PARENTING RESOURCES

- Managing Challenging Behaviors
- Parenting
- Autism
## Tips for Managing Challenging Behaviors

### DOs

- Keep calm, speak flatly, and try your best to hide your own stress from your face and voice. Choose your battles. Give positive reinforcement.
- Words of encouragement and praise are perfectly good positive reinforcement.
- Be consistent.
- Negotiate.
- Redirect unwanted behavior and replace it with a positive behavior. Clear expectations that are age appropriate are necessary.
- Be a positive role model.
- Mean what you say and say what you mean!

### DON'Ts

- Raise your voice and show your frustration.
- Don’t overwhelm your child by nitpicking.
- Don’t punish your child.
- Toys and treats are great occasional positive reinforcement, but they become ineffective when overused.
- Don’t give up too quickly.
- Don’t use dictator language.
- Never demand that your child “do nothing.”
- Avoid complicated directives
- Avoid using inappropriate language and behaviors.
- Don’t bluff or make empty promises.

### TIPS

Keep a journal or calendar to log incidents. This can help you look back and see if there are patterns or contributing factors that are setting off unwanted behaviors. It also allows you to visually track whether the unwanted behaviors are decreasing or increasing.

Swap information with other parents. Discuss what works and what doesn’t. It’s a great way to learn and teach new techniques.
Helping the Angry Child

“W”hen Sophie gets angry she kicks and screams. She wants to smash the world to smithereens. She roars a red, red roar and when Sophie gets angry, really, really angry, she runs! Then, for a little while, she cries. Now she sees the rock, the trees and ferns. She hears a bird. She climbs the old beech tree. She feels the breeze blow her hair. She watches the water and the waves. The wide world comforts her. She feels better now. She heads for home.”

These words were taken from the popular children’s book *When Sophie gets Angry - Really, Really Angry…* by Molly Bang. This book depicts the same, strong emotional charge felt by some preschoolers when they become angry.

Tim Murphy, author of *The Angry Child*, defines anger as a powerful response that is triggered by another negative emotion. A broad range of negative emotions trigger anger such as pain, frustration, loneliness, fear, rejection, boredom, jealousy, disappointment, powerlessness, embarrassment and humiliation. Sometimes, these emotions, if they can be identified, may help the child learn techniques for responding appropriately to the anger.

Preventing situations that cause children to become angry is helpful at school and home. While conflict provides opportunities for children to learn problem solving skills, setting children up to fail deliberately can damage their self-esteem. Too few toys and/or activities build boredom or frustration. Too little attention invites competition and misbehavior. Too much adult control invites feelings of powerlessness. Some things are basic:

- Develop good relationships with children. Help them to build positive self-images by providing activities that bring rewards and success.
- Provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors. Let him/her know that their good intentions are noticed and appreciated. Point out the connection between good choices and good results.
- Offer children choices throughout the day. Let them begin to problem solve and effectively negotiate with other children to accomplish goals or to get their needs met.
- Ignore behaviors that are harmless or unimportant. Prevent outbursts by not magnifying small incidents. Pick your battles carefully.
A wise teacher helps children develop emotionally as well as intellectually by:

- Taking notes on children’s behavior. You may begin to see a pattern that will then suggest prevention and/or guidance strategies.
- Teaching children to recognize their physical signs of anger and how to label it appropriately. Invite children to think about and discuss how they feel when they are angry. Help them recognize that their tears, stomach ache or pounding heart may be related to their anger. Model for them “When I feel my tummy hurt like that, I realize I’m upset and I need to figure out what to do.”
- Acknowledge his/her feelings by assigning labels to emotions. Children need to know that anger is a normal emotion, and that adults can teach them which behaviors are acceptable when they are angry. You can help by saying, “I know you’re angry because your tower was knocked down. I can help you build another tower or you can put the blocks away and choose an activity that will help you to feel better.” Acknowledging and labeling feelings and offering alternative activities are the tools needed to equip children for success.

