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Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

TWELVE TIPS FOR HELPING INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM HAVE A HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON

While many happily anticipate the coming holiday season, families of people on the autism spectrum also understand the special challenges that may occur when schedules are disrupted and routines broken. Our hope is that by following these few helpful tips, families may lessen the stress of the holiday season and make it a more enjoyable experience for everyone involved. The following tips were developed with input from the Autism Society, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Easter Seals Crossroads, the Sonya Ansari Center for Autism at Logan and the Indiana Autism Leadership Network..

1. **Preparation is crucial for many individuals.** At the same time, it is important to determine how much preparation a specific person may need. For example, if your son or daughter has a tendency to become anxious when anticipating an event that is to occur in the future, you may want to adjust how many days in advance you prepare him or her. Preparation can occur in various ways by using a calendar and marking the dates of various holiday events, or by creating a social story that highlights what will happen at a given event.
2. **Decorations around the house may be disruptive for some.** It may be helpful to revisit pictures from previous holidays that show decorations in the house. If such a photo book does not exist, use this holiday season to create one. For some it may also be helpful to take them shopping with you for holiday decorations so that they are engaged in the process. Or involve them in the process of decorating the house. And once holiday decorations have been put up, you may need to create rules about those that can and cannot be touched. Be direct, specific and consistent.
3. **If a person with autism has difficulty with change, you may want to gradually decorate the house.** For example, on the first day, put up the Christmas tree, then on the next day, decorate the tree and so on. And again, engage them as much as possible in this process. It may be helpful to develop a visual schedule or calendar that shows what will be done on each day.



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TWELVE TIPS FOR HELPING CONTINUED....

4. **If a person with autism begins to obsess about a particular gift or item they want, it may be helpful to be specific and direct about the number of times they can mention the gift.** One suggestion is to give them five chips. They are allowed to exchange one chip for five minutes of talking about the desired gift. Also, if you have no intention of purchasing a specific item, it serves no purpose to tell them that maybe they will get the gift. This will only lead to problems in the future. Always choose to be direct and specific about your intentions.
5. **Teach them how to leave a situation and/or how to access support when an event becomes overwhelming.** For example, if you are having visitors, have a space set aside for the child as his/her safe/calm space. The individual should be taught ahead of time that they should go to their space when feeling overwhelmed. This self-management tool will serve the individual into adulthood. For those who are not at that level of self-management, develop a signal or cue for them to show when they are getting anxious, and prompt them to use the space. For individuals with more significant challenges, practice using this space in a calm manner at various times prior to your guests' arrival. Take them into the room and engage them in calming activities (e.g., play soft music, rub his/her back, turn down the lights, etc.). Then when you notice the individual becoming anxious, calmly remove him/her from the anxiety-provoking setting immediately and take him/her into the calming environment.
6. **If you are traveling for the holidays, make sure you have their favorite foods, books or toys available.** Having familiar items readily available can help to calm stressful situations. Also, prepare them via social stories or other communication systems for any unexpected delays in travel. If you are flying for the first time, it may be helpful to bring the individual to the airport in advance and help him/her to become accustomed to airports and planes. Use social stories and pictures to rehearse what will happen when boarding and flying.
7. **Be prepared and stand firm.** Accept well-meaning but unwanted advice with the phrase, "I'll have to think about that," and smile.
8. **Prepare a photo album in advance of the relatives and other guests who will be visiting during the holidays.** Allow the person with autism access to these photos at all times and also go through the photo album with him/her while talking briefly about each family member.
9. **Practice opening gifts, taking turns and waiting for others, and giving gifts. Role play scenarios with your child in preparation for him/her getting a gift they do not want.** Talk through this process to avoid embarrassing moments with family members. You might also choose to practice certain religious rituals. Work with a speech language pathologist to construct pages of vocabulary or topic boards that relate to the holidays and family traditions.
10. **Prepare family members for strategies to use to minimize anxiety or behavioral incidents, and to enhance participation.** Help them to understand if the person with autism prefers to be hugged or not, needs calm discussions or provide other suggestions that will facilitate a smoother holiday season. If the individual becomes upset, it might also be helpful to coach others to remain calm and neutral in an effort to minimize behavioral outbursts.
11. **If the person with autism is on special diet, make sure there is food available that he/she can eat.** And even if they are not on a special diet, be cautious of the amount of sugar consumed. And try to maintain a sleep and meal routine.
12. **Above all, know your loved one with autism.** Know how much noise and other sensory input they can tolerate. Know their level of anxiety and the amount of preparation it may take. If you detect that a situation may be becoming overwhelming, help them find a quiet area in which to regroup. And there may be some situations that you simply avoid (e.g., crowded shopping malls the day after Thanksgiving). Know their fears and those things that will make the season more enjoyable for them.



