

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Tips from One Parent to Another



Understanding your child's needs is such an important part of parenting. Knowing this, can help us provide the tools, accommodations, and support that can help our autistic loved ones thrive.

Here are some ideas for how you can support your child:

Communicate. We all communicate in many different ways. For example, speaking, gesturing, emailing, texting, phone calls, written letters, eye contact, or facial expressions. While some autistic people have difficulty with verbal speech, many are very communicative through their body language and gestures. Honoring all forms of communication will help to build trust and support, which will decrease anxiety they may experience around communication. If your child does have difficulty with verbal speech, seek out other options that will help them find their own voice. Communication is much more than requesting, it's also about connecting and sharing ideas.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is an umbrella term that encompasses the communication methods used to supplement or replace speech or writing for those with impairments in the production or comprehension of spoken or written language. AAC can be the bridge your child needs until they are able to speak and converse, or it can be their voice for the rest of their lives.

Your child probably understands much more than it may appear. If it seems your child is overwhelmed, try to decrease the number of words you are using. It can also help to pair verbal speech with visuals, which is another advantage of AAC. All children need to be supported and informed regarding where they are going, who they are seeing etc. This too, will help them to feel more calm and secure.

Use Visuals. As you will see from this handy visual, visuals provide many benefits! Think of all of the ways visuals help YOU! (Grocery lists, street signs, recipes, etc.) Visuals can make a world of a difference.

- **Visual Schedules** – Uses images to explain steps needed for a task, when activities will occur, and in what sequence.
- **Pictorial Narratives** – Descriptive stories to help children understand social situations, expectations, social cues, new activities, and/or social rules.

Engage in Joint Attention. Joint attention is the shared focus of two individuals on something. It can be a struggle for children with autism to attend to a task at the same time as another person. To get and maintain attention use high energy, cause and effect toys, to get your child's attention. Bubbles, pop up toys, goofy hats or comic glasses are great ways to get and hold joint attention.

Teach "First, Then." This concept uses a visual display of a less preferred activity that your child needs to do in order to do a more or highly preferred activity. Teaching this concept can also help with transitions. Initially this can be taught using visual images paired with the verbal prompt of "first", "then". When teaching this concept, a picture of the activity or task that needs to be completed is placed under the "first" side of the board and a picture of something fun and motivating is placed on the "then" side of the board. An example is "first" bathtub, "then" music.