Teaching children self-calming techniques is helpful. Some methods include: moving away from the source of frustration and taking a break; taking slow, deep breaths; feeling their heart beat; talking to an adult; hugging a pillow; making a fist and “throwing the anger away”; thinking about positive things; riding a tricycle or running; or drawing a picture. Other positive steps you can take:

- Add a cozy area in the classroom. This area will provide children with a place to calm down or just to be alone. Add pillows, rugs, and stuffed animals to make the area more inviting.
- Make a scrapbook that displays pictures and labels for emotions. Include emotions like surprised, lonely, frustrated, laughing, worried and puzzled. Try not to place too much emphasis on anger.
- Encourage sensory experiences. Daily warm soapy water and finger paint can be soothing.
- Offer tempera paint and brushes to motivate children to engage in casual painting. Help them to paint angry feelings as well as happy feelings.
- Include soothing music with games that teach children how to control their bodies. Play stop and go games.

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Dealing with Biting

Have you ever received a phone call from your child's teacher notifying you that a child has bitten him or that your child has bitten? For many families, it is a very shocking and disturbing behavior and they want it to stop! The good news is that it is a normal stage most young children go through and will eventually grow out of it. In the meantime, there are many reasons why children bite and we must understand the reasons before we can take the first step in changing their behavior.

Teething - when children are teething, applying pressure to the gum area is very comforting to them, even if it means to bite another person. You can help them by providing cold teething rings, cool washcloths, etc.

Frustration - biting may occur when children encounter too little space, too many challenges/demands or just situations they can't handle. Notice when a child is becoming frustrated and be ready to intervene by providing assistance and/or giving the child the words to express his or her feelings.

Experimental - when given a toy or other object, one of the first places that an infant/toddler puts it is in their mouth. Tasting, gnawing, and mouthing things are something that all children do. Many children bite and mouth simply to explore. When this occurs, we should communicate to them that it is not “OK” to bite people. “No, “ or “No bite,” would be an appropriate response. Also, offering them appropriate items to bite may help in this situation.

Stress - biting is one way toddlers assert themselves, express their feelings and relieve tension. At this age, they do not yet have the verbal or reasoning skills to negotiate or understand another person’s point of view. There are activities that will allow children to relieve tension in appropriate ways, such as pounding play dough, experiencing waterplay or exploring other sensory activities. Consistency in mealtimes, bedtimes, etc. will also help.

What should we do when biting occurs?
• Remain calm. Avoid a dramatic or negative response.
• Give immediate attention and comfort to the victim first. Clean the wound with soap and water.
• Create distance from the child who bit from the child that was bitten.
• Talk to the biting child. Point out the effect of biting.

What can we do to prevent biting?
• Chart the behavior of children who bite to get an idea of times and situations when biting occurs.
• Change the environment, routines, activities, etc. if necessary.
• Help children to communicate and verbalize feelings.
• Provide close supervision.
• Redirect children to more acceptable behaviors.
• Provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior.
Dealing with Biting - con’t

What should parents/families expect from their child’s program?

- The children’s safety should be first. Programs should provide first aid as well as comfort and support to any child who is bitten.
- Developmentally appropriate environment/activities for their children should be provided.
- Children who are biting for any reason should be taught more appropriate ways to channel their behavior.
- An incident report form should be completed.
- The appropriate family member of the child who was bitten and the biter should be notified, keeping the identities of all children confidential to avoid labeling or confrontations.
- Families should be provided with current information and resources on biting.
- Families should be informed of specific steps that are being taken to address biting and explain the reasoning behind those steps.

What are inappropriate actions to a biting child?

- Expelling or de-enrolling child from the program.
- Inappropriately moving child into older classrooms.
- Biting the child back.
- Making the child taste items that are sour or spicy.

Whether or not your child bites frequently or infrequently, you will want to work with your provider to determine the reason for biting and potential solutions. Consistency between home and the early childhood setting will help your child understand that biting is not an acceptable behavior. In most cases, biting decreases when family members and the provider react the same using the same behavior management techniques.

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Toilet Learning for Toddlers

Toileting (or using the potty) is one of the most basic physical needs of young children. It is also one of the most difficult topics of communication among parents, child care providers, and health care professionals when asked to determine the “right” age a child should be able to successfully and consistently use the toilet.

Most agree that the methods used to potty train can have major emotional effects on children. The entire process - from diapering infants to teaching toddlers and preschoolers about using the toilet - should be a positive one.

Often, and for many reasons, toilet learning becomes an unnecessary struggle for control between adults and children. Many families feel pressured to potty train children by age two because of strict child care program policies, the overall inconvenience of diapering, or urging from their pediatricians, early childhood columnists, researchers, other family members and friends, etc.