Don't stress. Plan in advance. And most of all have a wonderful holiday season!

<https://www.autism-society.org/holiday-tips/>

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HOLIDAY TIPS

Holiday Tips for Families of Children with Autism



Managing Holiday Stress

The holiday season can be a stressful time of year for everyone, especially for parents of children on the autism spectrum. The sights and sounds of the holidays can be stressful and over-stimulating. There are many changes in routine, family events, parties, and vacations that need to be planned. Sometimes the stress of these changes can become overwhelming and the joy and happiness of the holidays might be lost. Here are some helpful tips to lessen your child's anxiety and increase your family's enjoyment of the holiday season:

Decorating and Shopping

- If your child has difficulty with change, you may want to gradually decorate the house. Decorate in stages, rather than all at once. It may also be helpful to develop a visual schedule or calendar that shows what will be done on each day.
- Allow your child to interact with the decorations and help put them in place.
- Flashing lights or musical decorations can disturb some children. To see how your child will respond, provide an opportunity experience these items in a store or at elsewhere first.
- Last minute holiday shopping can be stressful for children who rely on routines. If you do take your child shopping, allow enough time to gradually adapt to the intense holiday stimuli that stores exhibit this time of year

Family Routines and Travel

- Meet as a family to discuss how to minimize disruptions to established routines and how to support positive behavior when disruptions are inevitable.
- Continue using behavior support strategies during the holidays. For example, use social stories to help your child cope with changes in routine and visual supports to help prepare for more complicated days.
- Use a visual schedule if you are celebrating the holidays on more than one day to show when there will be parties/gifts and when there will not.
- Use rehearsal and role play to give children practice ahead of time in dealing with new social situations, or work together to prepare a social story that incorporates all the elements of an upcoming event or visit to better prepare them for that situation

Continued on page 4.

HOLIDAY TIPS CONTINUED....

- If you are traveling for the holidays, make sure you have child's favorite foods, books or toys available. Having familiar items readily available can help to calm stressful situations.
- If you are going to visit family or friends, make sure there is a quiet, calm place to go to if needed. Teach your child to leave a situation and/or how to access support when a situation becomes overwhelming. For example, if you are having visitors, have a space set aside for the child as their calm space. They should be taught ahead of time to go to this space when feeling overwhelmed. This self-management strategy will also be helpful in future situations.

Gifts and Play Time

- If you put gifts under the Christmas tree, prepare well ahead of time by teaching that gifts are not to be opened without the family there. Give your child a wrapped gift and a reward for keeping it intact.
- Practice unwrapping gifts, taking turns and waiting for others, and giving gifts. Role play scenarios with your child in preparation for him/her getting a gift they may not want
- Take toys and other gifts out of the box before wrapping them. It can be more fun and less frustrating if your child can open the gift and play with it immediately.
- When opening gifts as a family, try passing around an ornament to signal whose turn it is to open the next gift. This helps alleviate disorganization and the frustration of waiting.
- Prepare siblings and young relatives to share their new gifts with others.
- If necessary, consider giving your child a quiet space to play with their own gifts, away from the temptation of grabbing at other children's toys
- Prepare family members for strategies to use to minimize anxiety or behavioral incidents, and to enhance participation. Provide suggestions ahead of time that will make for a less stressful holiday season.
- Keep an eye out for signs of anxiety or distress, including an increase in behavior such as humming or rocking - this may indicate it's time to take a break from the activity.
- Understand how much noise and other sensory input your child can manage. Know their level of anxiety and the amount of preparation it may require.
- Try to relax and have a good time. Do everything possible to help reduce the stress level for your child and family during the holidays. If you are tense your child may sense that something is wrong. Don't forget to prepare yourself! A calm and collected parent is better able to help their family enjoy this wonderful time of year.

