



Tips for helping autistic children

Supporting autistic children requires understanding and empathy. Here we are going to look at some tips to help you provide effective support and assistance:

Educate yourself: Learn about autism and the specific needs and challenges that autistic children may face. Familiarise yourself with different communication styles and sensory sensitivities.

Establish a routine: Create a structured and predictable environment, as many autistic children thrive on routine. Stick to consistent schedules for daily activities, such as mealtimes, playtime, and bedtime.

Communicate clearly: Use clear and concise language when speaking to autistic children. Avoid abstract or figurative language, and be explicit about your expectations and instructions. Visual aids, such as pictures or written instructions, can also be helpful.

Respect sensory sensitivities: Understand that autistic children may have sensory sensitivities and may be overwhelmed by certain sounds, lights, textures, or smells. Minimise sensory triggers and provide a calm and quiet space when needed. Pay attention to the child's cues and respect their need for breaks or quiet time

Encourage their interests: Many autistic children have specific interests or passions. Encourage and support their interests, as they can be a source of motivation and engagement. These interests can also serve as a tool for building social connections with peers who share similar interests.

Establish a routine: Create a structured and predictable environment, as many autistic children thrive on routine. Stick to consistent schedules for daily activities, such as mealtimes, playtime, and bedtime.

Use visual supports: Visual supports, such as visual schedules, social stories, or visual cues, can help autistic children understand and navigate their daily routines and social situations. Visual supports provide a concrete and visual representation of expectations and can aid in reducing anxiety and improving comprehension.

Practise patience and understanding: Autistic children may have difficulties with social interactions, communication, and emotional regulation. Be patient and understanding, and provide them with the time and space they need to process information and express themselves. Avoid rushing or pressuring them into situations that may cause distress.

Create a supportive environment: Encourage acceptance and inclusion among peers, family members, and educators. Educate others about autism and help create an environment that embraces diversity and understands and accommodates the needs of autistic individuals.



Collaborate with professionals: Seek support from professionals who specialise in working with autistic children, such as paediatricians, therapists, or educators. They can provide valuable guidance, strategies, and resources tailored to the child's specific needs.

Celebrate strengths and progress: Focus on the strengths and abilities of autistic children rather than solely on their challenges. Celebrate their achievements, no matter how small, and provide positive reinforcement to encourage their progress and self-esteem.

Encourage social interactions: Help autistic children develop social skills by providing opportunities for social interactions. This can include structured activities with peers, such as playdates or joining social skills groups. Support them in understanding and practising social cues and appropriate social behaviours.



Support communication development: Many autistic children may struggle with verbal communication or have difficulty expressing their needs and emotions. Explore alternative communication methods like sign language, picture exchange communication systems (PECS), or assistive communication devices. Speech therapy and other communication interventions can also be beneficial.

Break tasks into smaller steps: Complex tasks or instructions can be overwhelming for autistic children. Break tasks down into smaller, more manageable steps. Provide clear instructions for each step and offer assistance and encouragement as needed. This approach can help them feel more confident and capable of completing tasks independently.

Teach self-regulation strategies: Help autistic children develop self-regulation skills to manage their emotions and cope with sensory overload. This may involve teaching deep breathing techniques, providing sensory tools like fidget toys, or practising calming exercises like visualisation or mindfulness.

Focus on strengths-based learning: Recognise and capitalise on the strengths and interests of autistic children in their learning process. Tailor educational activities to their individual strengths and learning styles. Incorporate their interests into lessons, which can enhance engagement and motivation.

Involve the family: Collaborate closely with the child's family to gain insights into their preferences, challenges, and strategies that work well for them. Share information about the child's progress and provide resources and support to the family. A unified and consistent approach across home and school environments can greatly benefit the child.

Promote sensory-friendly environments: Make adjustments in the environment to accommodate sensory sensitivities. This may include providing noise-cancelling headphones, adjusting lighting, offering seating options, or creating sensory-friendly spaces where the child can retreat to when they need a break.

Encourage independence: Gradually encourage and support autistic children to develop independent living skills appropriate to their age and abilities. Break down self-care tasks, such as dressing or grooming, into manageable steps and provide visual prompts or checklists as needed.

Create a positive and inclusive mindset: Encourage a culture of acceptance, understanding, and inclusion among peers, teachers, and the broader community. Promote empathy and teach others about autism to build an environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

Take care of yourself: Supporting autistic children can be challenging, so it's essential to prioritise self-care. Seek support from other caregivers, engage in activities that help you relax and recharge, and educate yourself on stress management techniques. Remember, taking care of yourself enables you to provide better support to the child.