The fact is that the ability to control bladder and bowel functions is as individual as each child. Some two-year-olds are fully potty trained, and some are not. But those that aren’t should not be made to feel bad about it. There are also many cultural differences in handling potty training therefore it is important that families and program staff sensitively and effectively communicate these issues.

The purpose of toilet learning is to help children gain control of their body functions. If a child is ready, the process can provide a sense of success and achievement. Here are some helpful hints on determining when young children are ready to begin the potty training process and suggestions on how to positively achieve that task.

Children are most likely ready to begin toilet learning when they:

- Show a preference for clean diapers - a preference adults can encourage by frequent diaper changing and by praising children when they come to you for a change.

- Understand when they have eliminated and know the meaning of terms for body functions. For example, “wet,” “pee,” “poop,” and “b.m.” are words commonly used by children to describe bladder and bowel functions.

- Indicate that they need to use the potty by squatting, pacing, holding their private parts, or passing gas.

- Show that they have some ability to hold it for a short period of time by going off by themselves for privacy when filling the diaper or staying dry during naps.
Toilet Learning for Toddlers - con’t

Become a cheerleader

- There may be times during the learning process when children accidentally go in their diapers or training pants. This can be very distressing and may cause them to feel sad - especially if they have been successfully using the chair for some period of time. When this happens, change the diaper without admonition - a caring adult can then try to pick up the child’s spirits with encouragement that she is doing well and will get better with practice.

- The most common cause of resistance to potty training occurs when children have been scolded, punished, or lectured too often about using the potty, or have been forced to sit on it for too long. This learning process usually is not fast or consistent. Children need your patience and support.

Have a plan

- It’s a good idea for families and child care professionals to exchange information on the words for body functions most preferred by each child in order to avoid confusion and provide a consistent message for everyone engaged in the process.

Successfully learning to use the potty is a major accomplishment for young children, and patience and praise from the adults who care for them is an extremely important component to their healthy emotional and physical development. Each child will individually provide signals as to when he or she is ready to make that leap. Good communication, appropriate expectations, and a consistent plan on the part of parents and caregivers make it easier to support this process and is the surest route to success.

Additional Resources


1. When it comes to communication: less is more! Use clear and simple pictures or visual prompts such as the visual support below from the Autism Speaks tool kit.

![Visual Schedule](image)

Use the visual prompt with simple and direct language to help your child understand what is expected. For example, say “Time for potty” instead of asking “Do you need to use the potty now?”

We’ve found it most effective when parents simultaneously present the verbal direction with the visual support while immediately guiding the child to the toilet with little or no additional discussion.

#2. Don’t delay the underwear! Move your child into underwear as soon as possible. We realize that this seems an intimidating step for many parents. But we’ve found it’s really important. Let’s face it, modern diapers and pull-ups can be too good at whisking away the pee. As a result, your child may not even realize that he has urinated. Putting your child in underwear helps him associate accidents with the discomfort of wetness on his skin.

#3. Don’t fuss over accidents. When your child does have an accident, minimize discussing, cajoling, pleading, teasing or other fussing that can have the unintended result of reinforcing the accident behavior. Instead, provide a brief reminder that you expect your child to use the toilet next time he needs to go. Then complete the cleanup with as little fanfare and discussion as possible. Save your attention for when your child is using – or attempting to use – the toilet.
**#4. Reward the desired behaviors.** Identify some activities, toys or small treats that will motivate your child. Reserve these for rewarding your child’s toileting successes, and only for rewarding toileting success. Chances are your child will work harder at achieving success if he can’t get these items any other way.

Importantly, deliver the rewards as soon as possible after your child uses the toilet to pee or poop. Don’t wait! We’ve found that quick delivery of the reward tends to speed skill acquisition.

And remember those visual supports. For example, you can incorporate a picture of the reward in your child’s toileting visual schedule. OR use a “First-Then” board to illustrate “First use the toilet, and then get your reward.” (See example below.)

![Image courtesy Time for a Future: Centre for Child Development](image)

In the early stages of training, reward each small success – even a small dribble of urine. These are important behaviors that you can build upon during subsequent bathroom trips.