<https://bestpracticeautism.blogspot.com/2015/12/holiday-tips-for-parents-of-children-on.html?m=1>



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ADDITIONAL HOLIDAY RESOURCES.....

CLICK ON THE HYPERLINKS TO ACCESS THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- <https://www.reachaba.com/blog/2020/12/8/autism-and-preparing-for-the-holidays>
- <https://tacanow.org/family-resources/autism-and-the-holidays/>
- <https://www.easterseals.com/explore-resources/living-with-autism/16-ways-to-prepare-children-with-autism-for-holidays.html>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/five-tips-for-managing-sensory-sensitivities-during-the-holidays>

HOLIDAY CALM DOWN KIT:

<https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2016/04/what-to-put-in-a-calm-down-kit-for-kids.html>

HOLIDAY CALENDAR COUNTDOWN FREE PRINTABLE:

<https://autismspectrumteacher.com/christmas-changes-autism/>

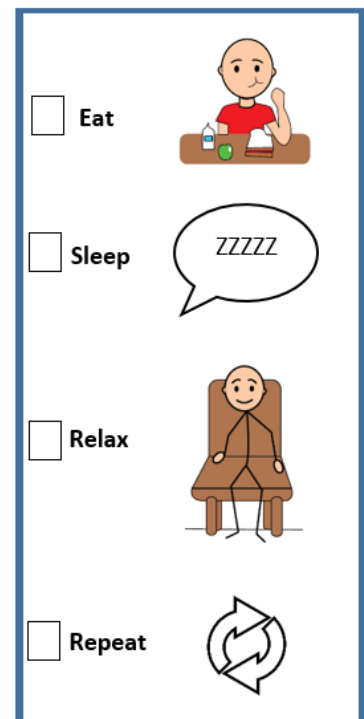
Your Visual Supports for Winter Break

www.patrickmulick.com

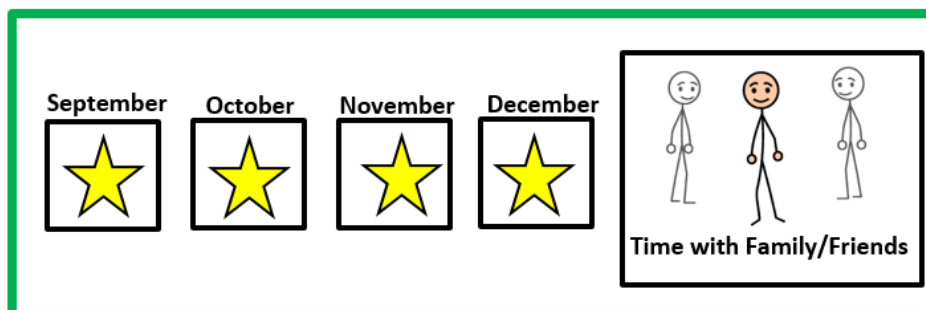
Behavioral Expectations



Schedule



Reinforcement Board



<http://patrickmulick.com/ultimate-access-card/holiday-visual-schedule/>

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DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME SUPPORTS

SUPPORTS FOR DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME CHANGE:

<https://adayinourshoes.com/daylight-savings-time-autism-adhd-tips/>

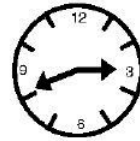
Daylight Savings Time

Daylight Savings Time happens every spring and fall.

We set our clocks ahead one hour in the spring. →

We set our clocks back one hour in the fall. ←

clock



**We change our clocks to have more daylight
at night in spring to have a longer day.**

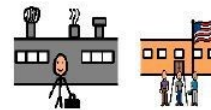
**This gives us more time to play and enjoy the nice
weather outside.**

daylight



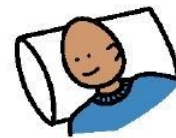
**We also change our clocks to have more daylight
in the morning in the fall for school and work.**

work school



**People might feel sleepy in the mornings or awake at night,
but they need to try to go to sleep at night at the same time.
It may take a few days to adjust to the change.**

sleep



Created by: Kristi A. Jordan, OTR/L

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/58/b5/6c/58b56c84a3a22bdea6c6b9ecc2f5ea4d.jpg>



