



Autism Family Toolbox

Welcome to the Autism Family Toolbox

Autism Family Toolbox has been created for parents and family members who wish to deal with some of the behavioral challenges of raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) between the ages of 2 and 12. While it is our hope that you will find the strategies helpful, they are not meant as a replacement to seeing a qualified mental health professional.

Some things to consider when confronted with challenging behaviors:

The reasons for challenging behavior in the child with ASD are wide ranging and frequently complex. It is also important to remember that the task is not always trying to eliminate challenging behavior but to redirect it into a more positive direction. For example, a child's fixation with vintage airplanes can be used to share his interests with another child who has similar interests and learn to share, develop conversational skills, and improve his reading.

They may include transitions in the child's life such as a change in teachers at school or a change in routine at home.

The problem could be social skills based. They may not know how to enter a play situation without being disruptive or may totally withdraw from doing so.

They also may have difficulty expressing feelings and act them out instead. Children with ASD typically can't verbalize feelings. Younger children may have difficulty putting into words what they want or need. They may need to have you verbalize for them or you may need to have a system based on the use of pictures.

Some problems are more likely to occur at certain times of the day. Usually behavior is the most difficult in the late afternoon, when children are tired and hungry.

A child's disruptive behavior could also be the result of boredom which could point to the need to have activities for them to do at times when they are likely to demonstrate difficult behavior. The difficulty could be due to lack of structure. Children will behave more appropriately when they know what to expect such as meal and bed times, when they are expected to do their homework, or when they can watch their TV.

Look for multiple causes of behavior. Your child may also have found out that if they have a melt down they will immediately get what they want. However, a meltdown may be the result of feeling overwhelmed by outside stimulation such as being in large groups of people or having to sit still in a restaurant or wear something that feels unpleasant.

Temperament may play a strong part. The child may always have had a strong need for attention and control. Each child in your family likely has a different temperament and will likely need a different approach. One thing that children with ASD have in common is that they are all so different from one another!

Make sure that you have appropriate expectations of your child. Is my child going through a stage that they will pass through in time? Am I expecting too much? Expecting a five year old with ASD to wait patiently for an hour to see the family doctor IS usually asking far too much.

Is the problem more one of my own than that of the child's? For example, a parent may feel embarrassed in a grocery store when their child speaks loudly. Sometimes it is best to let the behavior go, especially if it has occurred only once or twice and is not affecting others. If the behavior is disruptive and is having a significant impact on you and/or others, then there may definitely be a need to implement some new strategies.

Components of success

When reviewing strategies in your area of concern, and knowing your child, you will come across approaches that are more likely to work than others. Try not to be swayed by anyone who claims to have discovered a "cure" for autism. Follow up with all such claims by discussing them with a trained professional or by doing some thorough research on your own and securing information from a variety of sources. There are some excellent sources available on the Internet from fully accredited institutions including universities and clinics. There is unfortunately a considerable amount of misinformation in the media.

Trust your judgment and use the strategies you feel the most comfortable with as they will probably be the most successful. Whatever strategies you choose, stick with them and be patient. Avoid giving up on one set of strategies too quickly before moving on to the next. It may take at least two to three weeks to give you enough information as to whether the approach is working.

Be consistent in how you apply strategies.

Be positive with the child about any changes they are making.

Stay calm and avoid over-reacting when problems present themselves.

One of the most important things is to continue to build your relationship with your child.

Do things with your child, which you both enjoy, on a one to one basis.

Looking after yourself.

If you find your child's behavior extremely demanding and difficult to manage, talk to your family physician who can refer you to an appropriate professional such as a developmental pediatrician. You can also enlist the help of a psychologist available through local agencies or in private practice. Together, you can work out possible solutions.

When possible take breaks from your child, even for a few hours. If you are receiving help from an agency ask about respite support for a night or weekend away.

Join a support group. Meeting with other parents can be extremely helpful.

We hope you will find the Autism Family Toolbox helpful for your family. We have every confidence there are ideas that will make a difference.

Your comments are also very much welcomed and can be emailed to comment@autismfamilytoolbox.com

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