**#5 Use rewards to communicate.** Sometimes, rewards can help you communicate your expectations to your child. This is especially important for children who have difficulty understanding “if, then” rules.

For example, your child may not understand, “If you pee in the potty, you can have 5 minutes of iPad.” He may do better if you increase the opportunities for success and reward. How? Try the following:

1. On a day you are both at home, increase the fluids he drinks. This will give you more chances to take him to the bathroom for a successful pee. Reward each tinkle!
2. Look for patterns in when your child has accidents. It can help to write down the time and place of each accident for several days. You may start to see a pattern emerge. For example, you may find that he often urinates around 30 minutes after drinking a glass of water, milk or other beverage. Use this information to schedule his bathroom trips around times he seems most likely to pee.

3. Remember to make those rewards immediate and consistent. This increases the chances that your child makes the connection between peeing and receiving his reward.

#6. Empower your child to communicate. It’s especially important to help children with limited verbal abilities to signal their need to use the toilet. Once your child is consistently using the toilet when you bring him to the bathroom, it’s time to teach him a simple way to tell you he needs “to go.”

Consider encouraging him to use a visual support such as a picture of a toilet. Consider clipping it to his belt loop or shirt button hole so he can easily point to it. Or, if your child uses an assisted communication device, you can incorporate a picture of a toilet that he can press to give you an audible cue.

Ideally, you want him to use these cues when he feels his bladder is full. It can help to slowly stretch out how often you take him to the bathroom unprompted. In other words, you need to give him the chance to recognize what a full bladder feels like – and then experience the relief of peeing in the toilet. As we all know, that relieved feeling can be its own “natural” reward for using the toilet.

As your child becomes increasingly attuned to when his bladder and bowel is full, he may begin to show more obvious signs of a full bladder. You may start to see an increase in rocking, holding oneself, more vocalizations or other signs that he’s ready for a trip to the bathroom.

Sometimes a child may simply look intently at you – or toward the bathroom – when he or she needs to go. It’s particularly helpful for parents, teachers and other caregivers to become sensitive to these “tells” and immediately encourage the child to use the chosen communication method. This can be with whatever method works best – e.g., handing you the toilet picture or pressing the toilet button on a speech device.
Definitely reward your child for any effort to communicate.

7. If **needed**, **get professional help.** As parents, we often benefit from an expert eye and fresh perspective in what can be a challenging experience for many.

https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2016/02/12/seven-toilet-training-tips-help-nonverbal-kids-autism
Why Inclusion?

All children learn through play regardless of race, religion, socio-economic background or developmental disability.

Children with special needs require teachers' assistance in adapting toys, games and activities to meet their needs. These adaptations help to increase their ability to participate in play activities and experience success.

Children with differing abilities require different types of adaptations. When planning lessons and activities, the needs of the individual children in the group must be taken into consideration to insure that they are included to the greatest extent possible.

Although many of the activities and materials available are suggested specifically for children with certain developmental disabilities, all children can learn from them. By encouraging all of your students to participate in activities to the extent possible, and allowing all of the students (those with and without disabilities) to explore any specially adapted equipment, you can increase the feeling of inclusion for all the children.

Who are children with disabilities or special needs?

A. First and most important, children with special needs are just children. They are more like other children than they are different.
B. The disability is only one aspect of the child's total picture of strengths and weaknesses.
C. 10-12% of all children have some kind of disability.

Why serve children with special needs in integrated settings?

Advantages to children with special needs:
1. They are part of the community.
2. The typically developing children can serve as models.
3. Their peers provide a reason/motivation to communicate.
4. Their independence is encouraged.
5. Their lifestyle is normalized.
6. They are encouraged to strive for greater achievements when they see the abilities of peers.
7. They are able to learn skills within natural settings.

Advantages to children who are normally developing:
1. They learn to accept and be comfortable with individual differences.
2. They are exposed to diversity in their friendships.
3. They are encouraged to cooperate with peers.
4. Their attitudes become more positive when they see and experience typically developing children and children with disabilities playing together regularly.
5. They become more resourceful and creative.
6. Their self concept and the spirit of helping are promoted.
Why Inclusion? - con't

Advantages to parents:
1. They develop an awareness of different types of disabilities.
2. They are part of a diverse community.
3. They gain knowledge of typical and atypical development.
4. They benefit from the availability of other parents for support and information networking.