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4 STRATEGIES TO REDUCE HOLIDAY STRESS

4 Strategies To Reduce Holiday Stress

'Tis the season to be jolly! And, let's be honest, kind of stressed. The price of gifts, party prep and extra time with the in-laws can be hair-pulling for you, parents. The holidays can be hard on your kiddo with autism, too. There are lots of things that can unsettle little Ricky: changes in routine, flashy decorations and presents he can see but can't yet touch. To have a more peaceful season, implement strategies that'll help your sweetie cope with all the hoopla. Here's what to do:

1. Put the day in writing: Your family's schedule probably looks different during the holidays than it does regularly. To whittle stress and help Rachel adapt to the changes – and to reduce the likelihood of negative behavior between transitions – create a schedule that shows her exactly what's in store for the day. We like using Choiceworks, but you can also hand-write the sequence of the day's events. Review the schedule frequently with Rachel throughout the day, crossing off what's complete and talking about next steps.

2. Light up slowly: Decking out your abode with flashing lights and animated inflatable characters can be overwhelming for some kids with autism. If changes in the environment tend to trigger tantrums in Ricky, decorate in stages so he has time to adjust to the decor. Start by putting up, with his help, a couple of his favorite signs or trimmings. Praise Ricky for his participation and get excited about the cool new decorations. Every day thereafter, hang another few pieces until your home is finally tinsel'd up.

TIP: If lights and sounds are aversive to Ricky, choose more subdued decorations.



3. Write and read social stories: Anticipate what situations or events, such as big family dinners or waiting to open presents, may be challenging and stressful for Rachel during the holidays. Then put pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard – and draft stories about how she should behave and what to expect in those circumstances. She'll be calmer and more confident when she understands the rules. Read the social stories together daily and act out the scenarios, so she knows what to do at the real event.

4. Draw up a contract: Do you dread shopping with Ricky because waiting in line at the malls makes him meltdown? Or is hosting family for dinner a headache because he acts up at the table? To help promote better behavior – and thereby reduce holiday stress – use a behavior contract. In writing, clearly state how he needs to act during a defined amount of time and what awesome reward he'll get for meeting the targets. We swear by behavior contracts: they help a lot of our clients stay calm and cool in situations that previously riled them up.

It's also a good idea to have a calm down system in place to help your kiddo relax if and when she's afflicted with holiday stress. Practice the chill-out steps while she's calm, and carry a small visual with you at all times to remind her what to do when she's tense.

Wishing you and yours a happy, stress-free holiday season!
<https://howtoaba.com/4-strategies-to-reduce-holiday-stress/>

6 TIPS FOR TRAVELING WITH A CHILD WITH AUTISM

6 Tips for Traveling With A Child With Autism

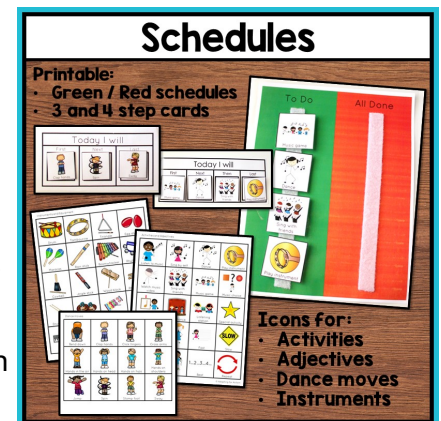
We have a client with autism who adores going to Florida. He talks about it all year, asking every Friday if he can go on Saturday. Not only is it adorable, it's remarkable, because going to new places used to be incredibly hard for him (as it is for most people on the spectrum). We worked with his parents, showing them what to do to help make his experience less stressful so he – and they – could have fun on vacation. With spring break approaching, we thought you might like the same guidance. Here's how you can help prevent tantrums when traveling with a child with autism.

1. Prep your child: Prime Alice for your family adventure about two weeks before you depart. (If she's a really anxious girl, start priming just a few days in advance so she has less time to worry but enough time to grasp what's to come.) Develop a mini presentation – slideshows can be fun – with pictures of all the places and things she'll experience, including planes, hotels, attractions and restaurants. Be excited as you review the images together daily, emphasizing the experiences Alice will love. Knowing what's ahead helps take the edge off anxiety.

