



The Autism Therapy Group

Practical Tips for Parenting Your Child with Autism

A Guide for Parents

CONTENTS

02

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself as a Parent of a Child With Autism

05

Tips for Helping Your Child With Autism Thrive

10

Above All Else, Love Yourself and Your Child the Best You Can



Parenting your Child with Autism

Receiving an autism diagnosis for your child is often an overwhelming, emotional, and life-changing experience. Questions about your child's future and pre-conceived ideas about what it's like to parent a child with autism flood your mind. You wonder how in the world you will ever be able to provide the care, support, and guidance your child needs to live a happy and fulfilling life.

It's a lot to process.

But first things first: **an autism diagnosis doesn't change who your child is**. The only thing an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis changes is what to do next on your parenting journey.

One of the most crucial things to keep in mind is that you and your child are in this together. You not only need to look out for their needs and support them along the way, but you also need to do the same for yourself. Frequently, parents of children with autism neglect their own self-care needs because they're focusing on helping their son or daughter with ASD.

But, as the familiar saying goes, "You can't pour from an empty cup." Or, yet another saying fitting for all parents, "You need to place your own oxygen mask on before assisting others." In other words, if you don't take care of yourself, you're not going to be able to take care of your child to the best of your abilities.

To help you on your parenting journey, we've compiled a helpful list of tips so you can better take care of yourself and your child with autism.

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself as a Parent of a Child With Autism

Parenting, in general, can be challenging and stressful, and sometimes even more so when you have a child with autism. Kids on the autism spectrum tend to be more sensitive to their parents' stress and anxiety, intensifying problematic behaviors. If you're burning the candle on both ends tending to your child's needs without paying attention to your own, you're going to burn out, lose patience easily, and fuel the fire of challenging behaviors.



1. Be Kind to Yourself

To make sure you don't get bogged down by your daily struggles, you need to practice self-compassion. Remind yourself that you're human. You get upset, lose your temper, run low on patience, and make mistakes. We all do as parents, whether we have a child with ASD or not.

Parenting is a learning process for every mother and father on the planet. No manual comes along with the birth of your children. And what makes parenting even more difficult is that you can't parent all children the same way. That goes for neurotypical and ASD children.

So be kind to yourself. You're doing the best you can.

2. Assemble Your Support Group

We realize this one can be a little challenging, depending on your personality and situation. But trying to navigate parenting a child with autism on your own will wear you down. You need a support network.

Reach out to trusted friends and family members willing to walk with you through your journey in parenting a child with ASD. Having a couple of solid people in your corner, ready to listen and provide support when you need it is priceless.

But even if you are an introvert, don't like asking for help, are a single parent, or don't have many friends or family members willing to support you, **there is help out there**. There are online and in-person support groups for parents of children with autism worldwide.

Some top resources for finding support near you include:

- [The Autism Society](#)
- [Autism Speaks](#)
- [MyAutismTeam](#)

3. Prioritize Time for Yourself

It can be challenging to pull yourself away from the daily routine of taking care of your child with autism. And because children with ASD thrive on predictable schedules, changing things up from time to time can be even more challenging.

But taking time for yourself is critical.

How much time depends on several factors, including your support system and your child's level of care needed. But even if you can't simply get a babysitter, you can try to work in small increments of time for yourself every day.

See if you can meet a friend for a cup of coffee (without your son or daughter), watch an episode of your favorite show by yourself, go for a stroll around the neighborhood, treat yourself to a face mask, or even just go to bed a little early.



4. Give Yourself Permission to Feel

You don't have to be over-the-moon ecstatic about parenting a child with autism and the struggles that come with it. It's okay to mourn the idealized life you had for them and yourself.

If you feel like you want to cry, you can cry. Don't hold an unrealistic expectation for yourself to be Mary Sunshine all the time. You're allowed to be sad, angry, or frustrated, as long as you don't discuss these feelings with or in front of your child.

Consider journaling your emotions or contacting one of the trusted members of your support network to express your concerns, hopes, frustrations, and struggles (out of earshot of your child, of course).



