

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO AUTISM



SEE PAST
THE LABEL,
FOCUS ON
THE ABLE

WHAT TO DO AFTER LEARNING YOUR CHILD HAS AUTISM

It goes without saying that parents want the best for their kids. That extends to all parts of life, from the friends they make to the hobbies they choose and to how they act on a daily basis.

Sometimes, those desires get mixed up with expectations and standards which is why it might be hard for some parents to learn their child has autism.



**AS A PARENT,
IT'S YOUR JOB
TO WORRY
SOMETIMES.**

**AND THAT'S
OK!**

But **just because** your child has ASD doesn't mean they won't necessarily live a long, happy, and an accomplishment-filled life.

Today, we're going to talk about what your first steps should be when it comes to taking care of your child and your family.

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

SEARCH...



Even the least medically-experienced of us all have heard of autism. You might know the basics or maybe even a little more, but just like anything, you might just be scratching the surface.

The internet is simultaneously the best and worst thing to have happened to humanity and the wealth of resources online might be overwhelming from time to time.

Here's what we recommend: start by talking to someone first instead of heading right towards Google. That may mean meeting with a therapist or getting in touch with a foundation.

Arizona has plenty of places to start looking for help, and we recommend checking out Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) or the Autism Clinic at Phoenix Children's Hospital. Both places have resources available for kids and families alike.

Even if you don't commit to bringing your child to therapy or making either of these places a lifelong destination, it is better to talk to someone professionally instead of being lost in the world wide web.

But, we know that you can't keep your eyes away from the internet forever and here are some top sites to have bookmarked:

- **Autism Society of Greater Phoenix - Support for all affected by autism**
- **National Autism Association**
- **Autism Support Network**

Here, you'll be able to find helpful hints, support groups, and hear from people who might be going through the same struggles or doubts that you are.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD & PROVIDE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

One of the most cliché pieces of advice in relationships is “walking a mile in the other person’s shoes.” Once you can start to see things from their point of view, arguments, tantrums, or unusual behavior might make more sense.

Practicing empathy with your child is going to be tough, even for the most understanding of parents. For many, you’ve simply never been around a child with autism and don’t know what to expect.



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While it may seem obvious, every child is different. Every child is going to have their own quirks, triggers, and needs for structure.

The more willing you are to be empathetic to your child, the more likely you are to become an expert on your child. You’ll know what may trigger them or help to calm them down. You’ll be able to see the early signs of a meltdown or know when they need space instead of a pep-talk.

Let’s look at some ways you can provide a positive environment for your child.

STRUCTURE EVERYTHING

Parenting can sometimes feel like you're running around like a chicken with your head cut off while everything is on fire.

But somehow and somehow, you're able to make dinner, drive everyone around, pack lunches for tomorrow, and maybe have enough time to squeeze in an episode of your recent Netflix binge. Maybe.

When your child has autism, they're going to need plenty of structure. The easiest way to do that is by making a schedule and sticking to it.

Bedtimes, mealtimes, free time all must remain consistent throughout the week. Explain that Friday is a goof-off night, and they get an hour or two extra of TV time while getting to stay up a bit later.

It may help to speak with their therapist about recommendations or what they're doing in sessions to get an idea of that consistency.



There is no cookie-cutter schedule for each family. There is, however, an ideal schedule and it's spelled consistency.

GIVE THEM THEIR SPACE



One thing you will see over and over again in various guides and resources is the importance of giving your child space.

Now, this doesn't mean converting the basement into a man-cave or making the old shed outside the ideal she-shed but finding them a way to have their own designated spot at home.

Many times it can just be a corner of the living room or a spot outside. To make it theirs, you can use colored tape or even let them decorate it to how they see fit. That space can be where they go to breathe and relax, be alone, practice a hobby like drawing, or even just sit for a few moments.

DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN

It can be easy to get caught up in avoiding a tantrum or following exactly what their therapist said after last week's session.

Underneath the good and the bad, however, is still a child who likes doing child things.

Don't forget to go to the park, have a tea party, play with action figures, build a LEGO set, and more. Think about what they can do instead of what may be holding them back. Embrace their hobbies and encourage them in whatever they seek.

That's why we've always thought it to be vital to have different school programs that can help a child grow outside the classroom. While we recognize the importance of academic work, a large part of a school setting is finding outside interests and thriving socially.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Parents make plenty of sacrifices for their kids. Sleep schedules become shorter and personal interests are left on the back burner.

While you're doing all you can to make sure you're taking care of your child, that doesn't mean you should simply forget about taking care of yourself.



RESPITE SERVICES

What exactly are respite services?

They're exactly what they sound like. We offer respite services for parents so parents can get the mental and physical break that they deserve. These services come in handy when you just need to take some time off but don't have to worry about leaving your child with someone inexperienced. **Respite providers are vetted and have experience with children with autism.**

Parenting can be a full-time job and having a child with autism can feel like you're doing time and a half. **Don't forget to look after yourself from time to time.**

STAY POSITIVE

Great, a useless piece of advice, right? “Stay positive.”

When it comes to staying positive, that does mean more than just keeping a smile on your face. Maintain a sense of humor about everything. Just because things might be harder than what they were doesn't mean you can't laugh.

Don't get down on yourself either. Even the best parents make tons of mistakes every week. You might feel like the magnifying glass is bigger now but that's not the case.

If you make a mistake, roll with the punches. Don't lose faith in yourself or your abilities as a parent. If everything went perfectly all the time, we might start to get worried.

That's why finding a **support group is so helpful**, especially in the early stages. You think an issue you have is unique until you see multiple parents mentioning the same thing.



WRAPPING THINGS UP

We know there is a lot to think about and a lot to digest after learning your child has autism. Plenty of big changes are coming both in and outside the household and it may be hard to wrap your head around them.

Just know that you aren't alone and there are plenty of places where you can go to get help and assistance along the way.

"Here at PS Academy, we see past the label and focus on the able. Every child deserves the chance to shine!"

KATHY BRITTON

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & ADMISSIONS