2. Tell travel stories: Taking a train or plane to your destination? Being aboard a new and large vehicle can be overly exciting for some kids and unnerving for others. To help soothe stress, write social stories about what it's like to ride a train or plane, what Alex can expect (sounds, line ups, announcements, etc) and how he should behave throughout. Read the story together every day and just before you go to the station. Make sure you have it handy on board, too, to show Alex if he gets antsy. If you're jetting off, also watch *Model Me Airplane* several times as you prep your precious for travel.

TIP: If possible, take your kiddo on a tour of the train station or airport before you travel to help him acclimatize to the sights and sounds.

3. Stick to a visual schedule: When you're traveling with a child with autism, create a visual schedule for each day of your holiday and stick to it. Alice will be less likely to meltdown when she can see what's next on the agenda. If you're vacationing with a tablet, download Choiceworks – it's an app that allows you to design various schedules with visual and audio cues –because many kids find it motivating. Going tech-free? Create a schedule with cutout pictures and handwritten words. As well, follow the tips for tantrum-free transitions to help Alice move more calmly between activities.



4. Bring eat-out entertainment: A lot of kids lose their patience at restaurants. Hungry bellies hate the long waits for food! To promote peace when you dine out, order Alex's food first, and, as soon as you sit down, give him coloring supplies, figurines, books or a game-playing device so he stays engaged while you wait for and eat your grub. Older kids might also enjoy playing I Spy or Hangman with you.

5. Prioritize sleep: Tired tykes are prone to tantrums. As such, make sure your sweetie gets the Zzz's she needs by sticking to Alice's at-home sleep schedule. Be consistent with sleep times (naps included) and follow her regular bedtime routine to help her feel relaxed in the new environment. Vacations are far more enjoyable when everyone is well-rested!

6. Serve snacks: Low blood sugar makes everyone grouchy. To help keep Alex's temperament and energy steady on your adventures, make sure he eats healthy and satiating food regularly. The Dietitians of Canada recommend serving snacks between meals that include at least two food groups. For example, provide Alex with whole-grain crackers and cheese, apple slices and peanut butter or veggies and hummus.

Bon voyage! Have a happy, calm and safe vacation!

<https://howtoaba.com/6-tips-for-traveling-with-a-child-with-autism/>

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AUTISM—FRIENDLY HOLIDAY VISUAL

AUTISM-FRIENDLY HOLIDAY

BRING QUIET SENSORY TOYS

Distractions, like toys or activities, are helpful for individuals to use during dinner or religious services

ARRIVE EARLY

Arriving early at large gatherings can allow the person with ASD to get used to a growing number of people

FIND A QUIET LOCATION

Ask the host if there is a quiet location that a person with ASD can be relocated to if they become distressed

REWARD INDIVIDUALS

Reward those with ASD often using words of praise or tangibles (food, toys, etc) when shopping or attending events

ELIMINATE NOISE

Allow a person with ASD to wear ear plugs or listen to music during noisy activities

ASK FOR GROUP SUPPORT

If attending a religious service, talk to the leader about how other people attending can support the family during service

PREP A PHOTO ALBUM

Prepare the individual in advance for relatives or other guests that will be visiting with a photo album to review

GRADUAL DECORATING

If an individual with ASD has difficulty with change you may want to consider gradually decorating the house

PRACTICE UNWRAPPING GIFTS

Practice or give gifts unwrapped. This may create less stress if a person with ASD can have access right away



<https://www.facebook.com/PAHumanServices/photos/holidays-can-be-a-stressful-time-for-everyone-here-are-a-few-tips-that-can-help-/1140536799490933/>

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TIPS FOR EXPLAINING AUTISM

Tips for Explaining Autism to Family, Friends, and Kids

If your child has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, you may be wondering what this diagnosis means for them and their future. Along with these overwhelming feelings of confusion and uncertainty, you may be wondering if you should share this news with friends and family and how you should explain it. The good news is, as you come to terms with this new future for your family, you will be able to better understand what and how to share with others; It might just take some time. Here are some tips that will help you when you are explaining autism to family and friends.

