Engaging youth with special needs, especially those on the autism spectrum, can be a very challenging task. However, it depends on the child's specific condition and severity.

Make sure to contact a Mentoring Specialist, 412-281-1288, about any special needs mentee. Below is a list of activity ideas or activity modifications to engage children with special needs:

For example: Kids do respond better to an individual who shows them kindness and affection.

For youth with ADD/ADHD you can:

- **Reduce the length of the activity** – Keep activities short, so they don’t lose interest.
- **Provide physical movements** – Don’t always have kids sitting down doing work, have them get up and become active. Or, if one is becoming anxious give them a stress ball or something soft to play with while they work.
- **Build a good rapport** – Kids respond better to emotional connections than contingent consequences.
- **Behaviors** – Ignore as many negative behaviors as possible and give your attention to the good/positive behaviors.
- **Distractions** – Try to eliminate outside noises and visual aids that might distract them from completing their activity.
- **Keep unstructured time to a minimum.**

For youth with autism and/or a learning disability you can:

- **Be Visual** – Kids tend to lean towards visual learning. For example, if they want to eat, they might point towards their mouth or hold up a picture of food, etc.
- **Be consistent** – Kids like routines and schedules, prepare your day out with activites for them to do.
- **Positive Interactions** – If a kid completes a task, reinforce them through a high-five or thumbs up.
- **Carry out the activity** – Be firm in having the kids perform the activity until completion.
- **Rewards** – Give kids rewards for completing a task or activity, like snacks or their favorite object.
- **Arts and Crafts, etc.** – Fingerpainting, puzzles, board games, cutting out objects are a great way to help improve their motor skills.
- **Musical Engagement** – Kids respond better to music. This can be their form of communication and help improve their speech.