

Supporting an Autistic Child: A Support Snippet for Parents

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition, not an illness. Autism can affect how a child communicates with and relates to other people, as well as how they experience the world around them.

An Autistic child may experience difficulties initiating and sustaining reciprocal social interaction and social communication, as well as a range of restricted, repetitive and inflexible patterns of behaviour and interests.



Signs of Autism

Autistic children may share some characteristics, and they might have strengths and weaknesses in different areas.

An Autistic child may:

- have difficulty understanding how others think and feel
- have difficulty making friends and socialising
- have difficulty expressing their own feelings
- have a need for rituals or repetitive behaviours
- experience anxiety over changes to routines
- frequently repeat words and phrases
- have anxiety over unfamiliar situations or social events
- stim (self-stimulatory behaviours such as repetition of words and sounds, rocking, spinning, jumping, hand movements, rubbing skin and chewing)
- have difficulty listening, concentrating and understanding
- have delayed or absent speech
- not respond to their name
- avoid direct eye contact
- become dysregulated or anxious at disliked tastes, smells, sounds, textures or sights
- not understand jokes
- have a very keen interest in a certain subject or activity
- have a very literal understanding of language
- find it hard to relate to children their own age and therefore prefer interacting with adults or younger children.

It's important to remember that every child is different and may display some of these behaviours but not be diagnosed as Autistic, just as an Autistic child might not display these behaviours. It all depends on the individual.

- **Work with your child's school:** Communicate regularly with teachers and school staff to create a consistent approach.
- **Regulation:** Identify potential triggers for dysregulated behaviours and develop regulation techniques to support your child.
- **Build routines:** Set up predictable daily routines. This structure and stability can really help reduce anxiety around the unknown.
- **Allow processing time:** Some Autistic children may need more time to process something, for example, an instruction. You might ask your child to do something and it might seem like they are ignoring you, but actually they are processing.
- **Use visual supports:** Visual timetables, now and next boards and symbols can help support your child's communication and understanding, allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings.
- **Give clear instructions:** Use simple, direct words. Try to use 'one voice' when giving instructions; multiple people talking at the same time can be confusing and overwhelming.
- **Celebrate every success:** It's easy to concentrate on negative traits when you have an Autistic child. Try to celebrate those small things that other parents might take for granted. This supports you and your child.
- **Identify triggers:** There will be things that dysregulate or upset your child; if you can identify them, you can help support them. It's not about avoiding the triggers; it's about providing your child with the support and tools to regulate during these situations. You could have a grab bag of favourite items to support regulation, such as ear defenders or fidget toys.
- **Have boundaries:** Make sure you set consistent boundaries for your child so that they understand what is acceptable and what is not. Your child will likely thrive on having boundaries in place; otherwise, they may feel out of control and overwhelmed.
- **Forget about 'normal':** Sometimes, we want things to be a certain way. Maybe you want that perfect Christmas family photo, or you want your child to dress up for Halloween like everyone else. But, remember your child doesn't know the pressures of social media and the expectations that come with holidays or occasions. Your child doesn't have to eat a roast dinner at Christmas just because everyone else does. It's OK for them to eat their usual meal; 'normal' isn't a set standard. It changes for everyone. What might be the norm for one family will seem odd to another, but both are perfect for them, so does it matter if your Christmas doesn't look like your neighbours?
- **Respect your child:** There might be things that dysregulate or upset your child; these things might seem insignificant to you. You might even think of them as 'silly'. They're not. They are extremely important to your child and they can't just 'get over' them. Autistic children require respect for their needs and wishes and an understanding that their brain works in a different way. You're not there to judge their actions and reactions to things; you're there to support them.

For more information about Autism, download [this guide](#).



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