Use visual supports for transitions: Transitions between activities or environments can be challenging for autistic children. Visual supports, such as timers, schedules, or countdowns, can provide a visual representation of upcoming changes and help them prepare and transition more smoothly.

Encourage sensory exploration: Allow autistic children to explore and engage with different sensory experiences in a safe and controlled manner. Provide opportunities for sensory play, such as sand or water play, tactile materials, or sensory bins. This can help them regulate their sensory system and develop coping strategies.

Individualise accommodations and modifications: Understand and address the specific needs of each autistic child. Work with parents, caregivers, and professionals to create individual plans that outline appropriate accommodations, modifications, and goals tailored to the child's strengths and challenges.

Promote executive functioning skills: Many autistic children may struggle with executive functioning skills, such as planning, organising, and problem-solving. Break down tasks into smaller steps, provide visual aids or checklists, and offer guidance and support to help them develop these skills over time.

Encourage peer interactions: Facilitate positive social interactions between autistic children and their neurotypical peers. Encourage inclusive play and social opportunities, and provide education and awareness to peers about autism. Create an environment of acceptance and understanding.

Provide opportunities for sensory breaks: Recognise when an autistic child may be experiencing sensory overload or becoming overwhelmed, and offer opportunities for sensory breaks. These breaks can involve engaging in calming activities, using sensory tools, or retreating to a quiet space to recharge.

Advocate for the child: Be a strong advocate for the needs and rights of autistic children. Work closely with parents and professionals to ensure the child receives appropriate support, accommodations, and access to services that will help them thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Focus on a strengths-based mindset: Focus on the strengths and abilities of autistic children and provide opportunities for them to showcase their talents and interests. Celebrate their achievements and help build their self-confidence by highlighting their unique qualities and contributions.

Encourage self-advocacy: Help autistic children develop self-advocacy skills by teaching them to communicate their needs, preferences, and boundaries. Encourage them to express themselves and provide support and guidance in navigating social situations and advocating for their rights.



Embrace neurodiversity: Embrace the concept of neurodiversity and celebrate the unique perspectives and strengths that autistic individuals bring to the world. Encourage acceptance, respect, and inclusion in all aspects of life.

Provide clear expectations: Clearly communicate expectations and rules to autistic children. Use visual aids, social stories, or visual cues to help them understand what is expected of them in different situations.

Develop a sensory toolkit: Create a sensory toolkit tailored to the child's sensory needs. Include items such as noise-cancelling headphones, stress balls, weighted blankets, or fidget toys that can help them regulate their sensory system and manage sensory overload.



Encourage self-expression: Support and encourage autistic children to express themselves in their preferred mode of communication. This can include verbal communication, written expression, art, or other creative outlets. Provide a non-judgmental and accepting environment where they feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions.

Build a safe and inclusive environment: Create an environment where autistic children feel safe, accepted, and included.

Promote understanding and acceptance among peers, teachers, and other adults. Address bullying or discrimination promptly and teach everyone about autism to reduce stigma.

Use special interests as motivators: Utilise the special interests of autistic children as motivators for learning and engagement. Incorporate their interests into lessons or activities to enhance their focus and enthusiasm. Special interests can serve as a bridge for connecting with others and building social skills.



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Practice flexibility: Be flexible in your expectations and approaches. Understand that autistic children may have different ways of learning, communicating, and interacting.

Adapt your teaching strategies, accommodations, and interventions to meet their individual needs.

Teach problem-solving skills: Help autistic children develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. Break down problems into manageable parts, teach them different strategies for approaching challenges, and encourage them to think critically and independently.

Encourage self-care routines: Teach autistic children the importance of self-care and help them establish self-care routines. This can include activities such as personal hygiene, healthy eating habits, exercise, and getting enough sleep. Break down these routines into smaller steps and provide visual support if needed.

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Collaborate with the child's support network: Maintain open and regular communication with the child's parents, caregivers, and professionals involved in their care. Share information, exchange strategies, and work collaboratively to ensure consistency and continuity of support for the child.

Celebrate progress and individuality: Celebrate the progress and achievements of autistic children, no matter how small they may seem. Recognise and value their unique strengths, talents, and qualities. Encourage a growth mindset and emphasise effort, resilience, and personal growth.

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By ANC

