

Tips for Interacting with Those Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

When interacting with those with autism, keep in mind that every child is different. When you've met one person with autism, you've met ONE PERSON with autism.

Talk regularly with their parents/primary caregivers. They know their child best and can provide insights, strategies, and triggers to help you interact with their son/daughter.

Eye contact is overrated. Do not force an individual with autism to make eye contact. It has been described as distracting and sometimes even painful.

Use their area of interest, fixation, or special talent to connect. Keep in mind that he/she may be one-sided in their conversation and talk about this interest non-stop. It is ok to set a time limit so you can move on to other topics of conversation. Technology is often a big motivator.

Be aware of rapid fire questions. Those with autism may need time to process and respond. Too many varied questions can lead to confusion. It is ok to repeat the same question if he/she is having trouble responding. Also **avoid figurative language.** Those with autism “see in pictures” and may take what you are saying literally. Make your expectations simple and clear. Use concrete terms and avoid lengthy verbal instructions.

Be mindful of tone of voice, facial expressions, sarcasm, and body language. Those with autism have difficulty picking up typical social cues.

They may need a break. Don't be disappointed if the individual needs a break. Interpersonal interactions may become overwhelming and he/she may need to recharge.

Don't take offense. Those with autism can often be very blunt and say things that are viewed as inappropriate. They are not being purposefully rude. It is part of their challenges with social skills. Model appropriate phrasing.

Be aware of possible sensory triggers. Lights, sounds, textures, touch, and smells may become overwhelming. If you are in the community, bring a bag of preferred items to help if the person with autism becomes overwhelmed by the sensory input from the environment. This can hopefully prevent a meltdown. Meltdowns are different from tantrums in that they occur when a person is overstimulated.

Let them cope in their own way. An individual with autism will engage in repetitive behaviors (stims). This is often used as a coping mechanism. They may seek sensory input or other bodily actions. As long as it is not self-harming, do not redirect the individual. Redirecting from something that is comforting will only lead to more stress and stimming.



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Be mindful of transitions. Many with autism thrive on routines and predictability. Some may have difficulty transitioning from one activity to another. It is helpful to provide periodic verbal warnings (Ex: “Three more times, then we need to leave.” “First we’re going to the store then the park”) Prepare him/her in advance whenever possible for schedule changes.

Use visuals. As individuals with autism often “see in pictures,” they may benefit from any visuals you can provide. (Ex; a picture schedule of the day’s events, a written list etc.).

Enjoy their uniqueness. Those with autism have a unique way of looking at the world. They have many insights and interesting views to share. You will see just how wonderful each person with autism can be!

They are working all the time. Remember, those with autism are working non-stop to keep up with the world and all the things we do naturally. They are continuously working on “keeping it together.”

In many ways, people with autism are no different than anyone else. They desire friendships, enjoy a variety of interests and activities, have favorites and pet peeves, and have good days and bad days...just like you.

Be patient. Don’t give up if you don’t feel your attempts at interactions are working. Give the person time and keep trying!



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