Advantages to early childhood professionals:
1. They receive hands-on training with special education staff as role models/mentors.
2. They gain experience coordinating with other professionals, i.e. special education teachers and therapists.
3. They gain an increased understanding of child development.
4. They get the opportunity to make an impact on a child with a disability.
5. They learn educational techniques that can be just as useful for children who are typically developing.
6. They benefit from the different types of support and materials that are available.
7. The realm of the teacher's personal and professional experience is broadened.

Advantages to special education professionals:
1. They gain experience working with a diverse staff.
2. They gain experience working with a diverse group of children.
3. They learn skills from other staff.
4. They gain an increased understanding of child development.
5. They benefit from the different types of support and materials that are available.
6. The realm of the teacher's personal and professional experience is broadened.

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How to Raise a Socially Intelligent Child

1. Foster good social skills from toddlerhood on. This is one of the most important skill sets your child will ever develop. It is infinitely more important to her future happiness than helping her develop her intellect.

2. Support his friendships. Honor and reinforce your child's developing friendships. Talk about them, remember them, and create opportunities to play. Remember that children get aggravated with each other, just as adults do. It doesn't mean the end of a friendship, necessarily, just that they need help to work through the issues that come up.

3. Model respectful relating. Remember that your child will treat others as you treat her. In addition to the obvious everyday respect, that means that you give her criticism in private, not in front of others, including her friends. Which means you have to find tactful ways to talk to your young child and other kids about the way they are treating each other, to help them work out difficulties when they play together.

4. Teach your child that people are important. All parents have to choose their battles, so put up with messiness and dawdling if you must, but teach your child consideration for others. Model it for him early on, praise it, help him brainstorm to solve peer problems, and don't let your child intentionally or unintentionally disrespect another person. If you can't confront it as it happens without embarrassing your child, be sure to talk about it later. As kids get older, you may need to be very explicit about insisting that they acknowledge adults in their presence, as well as other kids. Often preteens and young adolescents need to be reminded of this, and to be given coaching on how to handle interactions that feel awkward to them.

5. Teach kids to express their needs and wants without attacking the other person. For instance: "I don't like it when you push in front of me like that" instead of "You're mean!"

"I need a turn, too!" instead of "You're hogging the ball."

6. Help your child learn how to repair rifts in relationships. When we think about repairing relationships, we usually focus on apologizing. But premature apologies won't be heartfelt and may backfire by causing the child to hold a grudge. Giving them a chance to cool down first always works better. Apologizing is a very useful friendship skill that doesn't come easily to people in our culture, mostly because we feel like it indicates that we are bad or wrong for
making a mistake to begin with. But all human relationships will have conflict, and kids are still learning how to handle conflict. So be sure not to make apologies into a public shaming, or your child will always resist them. And be sure that you’re modeling apologies. If you never apologize, they won’t either. If you apologize graciously and often, to them and to others, they will too. The secret of helping kids learn to apologize is not making the apology into a punishment.

For more information on:

- Social Intelligence for Toddlers
- Social Intelligence for PreSchoolers
- Social Intelligence for Elementary Schoolers

http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/socially-intelligent
TIPS FOR NAVIGATING NON-SENSORY FRIENDLY PLACES

For children with sensory issues, there will be times when they’ll visit places that are not sensory friendly. Here are some tips to help make your child’s time in the community a little easier:

1. **When possible, visit places that are family friendly.** They tend to be more receptive to children who may get loud or have disruptive behaviors.

2. **Prepare and then prepare some more!** Social stories, checklists, or visual schedules are great ways to help your child know what to expect.

3. **Pack a “go bag” that includes your child’s favorite toy, gadget, snacks, etc.** The idea is to include anything that will make your child feel calm and comfortable when they are out in the community.

4. **If your child is sensitive to loud noises, wearing noise-cancelling headphones may help them self-regulate.**

5. **Dress your child in brightly colored clothing and take a photo of your child before leaving home.** This is especially important if your child has a tendency to wander. Let your child wear an ID bracelet, shoe tag, or a GPS. The goal is to make it easier to find your child if s/he gets lost. You can even attach travel-sized lights to his/her bag, which can make it easier to spot him/her in a crowd.

6. **If possible, travel with another adult who can provide additional support.** A second set of hands and eyes can make a big difference.