5. Don't Try and Hold on to Unsupportive Friends

Okay, we know this is a little hard to hear, but the sooner you prepare yourself for a tightening of your friend circle, the better. The fact is, most parents of neurotypical children don't have first-hand experience parenting children with autism. So when you need a shoulder to cry on, advice, or support, you might just find you have fewer shoulders around you.

But don't take it personally.

Instead, think of it as a friend-refining. Those friends who slowly fade out of your life because they don't know what to say or don't want to talk about your struggles aren't the kind of friends you need in your corner anyway. Cling to the people who offer to help and listen.

And don't worry, there is a good chance you'll start running with a new crowd – a crowd that understands your struggles and triumphs.

Tips for Helping Your Child With Autism Thrive

If you haven't realized already, there is a seemingly endless supply of information out there on the internet offering information about autism. Much of this information is extremely helpful, and if you get it from a reputable source like Autism Speaks or the Autism Society, that information is reliable.

However, the downside of this is the inevitable onset of information overload. You may already feel overwhelmed and confused by a recent autism diagnosis for your child, so sifting through the sea of online information, opinions, and blog posts from parents may send you over the edge.

So we put together a little list of practical ways to help parent your child with autism. And when you're ready to dive in to more information, the good old world wide web is waiting for you!

1. Accept Your Child for the Wonderfully Unique Individual They Are

While your child receiving an autism diagnosis may not be what you thought your parenting journey would look like, it's critical you accept your child for who they are. Just because they are on the autism spectrum doesn't make them any less of a gift to you and your family.

Not only should you accept your child and their diagnosis, but you should also work on accepting yourself as a parent to a child with autism. Do your best to reduce judgment toward your child and yourself. Instead, learn to practice acceptance and compassion for this parenting journey you are on with your son or daughter.



2. Celebrate Your Child's Strengths and Talents

It's easy to fall into the habit of focusing on your child's weaknesses or areas of improvement that may cause you stress. Instead, think about your child's strengths and talents and work on reinforcing those.

Focus on your child's highest-functioning areas. Perhaps your child loved numbers, puzzles, or music. Whatever your child loves to focus on, work on building that skill or talent. For example, if your child loves putting puzzles together over and over again, use that in your daily routine. Praise them for how great they are at it and use that skill in repetitive play as you work on communication and social skills.

Many famous people out there who you may not even know are on the spectrum, including well-known musicians, directors, and scientists. You never know, maybe they got to where they are because their parents saw their strength and talent and helped them explore it!



3. Change How You View Meltdowns and Acting Out

One of the biggest challenges many parents of children with autism have is dealing with meltdowns, tantrums, and acting out behaviors, especially in public. Of course, it can be embarrassing, overwhelming, and exhausting. There's nothing wrong with you feeling any of those emotions.

But the vital thing to remember about autism meltdowns is that they aren't acting out for the same reasons neurotypical children are. They aren't screaming and rolling around on the floor to make you angry and give in to their demands. Children with autism act out in public to communicate to you their discomfort.



Because children with ASD tend to be overly sensitive to external stimuli such as sounds, lights, and the number of people, public events and situations can easily cause sensory overload. And unlike neurotypical children, children with autism may struggle with communicating their discomfort to you, which is why they scream, hit, or run away.

Learning what your child can handle is something the two of you can work on together. Just keep in mind that they aren't trying to frustrate you when they act out in public. They're just trying to tell you, someone they love and trust, that they don't feel comfortable.

4. Practice a Whole Lot of Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is a great way to help any child feel confident and loved. But when it comes to children with autism, positive reinforcement may even go a little further.

Whether you're parenting a neurotypical child or a child with ASD, falling into the trap of constantly monitoring and correcting unwanted behaviors is all too easy to do. It's also easy to overlook the times when children display positive behaviors. Let's face it, every time your child displays negative behaviors, they get corrected. But how often do you really praise your child for every little accomplishment?

It may seem like you're going overboard at first, but praising your child with autism for positive actions, no matter how big or small, can build your son or daughter's confidence level and help them practice more positive behaviors regularly. So if your son or daughter brushes their teeth without putting up a fight, eats all the nuggets on their plate, or simply gets into the car to go somewhere with you willingly, make sure you tell them how awesome they are for being so well-behaved.



