

How To Help A Child With Autism



Autism Association of the ACT Inc

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To autistic children, our world is a chaotic and frightening place. Because they cannot communicate children with autism tend to retreat into themselves. They can also display fear or anger if forced to have contact with the world when they do not want to. Children with autism can become frustrated and angry because they find it difficult to express their feelings in a way that other people can understand. As a result, they appear remote to the people they live with, and they fail to develop normal human relationships.

But there are ways to help, and anyone can learn. Most children with autism improve as they get older. Their progress depends upon the degree of autism together with quality and quantity of help they receive.

What can we do to help?

There are many things we can do to assist children with autism to maximise their quality of life. Children with autism can become confused, anxious and frustrated by everyday events and situations. *They do not readily understand.* Difficult behaviour often emerges as a way of communicating this confusion and frustration. There are steps we can take to lessen the confusion and thereby reduce the difficult behaviour. Taking preventative action often requires time and effort. The effort is generally rewarded and is more effective than reacting to the behaviour after it has occurred!

Communication

Children with autism are concrete, literal thinkers and have difficulty communicating both verbally and/or non-verbally. Being unable to express or receive messages can lead to frustration and anger. Here are some steps we can take:

- give and receive messages using a variety of communication styles (written, verbal, gesture, comic, visual/pictorial)
- use clear, simple and precise language when giving instructions; start with one word and gradually move on to more complex sentences
- try to phrase requests in a positive way, stating what you want rather than what you don't want
- use activity schedules to assist the child to follow daily routines
- provide a structured program which assists the child to know what to expect

Social environment

Children with autism have difficulty understanding social rules and interpreting the feelings and emotions of others. Physical proximity and/or contact with others may cause anxiety. Here are some steps we can take:

- actively teach social behaviours via role play and practical demonstration
- have clear consequences for inappropriate social behaviour
- rehearse social rules in different settings
- reinforce the use of appropriate verbal or symbolic (e.g. comic) expressions of feelings and emotions.

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Organisational environment

Children with autism can become very confused when routines are altered. They may also know what is expected in one situation but may not be able to transfer this knowledge to another, related situation. Here are some steps we can take:

- explain rules (using a variety of communication styles) that apply to each situation encountered
- teach the same skill in different settings
- identify danger times, like transitions between activities, and be prepared
- provide clear signal to denote the start and finish of an activity
- use effective communication to warn of unexpected changes to routine

Discipline

Difficult behaviour generally serves a function for the autistic child. If we can recognise what that function is, we may know how to prevent the behaviour and replace it with something more appropriate. For example, the function may be to gain attention or obtain something, or avoid or escape from a disliked situation.

Traditional forms of discipline are not effective with an autistic child who is displaying difficult behaviour. The child may not readily seek praise or understand anger from another person so that this response to his/her behaviour may have little impact. It is always important to look at what motivates and interests each child and to assist the child to communicate his/her needs, anxieties and frustration in acceptable ways. Assistance through direct instruction, role play and modeling will be necessary.

Getting help

In the ACT, the Child Health and Disabilities Service (CHADS), and agency of the Department of Education, arranges assessment and also provides a range of services for children who are suspected of having some sort of pervasive developmental disorder, of which Autism and Asperger's Syndrome are examples. The CHADS telephone number is 6205 1277 or 62059198. If you would like more information, feel free also to contact the Association.

Autism Association of the ACT, Inc

The Autism Association is a voluntary organisation that works to improve the life and opportunities for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families and their carers. The Association is a non-profit charitable organisation. All Donations to the Association are tax deductible.

The Association provides:

- Support to people who have ASD, their families, carers, teachers and therapists;
- Information on autism;, on living with ASD, and Information on the services available in the ACT;
- Advocacy to improve services and opportunities;
- Close work with service providers to improve service delivery;
- Seminars and workshops and information forums;
- A newsletter, "Autism Awareness"
- Monthly meetings and speakers.

Membership of the Association is open to any person with ASD, their family, carers, teachers or other interested person. If you would like to join the Association or attend our meetings or assist in any other way, please contact us at the SHOUT offices.

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