



PARENT TOOLKIT

Autism



This toolkit offers practical strategies to help you support your child's communication, emotional well-being, anxiety, and sensory needs. Every child with autism is unique — take what works, leave what doesn't, and trust your instincts.

Understanding Autism

- Autism affects how children understand the world, communicate, process information, and respond to sensory input.
- Your child may find change, social interactions, or busy environments difficult — this is neurological, not behavioural.
- Focus on strengths: honesty, deep interests, strong memory, creativity, and unique ways of thinking.

Supporting Communication

Communication differences can cause frustration, worry, or meltdowns.

Try:

- Using **visuals** (pictures, symbols, written words) to support understanding.
- Offering **extra processing time** — count silently to 10 after giving a direction.

- Keeping language **simple and concrete**: “Put shoes on” instead of “Get ready.”
- Using **choices** to increase cooperation (“blue cup or red cup?”).
- Celebrating all communication — gestures, signs, pointing, AAC devices, and speech.

Helping with Emotional Regulation

Many autistic children struggle to identify, express, or manage emotions.

Strategies:

- Use visual aids like **emotion charts**, “zones of regulation,” or emojis.
- Create a **calm-down plan** for when they feel overwhelmed (movement, deep pressure, comfort item).
- Keep routines predictable and **use visual schedules** to reduce uncertainty.
- Offer **co-regulation**: your calm voice and slow movements help your child calm too.
- Teach simple coping skills like blowing bubbles (deep breathing), counting, or squeezing a pillow.

Supporting Anxiety

Anxiety is very common in autistic children, especially around uncertainty, transitions, or sensory overload.

Tips for parents:

- **Prepare ahead** for changes using social stories, photos, or short explanations.
- Use **timers or countdowns** to help with transitions (“5 minutes until we stop playing”).

- Break tasks into **predictable steps** (“First... then...”).
- Validate emotions: “I know this feels scary. I’m here to help you.”
- Practice calming activities daily, not just when in crisis.

Sensory Needs & Sensory Regulation

Autistic children may be over- or under-responsive to sounds, textures, lights, or movement.

You can:

- Work with an Occupational Therapist for a **sensory profile**.
- Offer sensory supports: noise-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, chewy necklaces, weighted items, fidget tools.
- Build a **sensory-friendly space** at home with dim lighting, soft textures, or cushions.
- Use a **sensory diet** — planned movement and sensory activities throughout the day to help regulate the nervous system (jumping, pushing, swinging, deep pressure, stretching).
- Respect sensory boundaries (e.g., if your child avoids certain textures or sounds).

Behaviour Support Through Understanding

Challenging behaviour is often communication.
Look underneath the behaviour:

- Are they overwhelmed?
- Confused?
- Sensory overloaded?
- Hungry, tired, or anxious?

Helpful approaches:

- Teach alternative communication (“help,” pointing, AAC).
- Use **clear expectations** and visual cues.
- Reinforce positive behaviour with praise or preferred activities.
- Avoid power struggles — offer limited, meaningful choices.

Social Support & Friendships

Social interaction may feel unpredictable or exhausting.

Support by:

- Preparing your child for social events with pictures, explanations, or scripts.
- Supporting play through **structured activities**, turn-taking games, or parallel play.
- Finding autistic-friendly clubs, programs, or interest-based activities.

Supporting Yourself as a Parent

You deserve support too.

- Connect with other parents — you are **not alone**.
- Take breaks when possible; small pauses can restore energy.
- Celebrate progress — even small steps are meaningful.
- Seek guidance from professionals when needed; asking for help is a strength

Helpful Resources

Books

- *Uniquely Human* – Barry Prizant
- *The Out-of-Sync Child* – Carol Kranowitz
- *Parenting a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder* – OAR

Websites

- Understood.org
- Autism Speaks Toolkits
- National Autistic Society

Autism brings challenges, but also incredible strengths and beautiful ways of experiencing the world. With support, patience, and understanding, you can help your child thrive — and build a home where they feel safe, valued, and celebrated for who they are.