while your problems are probably fleeting. Likewise, don't let any bad humor they exhibit ruin your day. This is when a smile can smooth everything over.

## Why this day is so important

### 1. It builds awareness of people with disabilities

People with disabilities sometimes feel invisible in our society. People around them in their daily routines, barely noticing them. Today, try to make eye contact and smile and be available to help should they seem to be having difficulties.

### 2. We better understand the difficulties people with disabilities have.

The treasured parking space right in front of the pharmacy, the sloped curbs at intersections with the textured mats in place so the vision impaired folks can feel the curb end, the buttons to open doors automatically, even elevators on the Subway — are all in place to make a difficult life a little easier for a person with disabilities. Notice these accommodations today, and then notice how few of them there are.

## It's more than a day —it's the law

The Americans with Disabilities Act was created to define the rights of people with disabilities and the design standards which businesses and municipalities must incorporate to comply with the law. Called the ADA, it is quite explicit in the standards required, and a familiarity with it could be most helpful to anyone in.



## Walt Disney Day

Walt Disney Day falls on the first Monday of December each year, on December 6 this year, and it's an occasion that no one can or should ignore. We all grew up watching cartoons and movies by Disney, and they are an essential part of our childhood. Also, the theme parks such as Walt Disney World and Disneyland are a rage worldwide! Hundreds of lucky people have been there and have hundreds of memories linked to the magical lands. Feeling nostalgic already? If yes, now is the perfect time to relive the fun days once again by celebrating Walt Disney Day.

### History of Walt Disney Day

The famous Walt Disney (Walter Elias Disney) was born on December 5, 1901 in Chicago. However, the talented Disney we know did not emerge until 1919, when he began his career as an illustrator. In 1928, Disney created Mickey Mouse, a character he sketched while on a bus. Can you imagine one of the most famous characters in the world being created like that? Today, the cartoon character is the centerpiece of the entire Disney brand.

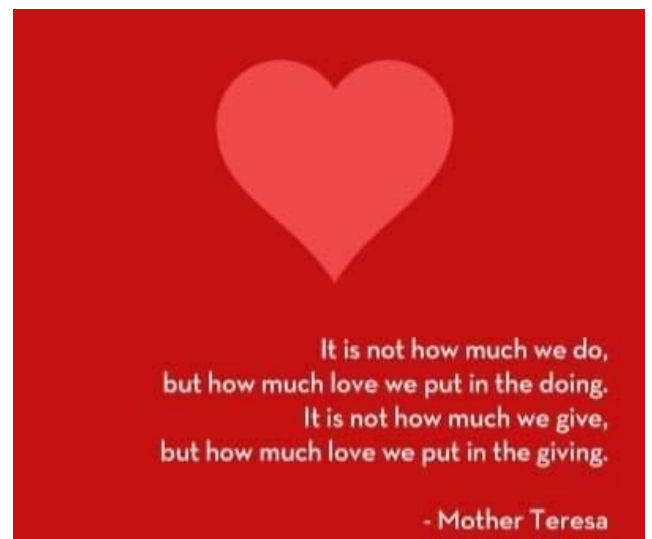
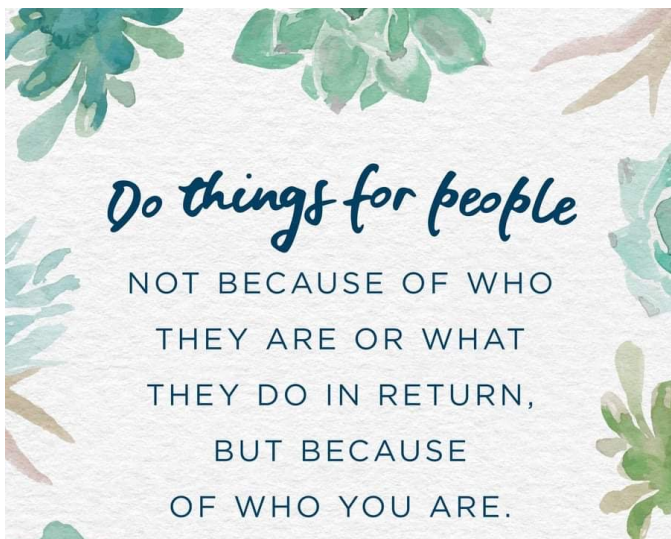
However, things weren't always so easy for Disney. In 1923, his first business venture called Laugh-O-Gram Studios went bankrupt. At the time, he had only \$20 to start over, so Disney decided to head to Hollywood, where he created a few cartoon characters with his brother. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to attain legal copyright for them. Then Mickey Mouse and other memorable characters such as Minnie Mouse, Pluto, Goofy, and Donald Duck arrived. From thereon, there was no turning back.

