

# Guide for Parents of Children with Autism

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Hello. My name is Angela Vedro. I am currently obtaining my Master's Degree in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland. For my class titled, Emotional Disorders in Children, I completed a study guide for parents of children with autism. I created this guide to inform parents about autism and what some coping strategies entail.

Within this guide, you will find information on autism in various formats. First, I would like to mention that I created a podcast as part of this study guide. Podcasts are short, audio clips posted online. The podcast created is an adult friendly guide to parenting a child with autism. This guide also includes a glossary of terms, adult friendly podcast script, suggestions, additional resources, and references.

I hope you enjoy the information I provided about autism. I think it is important for parents to have resources to help them excel in parenthood. To find more information about autism, other developmental disorder or psychiatric disorders in children, please visit [www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu). It is a informative website filled with resources to inform readers about behavioral and emotional disorders. The website also offers support to help children and teenagers with these behavioral and emotional disorders.

## **Glossary**

**Pervasive developmental disorders (PDDs):** A group of disorders characterized by delayed or abnormal development in many aspects of development including: social, communication, behavior, cognition, sometimes even motor skills. The term is synonymous with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

**Pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise specified (PDDNOS):** The child has some autistic-like behaviors, but does not meet the definition of either high functioning autism or Asperger syndrome.

**Autism:** The most common and typical of the PDDs, ranging in severity from those who are very handicapped (nonverbal, totally aloof, and highly repetitive) to those who are only mildly socially awkward, are slightly unusual in their conversational style, and have special interests.

**High-functioning:** Having normal intelligence and a fairly good command of language.

**Resilience:** The ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change

**A guide for parents of children with autism – Podcast Script (adult friendly)**

Hello. My name is Angela. Thank you for listening to this podcast for parents.

If your child was diagnosed with autism, many changes are ahead for you. Some of the family rituals you have will change. This can lead to confusion, stress, and an overwhelming sense of disconnect between you and your child. Don't worry. Your child is special and you can be a special parent by learning about your child.

You are not alone. Did you know that 1.5 million Americans have some form of Autism? That means 3 million parents who are dealing with similar behaviors from their child. (Troy, 2007)

This podcast will explore the ways you can help your child. Often parents of children with autism are not trained on addressing the behaviors and communication challenges their child exhibits. This eight step guide will begin to build your parenting skills for raising a child who is special.

So let's get started

Autism can be treated in many ways. Keep in mind; these interventions are not a cure, but helpful ways for your child to live with autism. The goal is to help your child become comfortable in social settings, productive in school, and help him/her to create lasting friendships.

With that being said let's take a look at our eight step guide. The topics being covered include: Finding acceptance, reaching out, seeking resources, relearn learning, saying no to stress, becoming an advocate, developing a plan, and becoming aware.

Lets take a look at step 1.

### **Step 1: Finding Acceptance**

Family resilience is formed by having an optimistic and positive attitude. Your child has a disorder that is altering your family's life. This change is all right; it just needs to be accepted. The following statement is a quote from a mother whose child was recently diagnosed with autism.

Quote "Being told Ethan had autism was a huge relief. I knew something wasn't right with him and I'd already adjusted to that. Getting the diagnosis meant we could get him the help he needed" End Quote

Ethan's mother already knew her son was different, but now she knows why and can make changes to ensure Ethan is successful. And that is exactly what you need to do as a parent. Accept...and become open to changes.

### **Step 2: Reaching Out**

Educate your family and friends. Receiving support from your family and friends is very important, but you need to teach them how they can help you. Using social support systems within your community is also a great coping strategy, as many experts have learned. Remember, you are not the only parent dealing with a child who has autism. This website contains a wealth of information.

Did you know if you do a Google search using the word "autism" you will receive 3,140,000 results? This can be overwhelming. Not always good sources. I recommend looking at websites that end in .org (which is an organization) .edu (which is an educational institution) and .gov

(which is a U.S. government site). For more information about internet resources, please refer to the podcast study guide for a list of helpful websites, blogs, and social networking tools.

### **Step 3: Seeking Resources**

Research shows most parents choose avoidance. Many parents say

Quote “if I ignore the symptoms and behaviors, hopefully they will go away.” End quote. A significant amount of research has shown this method only helps in the short term. Long term change is achieved by utilizing individual, family, and community resources. You can do this by:

- Early intervention programs, which simply refers to activities that help a child’s develop and improve some skills
- School support, this can be achieved by the use of wraparound services or a classroom aid. Wraparound services allow your child to be assigned a professional who will provide one on one support when your child is in a difficult situation.
- pediatrician recommendations, this can include speech and/or occupational therapy

(Troy 2007)

### **Step 4: Relearn Learning**

Your child learns differently than other children. It is important to understand these differences.

The goal is not to change your child, but to change the environment to meet the needs of your child. Drastic measures do not need to be taken, but your child does need to feel safe and secure in his/her environment. Once your child feels safe and secure then parents, teachers, and caregivers can begin the teaching process. Parents, teachers, and caregivers need to pick up on

the child's interests and needs so appropriate interventions can be used to help control the child's behaviors and ensure he/she is learning to the best of their abilities.

