

Top tips for parents of children with autism

Create a predictable routine

Structure is key to supporting children with autism. Create a consistent daily routine to help them understand what happens next. Predictability reduces anxiety and helps children feel more in control. Some children like to do things in the same way every day this helps them feel safe.

Use visual supports

Children with autism often process visual information more easily than they do speech. Use visual cues, such as picture or objects, to help them understand what you are saying or for them to communicate choices so for example they can be shown a rubber duck before going to have a bath or they can be shown two types of fruit to choose which they want.

Focus on sensory preferences

Children with autism may experience their senses differently than other children. They may be over or under sensitive to information arriving via their senses i.e. smells noises etc. Offer a variety of different sensory activities and understand they are not being difficult. The sensory differences are real. Try soft lighting, quiet spaces, or tactile toys, ear defenders cutting out labels from clothes and lots of other accommodations.

Support communication development

Children with autism face communication challenges. Encourage non-verbal communication methods like signing (e.g., Makaton), communication boards or gestures to help them express needs. Allow your child lots of time to process communication. Show them rather than tell them what you want them to do.

Use special interests to motivate learning

Autistic children often have intense interests. Use these special interests to engage them in learning activities. For example, if a child loves cars, use cars for counting games or sensory play. Use their favourite activities as rewards for doing things they are less keen to do.

Allow time for processing

Children with autism may need more time to understand and respond to instructions. Give them extra time to respond to requests or questions and avoid repeating instructions too quickly.

Promote social interaction through play

Encourage simple social play, like turn-taking games or parallel play (playing alongside another child). Use toys or activities your child enjoys encouraging them to join in.

Work on emotional regulation

Children with autism may struggle to manage their emotions. Teach them calming strategies, like deep breathing or using a favourite sensory item when they feel overwhelmed. They may need support to learn to name and recognise emotions in themselves and others.