After a few years, Disney began developing feature-length cartoons as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo, Bambi, Cinderella, and Mary Poppins. Disney made these animated creations during the 1940s to 1960s. Due to the success of these cartoons, it was not a surprise when Disney won 22 Oscars for his role as an American animator, film producer, and voice actor. But as we know, Disney didn't stop there. He also opened theme parks in 1955. The Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, was under construction when Disney passed away. In 2018, the theme parks had already hosted over 157,3 million guests from across the world.



## Month of Giving

December is the Month of Giving and it revolves around people making a difference in society by helping others. Do you have some extra clothes or food you want to give away? Use this month to ensure your hand-me-downs reach those in need! In Christian tradition, it is the time that marks the birth of Jesus Christ and revolves around the concept of giving and spreading joy. The concept of giving gifts was formed around the 15th century as Christmas was seen as a holiday that focused on friends and family. Over the years, the month of Christmas has become a universal time for giving and also serves as a reminder of the history of Christmas.





## Operation Santa Paws

Operation Santa Paws is held from December 1 to 24 every year, and we are excited to extend love and care to our furry friends and pets in shelters and rescue centers in every way we can. Animals have been kept as pets since time immemorial. Dogs especially are man's oldest and best friend and, over the years, have proven their love and loyalty to humanity. Operation Santa Paws is the perfect time to show our love for them in return. Pets are an important, integral part of our lives. They are our friends, family, guards, and go-to whenever we feel down and need some loving. Pets, whether they're dogs, cats, rabbits, or birds, have all been with us through the good, bad, and ugly times, leaving imprints on the pages of our hearts. It is therefore devastating to note that millions of these beautiful creatures are abused, maltreated, and subsequently abandoned in shelters and rescue houses every year, with limited resources and supplies available for their care. And so Operation Santa Paws was born.



## **Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree** **Lighting**

Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, falling on December 1 this year, is an annual fanfare that follows the lighting up of a Christmas tree placed at the Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan, New York City, in mid-November and lit during a public ceremony on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving. Fun fact: The tree lighting ceremony is broadcast each year on N.B.C. and is usually lit by the Mayor of New York City.

## **Christmas Eve**

Christmas Eve takes place on December 24 and is probably one of the best nights of the year! Christmas has the power to reunite families and friends, warm up our hearts, and remind us that we have so many things to be thankful for. So put on your cozy PJs, light up your fireplace, call your loved ones, and top off your hot cocoa with some fluffy marshmallows! Christmas Eve remains an important part of Christian culture and signifies the birth of Jesus. It has become even more popular within the last century thanks to a beloved icon: Santa Claus. The idea of the jolly man in red gave rise to more traditions such as hanging stockings and leaving out cookies, milk, and sometimes carrots for his reindeer. Apart from Santa Claus and Christianity, Christmas Eve took on another significance — it also became a day made for spending time with family and loved ones over dinner, decorating, gift wrapping, and Christmas-themed movies.

The holiday unites families and friends, allowing them to get together and enjoy special and traditional activities.

## Christmas Day

Every year on December 25, we celebrate Christmas, a day for spending time with family, observing an important Christian holiday, partaking in lighthearted traditions, or just spreading some holiday cheer! Christmas has evolved over several millennia into a worldwide celebration that's both religious and secular and chock full of fun-filled, family activities. The Magic of Christmas never ends and it's greatest gifts are family and friends. It's not what's under the tree that matters, it's who's gathered around it that matters the most. The holidays are the perfect excuse to spread cheer to those around you and, in doing so, help you enjoy the holiday more, too. Whistle along to your favorite Christmas tune, smile at others, and wish everyone a Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays. Your joyful holiday spirit will be contagious. Traditionally, Christians claim Christmas as the day on which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born. And although many of our Christmas Day rituals and traditions evolved from that singular moment, that's not the whole story. Although there are myths and truths about Christmas, let's unpack what we do know.

The fact is that no one knows the exact time and place of Jesus' birth. In the Bible's New Testament, apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John share similar stories but they never actually name the date of Jesus' birth.

As Christmas is rapidly approaching, we hope that you will take time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. He came to this earth to die willing for our sins on the cross. That is right! He loved us that much! So amid the presents, cookie decorating, and Christmas parties remember that Jesus is the reason for the season! It is a time of God showing His great love for us. It can be a time of healing and renewed strength. Sure, enjoy the season but remember to rejoice as well! After all, the true meaning of Christmas is the celebration of God's ultimate gift: the birth of Jesus, the Christ child. Christmas is defined in the joy of giving to others, as God has given us his Son. We celebrate Christmas for what it is: the birth of Christ, the greatest gift of love that has been or will ever be given. My hope for you this Christmas season is that you will personally experience God's gifts of peace, joy, and love.

### **Merry Christmas from the Autism News Network!**