1. PROCESS THE DIAGNOSIS YOURSELF FIRST

Although children with autism are often as successful as their peers with individualized treatment based on evidence-based practices, parents of newly diagnosed children often have many hurdles to overcome. Parents often report feeling blame and devastation after their child has been diagnosed with ASD, but also report eagerness in finding adequate supports for their child. After your child is diagnosed for the first time, it is perfectly normal to feel scared and worried about the future. You might now be wondering if your child will ever be able to live on their own or hold down a job. You also might be worried about kids being bullied or judged on the basis of their diagnosis. A million possible obstacles for their future might come to mind.

It's important that you take some time in your own family to process the diagnosis and understand that it is not a debilitating or negative condition. Do some research and educate yourself about autism and its possible symptoms. Once you feel more comfortable with the diagnosis and the future yourself, you can decide what information you feel comfortable sharing with others. It is your decision on who and how many people you share the diagnosis with and everyone's situations are different. So, take the time to decide what is best for your family.

2. EXPLAIN THE BASICS

Although many people know someone with autism or have been touched by it in some way, there are also many people out there who have no experience with autism at all. If this is the case, it's a good idea to begin explaining autism by describing some of the basic conditions associated with it.



You can explain that autism is usually associated with difficulty in social and communication skills, repetitive behaviors, and adherence to routine. It also can be accompanied by sensory sensitivities and challenges with paying attention. By explaining autism to family and friends who may not have had experiences with autism before in this way, you can give them some helpful background information. You may even want to recommend or gift resources like articles or books that will help them better understand autism spectrum disorder and what it means for your child.

Continued on page 11.

TIPS FOR EXPLAINING AUTISM CONTINUED....

3. SHARE INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO YOUR CHILD

Autism is a spectrum disorder, with symptoms and severity ranging widely. Some people's preconceived notions about what autism is may not fit your child. For this reason, it's often best to explain the specific symptoms and behaviors your child exhibits instead of the all-encompassing term of "autism."

When you are explaining autism, note that although certain conditions are typically associated with autism (as mentioned above), it varies a lot and can affect people in different ways. Start with the basics, and then you can begin to describe how autism affects your child specifically. You can explain that because of his or her condition, your child has trouble making eye contact. Or explain the adherence to the routine that your child prefers. This will give your friends and family a better understanding of the conditions your child struggles with specifically.



Also, don't be afraid to note the positive traits of autism and highlight the strengths of your child. Some people with little or no experience with autism may not understand that people with autism can have a fairly normal life. By noting that your child has great attention to detail, is able to deeply focus, or can absorb and retain extremely detailed information on subjects they are interested in, you can help those people see your child for more than just a diagnosis.

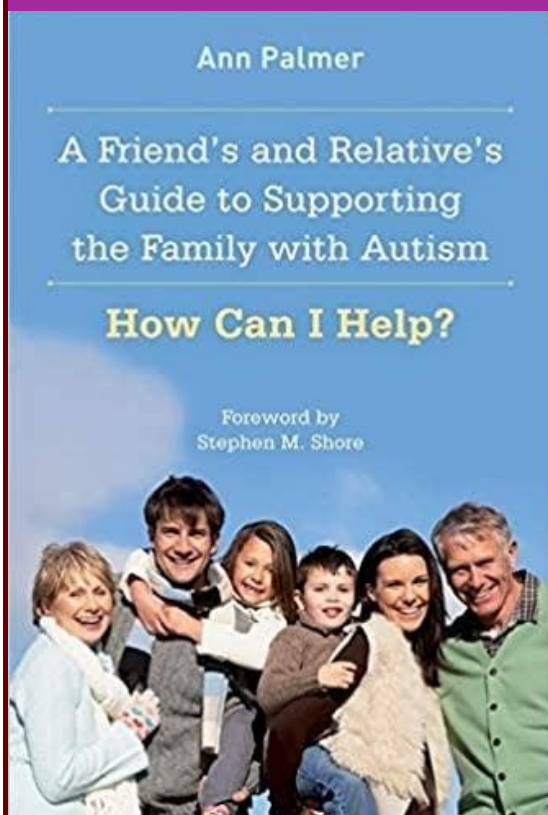
4. SHARE SUGGESTED WAYS TO INTERACT WITH YOUR CHILD

When you first start explaining autism to friends, family, and kids, they might not understand all of the jargon and behaviors you identify. For example, they still might have trouble understanding the meltdowns, necessity for routine, or other behaviors your child exhibits. For this reason, you might want to share suggested ways to interact with your child.