7. **Arrive early to avoid large crowds and long lines.** When visiting places like the zoo, request a Guest Assistance Card upon arrival at the admissions booth. This will enable you to bypass long lines. Other locations throughout the city may have something similar. Check with guest relations upon arrival for help.

8. **Keep your visit short and sweet.** Be prepared to leave early if your child gets overwhelmed, overstimulated, or has a meltdown.

9. **Be flexible and have an exit strategy.** You may have arrived by train but if your child has a meltdown, consider another mode of transportation.
SENSORY FRIENDLY PLACES
Lugares agradables a los sentidos

AMC Bay Plaza Cinema 13
Sensory-friendly movies
_Películas agradables a los sentidos_
www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films

Keen Sports and Arts and Crafts (at St. Mary's Recreation Center)
(212) 768-6785
www.keennewyork.org

Music for Autism
Citywide sensory friendly concerts.
Conciertos agradables a los sentidos en los cinco condados.
www.musicforautism.org/concerts

Bronx House
990 Pelham Parkway South
Bronx, NY 10461
(718) 792-1800
Programs for parents and children with special needs
Programas para padres de niños con necesidades especiales
http:/bronxhouse.org/Program/about-special-needs/?parentid=127

Wave Hill
West 249th St.
Bronx, NY 10471
(718) 549-3200
www.wavehill.org
Public garden and cultural center in the Bronx.
_Jardín público y centro cultural en El Bronx._

include.nyc.org
ORGANIZING & KEEPING RECORDS

An important part of raising a child is keeping records of the major events in your child's life. As a parent of a child with special health care needs or a disability, this record keeping goes beyond when your daughter got her first tooth or when your son broke his arm.

Why keep records?
It is important to have medical information in one easily accessible place. Keeping track of your family's medical information can prevent unnecessary stress. If you move or change doctors, you will be able to share your medical history with the new doctor before your “official” records get forwarded.

What records should I keep?
Keep all relevant information related to your child, including:
1. Dates of immunizations, hospitalizations, illness, surgeries
2. Contact information and dates of service for: doctors, specialists, dentists, surgeons, therapists, insurance companies, schools
3. Phone conversation logs for: medical professionals, insurance providers
4. Medications
5. Insurance information (copy of policy and correspondence)
6. Education/school documents (i.e. 504 Plan, notes from nurse, etc.)
7. Equipment, supplies and vendor information
8. Emergency contact information
9. Other information specific to your child
Where do I start to organize records?

1. Start with today, this month, this year.
2. Don't let the overwhelming thought of organizing prevent you from beginning.
3. Find a method that works for you and use it.
4. The best method is one that you will use regularly.

Some suggestions:

1. File folders, accordion folders, notebooks and a specific box or file drawer all work as locations to keep records. Find what works best for your lifestyle.
2. Use a different folder, notebook, box or file drawer for each child.
3. Go through your records annually to keep them current and up to date.

RESEARCHING HEALTH CARE INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

Research Tips

Whereas health care information was once hard to come by, today we can be buried by the volume of information turned up by a single Internet search. Since anybody can put anything on the Internet, it is very important to sift through the search engine results carefully. Here are some tips to help parents identify quality information to assist them in making good health care decisions.

Types of information

1. Determine if you are looking for factual information, opinions, or both.
2. Factual information should be able to be verified from a primary information source, one which should be provided by the author.
3. If the information is an opinion, it should be clearly stated as such and the author should identify what qualifies him/her to offer this opinion.

Source of Information

1. Determine who owns or sponsors the website and why they are providing the information.
   a. First, check the website’s domain name.
      i. Web addresses that end with .gov are government-owned websites; those that end with .edu are owned by educational institutions; those that end with .org are generally owned by nonprofit organizations.
      ii. .com websites are commercially driven or for-profit ventures. By eliminating the .com sites when beginning a search, the search can be significantly narrowed down to sites that are most likely to have evidence-based information.
   b. Check the website’s homepage.
      i. If it is not immediately apparent who is behind the website’s existence, try scrolling down to see if there is contact information at the bottom of the page.
   c. Check sections of the website such as “Contact Us” and “About Us”.
2. Do not assume the website owner or sponsor is the author of the information on the website. Look for a byline or for author’s information in the footer of the article or web page. You should be
able to easily determine what makes the author qualified to provide the information.
3. Uncover the author’s purpose in providing the information. Consider the difference in perspectives of an employee paid to write the information and, for example, a customer who writes an essay about their experiences with the company’s product.
4. Check to see if the author’s contact information is provided.