5. Don't Be Afraid to Use Autism Resources

Support for children with ASD and their families has come a long way. From the amount of information at your fingertips to autism therapy centers like The Autism Therapy Group to online autism support communities to ASD advocacy groups.

Parently a child with autism can be challenging and can often change a family's dynamic. **But realize that you are not alone.** Millions of other families just like yours have dealt with similar challenges, and thanks to modern technology, you can find support almost anywhere.

Consider getting involved with some of the ASD nonprofits so you can connect with other parents of children with autism and learn more about advances being made in understanding ASD.

Some well known and respected ASD nonprofits include:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder Foundation
- The Autism Community in Action (TACA)
- Organization for Autism Research (OAR)
- 4 Paws for Ability
- Autism Science Foundation (ASF)
- The Autism Society



6. Get Familiar with Living a Life Full of Routines and Schedules

Children with autism learn and thrive most effectively on a routine. This goes for the home, public, and learning environments. ASD children also do well with visual aids referring to the routine or schedule, which is why it's a great idea to have visual routine schedules throughout your house, on a clipboard in the car, and when they are at school.

Simply draw or print out some pictures referring to a scheduled activity such as a toothbrush for when it's time to brush teeth, a school for when it's time to go to school, a plate of food for dinner time, and so on. You don't even need to include specific times, just an order of activities and events, so your child knows what to expect.

For example, you could make a schedule for your son or daughter about attending a new library to reduce their anxiety about going to a new place. It could include pictures of a car, various familiar landmarks that are on the way, the library, some books, a symbol of someone putting their finger to their lips communicating behavior expectations, the car to go home, the same landmarks in reverse, ending with your home.



7. Don't Forget to Have Some Fun!

Spending your days and nights caring for your child with autism, ensuring they get the support and help they need to thrive, can become a chore if you're not too careful.

That's why it's critical to make plenty of time for FUN! After all, your ASD child is still a child, right? Of course, the best thing to do is put playtime on your child's schedule. Not only will it help your child understand what to expect, but it'll ensure you incorporate some fun in your daily lives.

Keep in mind, while the playtime may be placed on the schedule, it shouldn't feel like work. Make sure the time you spend playing with your son or daughter is relaxing and enjoyable!

8. Enroll Your Child in ABA Therapy

In your research to discover how to best parent your child with autism, it's likely you'll come across information relating to Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA). This type of therapy was developed specifically to help children with autism make meaningful and positive behavior changes regarding:

- Communication skills
- Play skills
- Social skills
- Academics
- Self-care
- Work
- Community living



ABA therapy is one of the most studied and proven effective ways to help your child thrive at home, in school, and in life. This evidence-based treatment empowers children with autism to overcome challenges they may face and reduce unwanted negative behaviors that could interfere with living a fulfilling life.

At The Autism Therapy Group in Lombard, IL, we offer both in-home and center-based ABA therapy as young as three years old. While early intervention is one of the best things you can do for your child to help them learn and grow, it's never too late to start your child on the path to success.

When you enroll your child in our ABA services, your child will receive a treatment plan that is individualized to fit their needs. Not only that, but we'll equip you with the tools and techniques you need to continue what they learn with us while at home.

Above All Else, Love Yourself and Your Child the Best You Can

Whatever tips you use from this guide, whether you try to use all of them or just one, remember that your journey as a parent of a child with autism is your own. While you may face similar struggles as other parents with children on the spectrum, you and your child are unique. The most important thing to do is show your child, and yourself love, patience, acceptance, and compassion.

Don't put too much pressure on yourself to know all the correct answers, and allow yourself the grace to make mistakes.

Don't be afraid to reach out for help, and don't be ashamed to take some time for yourself.

And if you need some help and support with nowhere to turn, contact the Autism Society's helpline at 1-800-328-8476.

To learn more about our ABA services and how we can help both you and your son or daughter grow and thrive together, contact our customer care specialists to schedule a consultation or find out more.

Contact The Autism Therapy Group!

Call Us: (847) 465-9556

Email Us: info@atgtogether.com