You won't need to share your child's treatment plan with everyone, but sharing the do's and don'ts for your child may be important for adults who care for your child regularly, like a grandparent or teacher. So, walk them through your child's schedule and make a note of the importance of sticking to it for your child. Let them know of any sensory sensitivities your child has with certain types of foods. Make them aware of any goals you are working on with your child, such as looking others in the eyes, and how to provide positive feedback and reinforcement. Any suggested ways of interacting can help others better know how to communicate and care for your child.

<https://carmenbpingree.com/blog/tips-for-explaining-autism-to-family-and-friends/>

BOOK SUGGESTIONS



A Friend's and Relatives Guide to Supporting the Family with Autism: How Can I Help?

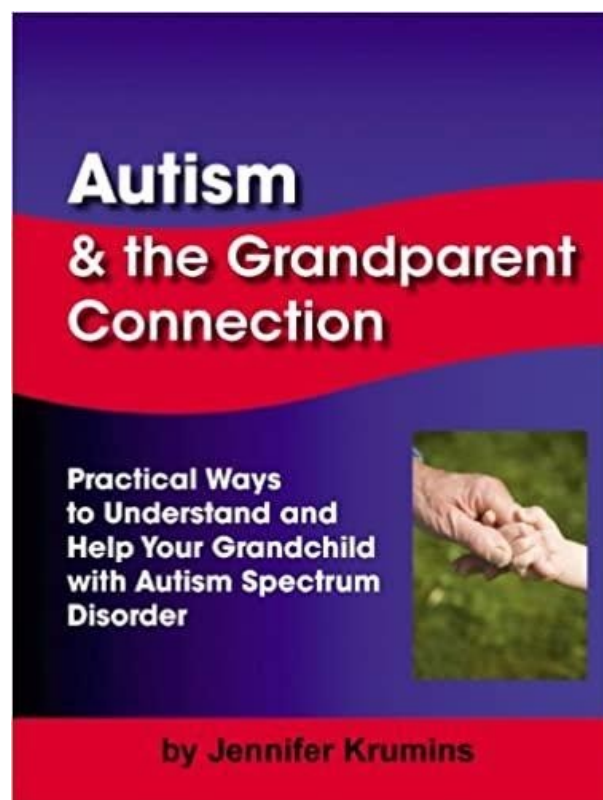
By Ann Palmer

When a child is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, what the family really needs, and often lacks, is positive reassurance and understanding from those closest to them. This book is packed with advice on how extended family members and friends can provide the necessary support. Explaining the diagnosis and characteristics of ASD, this helpful guide uses examples from real families to illustrate the complex feelings that parents and each member of the family are likely to go through after a child is diagnosed. It gives practical tips on help that might be needed most, details the possible changes that will take place as the family adjusts and concludes with a comprehensive guide to other useful sources of information. This book will help strengthen relationships between parents and their extended family and friends, enabling a reliable support system to develop which will remain crucial to the child throughout their life.

Autism and the Grandparent Connection: Practical Ways to Understand and Help Your Grandchild with Autism Spectrum Disorder

by Jennifer Krumins

As a grandparent, your ability to embrace your grandchild and support his or her parents is perhaps the essential gift you can offer your family. For parents facing the challenges of raising a child with autism, the burden is emotional, physical, financial and social. Parents need family to help them with the responsibility. Grandparents have the power to make life more manageable for your children and your grandchild. Filled with practical information, this book will undoubtedly give you the tools you need to provide stability, support and strength to your grandchild with autism. You will be empowered to be the best you can be. Answering important questions: What is Autism and how does it affect my grandchild?



The LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter is a compilation of national and regional resources designed to support families and school teams. Every effort is made to provide accurate and complete information in the LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter; however, LBL ESD cannot guarantee that there will be no errors. For example, some of the content within curated resources from across the nation may not apply to Oregon. LBL ESD does not assume any legal liability for any direct, indirect or any other loss or damage of any kind for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, product, or process disclosed herein, and do not represent that use of such information, product, or process would not infringe on privately owned rights.

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