

Autism Parent & Carer Advice and Strategies

Always show or model to the child what you want them to do, when you ask them to do something (do not just tell them)

This will help your child to understand exactly what you want them to do, by seeing it.

Reduce your language to help your child understand

It can help to reduce language or shorten a sentence to the key words, to ensure your child hears the important information. For example, rather than saying “can you put that rubbish in the bin now” instead say “put in the bin” or just “bin”.



Get on the floor or at a table and play with your child, doing what they enjoy playing with!

If your child enjoys pushing a train along a track, do this with them! If your child enjoys spinning, join in spinning with them! If your child enjoys building, build with them! Joining in with things that your child enjoys, is a great way to get their attention because it is something they already enjoy. Model language during this time to demonstrate and teach the vocabulary in context. For example, if jumping together say “jumping, jumping”, or if playing with trains use language around trains i.e. “here comes the train! choo choo”.

Visual Support

Objects, pictures or photos can support a child’s understanding about where they are going and what they are going to do next.

For example, if you want to change their nappy and they are playing, give your child a nappy to hold, to help them understand that is where you want to take them. This will help their understanding and the transition to the bathroom.

Another example is if you are going to the park, before you go, you can show your child a photo of the park and tell them that you are going to the park. This will help their understanding of where they are going.

Consistency

Being consistent over time with routines and boundaries will help your child understand what to do and what is expected. If you say one thing one day, i.e. “no jumping on the bed” and the next day you let them jump on the bed, your child may get very confused and this can lead to frustration or distress.

Sensory Needs

A child diagnosed with autism is very likely to have sensory sensitivities and will process the sensory input around them, very differently to you. There is what's known as 'hypersensitivity', which is being very, very sensitive to sensory input, or 'hyposensitivity' which is being under sensitive or perhaps not registering specific sensory input.

The sensory input in the environment can really have an impact on a child, so be aware of their surroundings. This includes the lights, visual stimulation, noise, touch, smells and movement.

Autistic children can find it difficult to block out different sensory stimuli and therefore, find it difficult to concentrate. Removing or reducing stimulation can help. Be aware of things such as different sounds, lights, things on the walls or in the room, sounds of electrical equipment, clothing, food texture and physical touch.

Food

Introduce new foods but try not to put pressure on a child to eat if they really protest. Many autistic children have sensory sensitivities and find different textures, smells and tastes very uncomfortable and this can lead to high anxiety around food.

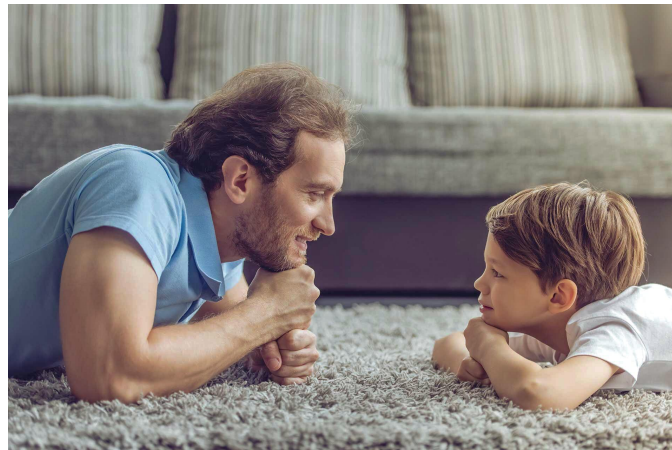
Allow children to explore food with their hands and other senses. This does not necessarily mean at the dinner table, you can do messy play activities with different food types such as cooked pasta, dry cereal or flour at non-eating times. This will give your child time to explore without any pressure of eating.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is an approach to developing early communication, interaction and relationships with children with autism and complex needs.

In Intensive Interaction, the child leads an interaction, at their level of communication. They may say words, make noises and movements with their body, which you can respond to by imitating and copying to join in with their interaction. Almost like a conversation, but at the child's level of communication. Here is some further information in this [BILD leaflet](#) and examples in a [video from Intensive Interaction founder Dave Hewett](#).

Try this with your child and see how they react. I have made very positive relationships with children at different stages of early communication by using Intensive Interaction.



Understanding Behaviour

Behaviour can communicate that something is frustrating or upsetting your child. You might be able to work out what is causing this and other times you might not.

The reason behind the behaviour could be due to:

- a sensory sensitivity or overload,
- something to do with an object or activity and they may not understand (i.e. wanting a toy that they can see or the removal of a toy without prior warning)
- for social connection
- to avoid a situation, person or thing
- a medical need such as pain
- anxiety
- trauma

When you try to understand the reason behind a behaviour, you can try to avoid this from happening, or think of a supportive strategy (i.e. if a child gets upset because they want the iPad because they have seen it, next time make sure that the iPad is out of sight until the time they can have the iPad), or give access to the wanted attention/ toy/ communication aid etc. in a controlled and structured way (i.e. if a child is trying to get your attention by jumping on you during a specific activity (i.e. when you are cooking), try to give them this attention before the activity i.e. jumping together holding hands first and then cooking. Making this a routine can help your child understand when they can and can't do something.

Regulating Emotion

If your child has become so upset or angry and is emotionally dysregulated, they will need help and time to calm down before anything else is possible.

Being calm yourself will help them calm down enormously, even if you are feeling very stressed inside. Saying as little as possible until they are calm may also help.

Over time, you may find something that helps the child to calm down that can be used at these times (e.g. singing or a specific comforter like a blanket) .

It is good to keep a note of what happened before times that the child becomes upset. This will help to identify any dislikes, patterns or triggers over time.

