

Autism: Suggestions for families

Please note: These suggestions are especially relevant for children with Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism.

Children with autism spectrum disorders have difficulty understanding social conventions. They may not recognise others' feelings or intentions. They may not understand reactions that most people would take for granted. These things affect their ability to relate well to others. It is also very common for children with autism spectrum disorders to have restricted or unusual interests. They are often concerned with small details.

How you can help

Parents and carers can help children to recognise social cues and expectations and learn appropriate responses. They can help children learn friendship skills and how to think about other people's points of view. Setting up predictable routines is important for these children. Knowing what to expect helps them deal better with change.

Teach social skills

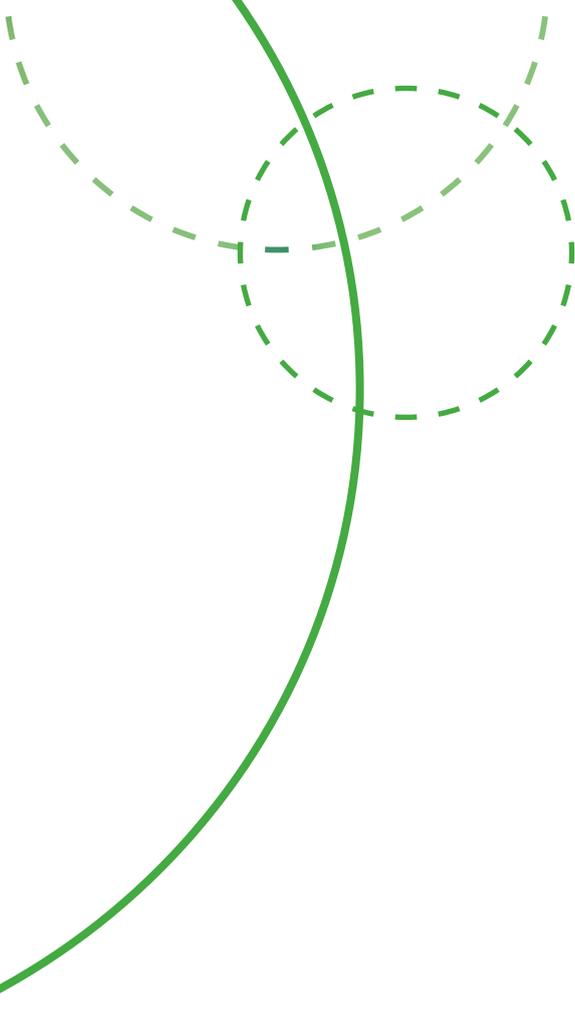
Help children to recognise how the other person is responding, for example, when they are talking too much. Teach them to ask questions of the other person as well as just talking to them. Teach children about turn taking and sharing in games. It may also be helpful to teach your child to 'lose gracefully' when playing games.

Check for meaning

Make allowances for your child's difficulties with language. Make sure that he or she has understood the meaning of what you are trying to say, especially when talking about emotions or things that do not have an obvious meaning. Be careful about using sarcasm, mottos and slang.

Teach how to recognise nonverbal cues

Help your child to pick up on people's nonverbal emotional communications by commenting on them yourself. For example, you could explain the link between observed behaviour and emotions: "Your brother is running around a lot. Maybe he is excited."



Provide social opportunities

Provide opportunities for your child to meet and play with children of the same age. Select activities that you know will be within their capabilities. For example, a specific activity such as a trip to the movies with a friend may be more successful for your child than a sleep-over where plans and expectations are not as clear. You may need to be actively involved to help your child succeed with social events.

Have regard for the child's point of view

The way children with autism spectrum disorders think about their world is different from usual expectations. Understanding the child's perspective helps with establishing appropriate and effective consequences for problem behaviours.

Teach social problem-solving

Help children learn social problem-solving skills. When things go wrong, talk with your child about what he or she was doing and feeling, what others were doing and feeling and what he or she could do next time to get a different result.

Use positive discipline

Try to use positive feedback and praise for appropriate behaviour. Positive discipline works better than punishment for helping children to change their behaviour.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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