

TIPS

for Caring for Someone With Autism

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by difficulty with social interaction, impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. Although there is no cure for autism, the following tips can help if you are caring for someone who has this disorder.



Seek treatment early. Working closely with a doctor is an important part of finding the right treatment program. Treating autism early and getting proper care can reduce a person's difficulties and increase the person's ability to maximize strengths and learn new skills.

Adjust your thinking. Because some people with autism have challenges with abstract and conceptual thinking, avoid communicating through abstract ideas when possible. If abstract concepts are needed, use visual cues, such as gestures, or written words to augment the abstract idea.

Look past behavioral outbursts. A person with autism may misbehave, but do not take this misbehavior personally. Misbehavior usually is the result of efforts to endure experiences that may be confusing, disorienting, or frightening to the person with autism.

Be aware of food allergies. Food allergies are common in people with autism, and avoiding allergenic foods can make living with autism easier. The most common food allergies are associated with gluten, soy, corn, casein, and heavy metals.

Jot it down. Keep a detailed notebook with records of conversations and meetings with health care providers. Recording reports and evaluations from doctors may help a person qualify for special programs. This information also can come in handy when it is time to make decisions.

Monitor noise levels. If you believe that a situation may become overwhelming for the person with autism, help them find a quiet area to regroup. Settings that should be avoided include, for example, crowded shopping malls.

Be specific. Each person with autism is unique and may act differently than others. Be as concrete as possible in all your interactions with the person with autism. Facial expressions and other social cues may go unnoticed.

Take a breather. Allow yourself to take time away, even if it is just for a few minutes. Consider taking a walk, going to see a movie, or visiting a friend. If you feel guilty about taking a break, remember that taking time for yourself will help you to feel renewed.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.

