

# Parenting Children on the Autism Spectrum

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Having a child on the autism spectrum generally has a major impact on any family. In these difficult times that require us to shelter in place, the impact is likely to be more extensive. Families with such challenges may already tend to isolate themselves out of concern over their child's tendency toward inappropriate behavior. Below are a few suggestions to enhance improvement of family life.

## Consider the Natural and Required Tendency toward Isolation

This tendency toward isolation occurs even when families realize the importance of social engagement. However, isolation is likely to be even more of a challenge when everyone is expected to isolate themselves. To enhance success, begin by reaching out to extended family and friends or peers from school who are familiar and can be trusted. Any form of communication such as the phone,

text, or face time should be considered. Messaging applications like Zoom or Google Hangouts might be utilized.

## Continue to be as Consistent as Possible

You probably already realize that routines are comforting to kiddos on the spectrum. Do your best to keep as many of them as possible. Stick to regular daily living routines such as bed-times. No doubt, you have had to build in new routines to include school-work and exercise.

## Consider Calming Activities

If children are frustrated, worried, or scared, they may have more repetitive behaviors like rocking or flapping, tantrums, and other challenging behaviors. It helps to find ways for them to work through strong emotions by expressing them through such activities as: talking, writing, painting. Deep breathing, music, exercise, or talking to Grandma on the phone might also be helpful.

## Keep Your Sense of Humor and Take Time to Laugh

With all of the cautions that surround us, it is important to seek out upbeat media such as music that makes you want to dance. Stay away from television shows that are depressing. Just watching the news these days can be a downer. Maintaining your own physical and

mental health is essential as you know.

## Realize that Siblings May Also Need Help

The challenges faced by a child on the spectrum can have both positive and negative effects on siblings. While many siblings are often more tolerant of the differences in people and show compassion for those with special needs, some feel resentment at the extra attention given to their sibling. They may resent having to take on extra chores. It is extremely important to keep the lines of communication open so that siblings can talk about their feelings without being judged and realize that their feelings are normal. They should have a private, autism-free zone all to themselves.

Make sure there is some time that friends can visit the siblings without being interrupted even if the visit is virtual. It might be helpful for siblings to talk to others who are also siblings of individuals on the spectrum. Just googling something like *support for siblings of children on autism spectrum* will produce resources such as at [www.autismspeaks.org/covid-19-information-and-resources-families](http://www.autismspeaks.org/covid-19-information-and-resources-families).

Much succes for you and your children!

Ruth

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