

8 Ways to Support Families who have Children with Autism

1. Do not judge

Our houses may be messy, we may have to interrupt what we are doing to clean up major spills, and we will rearrange our lives to meet the needs of our children. Comments about how a child is normal, that they will outgrow it, or that it is behavioral/poor parenting rather than autism-related does not help. If you think it, stop. If you can't stop thinking judgmental comments, keep them in your own head.

2. Do not give unsolicited advice

We get that you are trying to be helpful, but it isn't helpful. Typical parenting approaches may not work with atypical children. Unsolicited advice sends us the message that you think we are incompetent or clueless. Our lives revolve around autism and we know what we are doing. We probably have tried just about everything ...and yes, we read that article.

3. Treat our child with respect

Say, "hello," and other polite comments, even if the child does not respond. The child can hear you. Verbal children with autism may not pick up on the social cues of conversation. Teasing and comments about social issues are hurtful. Just smile and be kind and teach your children to do the same. Appreciate differences, including autism.

4. Be friendly

We may not be able to get out much. We probably do not have many friends. Being a friend can help give us the support we need.

5. Be understanding

Our children may have a hard time. Do not stare during a meltdown or if a child is behaving abnormally. We may not be able to spend time on the phone or accept spontaneous invitations to do something. We may have to change plans or leave early depending on how our child is doing that day. We may not be able to give you our full attention because of our child's needs. Autism is a neurological disorder. There is no cure. A meltdown is different than a tantrum ...and no, spanking won't stop either one.

6. Be inclusive

Although children with autism may not seem interested in others, they do want friends. It is nice to be included in play dates. Encourage your own children to be friendly and inclusive too.

7. Find ways to help us out

Some families really appreciate a meal. Offer to take care of the children so the parents can go to appointments, the grocery store, or out on a date. Go with the family on outings. Come do an activity with the child so the parent can get something done in the house.

8. Ask questions

Find out more about autism. Ask the parents about what kinds of things work for their child. Ask how you can help.

This handout was prepared by Dr. Redhair and is available on learnwithemily.com.