Your child needs more time to learn things in the classroom and at home. Your child learns differently than other children in his/her class, so ensure they are gaining the most out of instruction at school and at home. Encourage a parent teacher conference; learn about your child's teacher and his/her methods of instruction. Is your child in an inclusion class? What is stated on his/her Individualized education plan? These are all things you need to research to ensure the optimal success for your child. Interventions only work when the correct one is being used. At the parent teacher conference make sure your child's teacher is aware of his/her interests, social understanding, intellectual level, language level, and age.

Don't forget to include your child in the decision making. Ask what they think and like.

### **Step 5: Saying "NO" to Stress**

The behaviors of your child can increase the stress you feel. This increased stress leads to a less productive learning environment at home. Your child needs to feel safe at home. Remember this maybe the only place he/she feels safe. You are not the only one with stress. Children with autism have increased anxiety which leads to stress. You and your child can work together to ensure your home is a calm and productive environment. You can do this by learning techniques for stress reduction. Some techniques include: yoga, deep breathing, relaxaing music, and journaling (Osborne, 2009).



### **Step 6: Becoming an Advocate**

You can be an advocate not only for your child, but for others diagnoses with ‘Autism. You can do this by ensuring your child’s teacher is trained in teaching students with Autism. Research shows many teachers and staff are not properly trained.

You can become an active part of local organizations. If your town does not have an organizations presence you can sponsor a local branch. The possibilities are endless, just be creative. You can make a difference!

### **Step 7: Developing a Plan**

Each step in this podcast is important, but number seven maybe the most useful in receiving immediate results.

Let’s do a little recap of the first six steps

We talked about finding acceptance and trying to remain optimistic. We discussed educating family and friends, so they can help you as a parent. We looked at seeking resources to ensure your child is developing properly. We learned that your child learns differently. And we discussed the importance of eliminating stress.

These are all very important steps. What we need to add is a behavior plan.

What do you do when your child is acting out and not listening to your directions?

As a parent, your first step needs to be consistency. If your child follows a routine at home, this will reduce your child’s confusion and anxiety which will help with defiant behaviors.

Next, you need to understand these challenging behaviors. Your child is acting out for a reason. Once you identify what your child is trying to tell you then you can teach alternative forms of expression.

Traditional time outs do not normally work with children who have autism. You may want to try and create expectations and consequences. Have your child help in creating this list. You may want to illustrate the expectations and consequences somewhere in your home. This visual representation will help your child to remember what is expected of him/her.

This will only be effective if you have follow through. Let me explain. Billy always cleans up his paints. Billy knows if he does not clean up his paints then he will not be allowed to play with them for one day. Billy also knows that only dad enforces this rule, so when mom is home instead of cleaning up his paints, Billy gets mad and throws them on the floor. The next day Billy is crying because he wants his paints, mom lets him play with them. Billy now knows he will not get punished by mom and he continues to push the limits. Structure and consistency are the two most important things to keep in mind when dealing with defiant behaviors.

### **Step 8: Becoming Aware**

I have saved the best for last. Focus on what your child can do rather than what they can't do. Your child is special in so many ways. Consider the following questions: What does your child enjoy? When is your child most successful? What does your child not mind doing? Once you have a better understanding of your child's interests you will have a better understanding of your child true personality, without the label of having autism (Ozonoff, S., Dawson, G., & McPartland, J., 2002)

You have made an important first step by listening to this podcast. If you are eager to learn more about Autism, I recommend that you read our other study guides also on this web site. Thank you for your listening! I hope this resource helps you or someone you love. Have a wonderful day!

**Suggestions:**

- Do not blame yourself or other family members.
- Do not feel like you are alone.
- Do help your child feel comfortable in social situations.
- Do make sure your child feels safe in school.
- Do encourage your child has lasting friendships.
- Do have an optimistic attitude
- Do educate your family and friends
- Do receive support from family and friends
- Do seek professional resources
- Do learn how your child learns
- Do focus on your child's positive traits
- Do not change your child
- Do accept your child
- Do not become stressed
- Do be an advocate for your child and for other children with autism
- Do develop a behavior plan
- Do provide a consistent and structured environment

## **Additional Resources**

There are a lot of resources on autism that can be found online. Remember, some websites are not credible. I have listed some websites that will assist you in learning more about autism.

- **Autism Society of America** –research programs, learn about living with autism, and autism news <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homepage>
- **Autism Speaks** – Science, awareness, advocacy, and family services  
<http://www.autismspeaks.org>
- **Autism Collaboration** – Lists many resources for information on autism  
<http://www.autism.org>
- **100 useful websites**, networks, and resources for parents of children with autism By Meredith Walker <http://www.mastersinhealthcare.com/blog/2009/100-useful-sites-networks-and-resources-for-parents-of-autistic-children>

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