
Autism – tips for parents

Summary

- Parenting an autistic child may pose some extra challenges for families.
 - See your local GP, paediatrician, therapists, local autism associations or other parents at your support group for more information and advice.
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Parenting an autistic child may pose some extra challenges. See your GP, paediatrician, therapists and local autism associations for information and advice.

Remember that other parents of autistic children can be a good source of tips and suggestions, so it's good to join a local support group where you can share experiences in a supportive environment.

After a diagnosis of autism

An autism diagnosis can bring about many different feelings for parents and carers. Some may feel an initial period of panic or distress, and this is completely normal. Others experience a feeling of relief as they are able to put a name to their child's issues.

Many parents and carers experience feelings of grief and loss for the future that they had anticipated, which now may not eventuate. Some may feel a mixture of all these. All reactions are valid and normal.

During this time, you may like to consider:

- Counselling may help you to manage your own feelings about your child's diagnosis.
- There are many different approaches to support the development of your autistic child. You may like to research them yourself to find the best approach for your child and family. Good starting points include your paediatrician or the health professionals who assessed your child for autism.
- Other parents who have children on the autism spectrum can be excellent sources of information. Contact an autism support group for further information, support and guidance. [Amaze](#) has a list of [support groups in Victoria](#) on their website.
- The Raising Children Network's Parent guide to therapies will help you find reliable information about a wide range of therapies and interventions for autistic children. Each parent guide sets out what the research says about the therapy, and the approximate time and costs involved.
- **TherapyConnect** is a resource created by Amaze to help families of young autistic children understand the therapy and what to expect.

When searching the internet for information on autism therapies, be aware that not all information on the internet is reliable. Check with your doctor or autism professionals, and be wary of any website that claims a 'cure' for autism. It is a lifelong condition and while there are many therapies and strategies to help support your child's development, there is no cure.

Autism – choosing a therapy for your child

Suggestions include:

- Seek advice from your child's paediatrician and other professionals involved in your child's diagnosis. Your child's diagnostic report will have recommendations. It may be worth collecting information on an intervention program you're considering and discussing it with the medical or allied health team (or both) who know your child.
 - Only choose therapy programs that are evidence based. This means they have been evaluated by scientists
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to see if they work reliably.

- Make sure the people offering the program are properly qualified. Ask questions about staff qualifications, their participation in ongoing professional development and their experience in working with autistic children.
- Find out about the time, effort and cost involved – for example, you may not have the time or resources to devote to an intensive program because of other children or work commitments.
- Some programs are for children with particular abilities or who are a particular age, so check that the therapy is appropriate for your child.
- Be wary of programs that claim to work for all autistic children – their approach may be too broad to be useful.
- As a parent, you will know that there are things that your child has difficulty with. When researching therapists and programs, consider these needs. Therapy and programs should be family centred – which means listening to parents and what they would like to work on. Remember – you are the expert on your own child.

Coping with stress – tips for parents of autistic children

Parenting can be stressful. Tips for coping with the stress include:

- Talk to someone. This may be a friend, family member or counsellor. Contact the **National Carer Counselling Program** on **1800 242 636** during business hours to speak with a counsellor.
- Consider using **respite care** in order to spend time by yourself, with other children or your partner.
- Take your time making decisions about therapy for your child, and what is best for the family.
- Consider joining a **parent support group** to meet people on similar journey. This can help with making friends with similar needs.
- Find time to look after yourself – whether this is a taking a walk or **practising mindfulness**.
- Tap into carer supports through **Carers Victoria**. There are a range of **support groups** and workshops that can help you.
- Ask friends and family for support.

Brothers and sisters of autistic children can also benefit from support. Visit **Siblings Australia for sibling support resources**.

Behaviour and autistic children

Some autistic children may engage in behaviours of concern. Behaviours of concern are behaviours that put the child, other people or property at risk. They are due to difficulties with receptive and expressive communication, or challenges with emotional regulation. A behaviour support practitioner can help you to understand your child's behaviour.

Talk to your child's healthcare professional, such as their psychologist, behaviour therapist, occupational therapist or speech pathologist, or contact the **Amaze** Autism Advisor service on **1300 308 699** for advice (8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday).

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Your child's **paediatrician**
- Your child's **psychologist**
- Your child's **speech pathologist**
- **Amaze** (previously Autism Victoria) Tel. **(03) 9657 1600**
- **Aspergers Victoria**
- **Carers Victoria** Tel. **1800 242 636**
- **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres** Tel. **1800 052 222**
- **Early Days Workshops** (pre-school) – attend a free workshop
- **Positive Partnerships** (school aged)

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