**Dated Information**

1. Verify that each page of the website indicates when the page was last updated.
2. Make sure the article includes the date it was published or last updated.
3. Evaluate if the information is current enough for the topic you are researching.

**For Further Information:**

4. Finding Reliable Health Information Online: [http://www.hopkinsbayview.org/communitylibrary/reliablehealthinfo.html](http://www.hopkinsbayview.org/communitylibrary/reliablehealthinfo.html)
Managing Stress

What’s Happening
Everyone has stress, whether it’s a bad day at work, car trouble, or simply too many things to do. However, too much stress can make it hard to parent effectively. After a while, your children may show signs of being stressed out, too!

What You Might Be Seeing
Some signs that you are stressed include:
- Feeling angry or irritable a lot of the time
- Feeling hopeless
- Having trouble making decisions
- Crying easily
- Worrying all the time
- Arguing with friends or your partner
- Overeating or not eating enough
- Being unable to sleep or wanting to sleep all the time
A build-up of stress also can contribute to health problems, including allergies, a sore neck or back, headaches, upset stomach, and high blood pressure.

What You Can Do
It is important to learn how to manage your stress—for your own sake and for your children. The following suggestions may help:
- Identify what’s making you stressed. Everyone’s stressors are different. Yours might be related to money, work, your surroundings (traffic, crime), your partner, your children’s behavior, or health issues.

- Accept what you cannot change. Ask yourself, “Can I do anything about it?” If the answer is no, try to focus on something else. If there is something you can do (look for a new job, for example), break it into smaller steps so it doesn’t feel overwhelming.
- Have faith. Look back at previous times when you have overcome challenges. Think, “This too shall pass.” Consider that people who attend church, pray regularly, or practice other forms of spirituality tend to have less stress.
- Relax! Try deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or listening to music. Take 30 minutes to play a board game and laugh with your kids.
- Take care of your health. Getting enough sleep can make a big difference in your stress level. So can eating healthy foods and getting some exercise.
- Take time for yourself. Take a bath, read a book, or pick up a hobby. When you can, hire a babysitter (or trade time with a friend or neighbor) and get out for a few hours.
- Develop a support network. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Older children can set the table. Your spouse or partner could take over bedtime a few nights a week. Friends might pick up the kids from school to give you a break.

Remember: Learning to manage your stress will improve your happiness and show your children that they can handle stress, too!
WANDERING AND SAFETY

According to the National Autism Association, “wandering is the tendency of an individual to leave the safety of a responsible person’s care or safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury.” Other names for wandering are running, bolting, or elopement.

Ways to keep your children safe

1. Supervise your child at all times.
2. Get your child a tracking device and/or wearable identification.
3. Secure your home. You can install alarms, door chimes, and/or deadbolts.
4. Learn what triggers your child to wander and devise strategies to minimize these triggers.
5. Be conscious of what your child is wearing when they go out into the community.
6. Create a family emergency plan.
7. Have a recent photo of your child with you at all times.
8. Teach your child skills to stay safe, including learning how to swim. (Remember that this does not guarantee safety but it helps.)
9. Create social stories for your child that can help them understand how to be safe at home and in the community.
10. Notify first responders and trusted neighbors of your child’s tendency to wander.
11. Inform school and program staff (including non-school programs) that your child wanders. You can include this information on their Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This keeps school and program staff accountable and aware.

Please visit www.aware.org for more information and resources.
Autism Tip: Enjoy Grocery Shopping

“How can I help my child avoid meltdowns at the store? Everything is okay with him until he gets into the store.”

#1 Give fair warning
Research and experience tells us that “knowing what to expect” helps children with autism cope with potentially stressful situations. This means resisting the understandable temptation to try to sneak a quick shopping trip into your son’s day. Whenever possible, I strongly recommend letting him know ahead of time where he is going and what he can expect.

#2 Take a virtual tour
You and your son may be able to take a virtual tour of the store on the store’s website. If that’s not available, consider visiting the store on your own to take pictures and/or a cell-phone video.

This approach is particularly useful for preparing your child to accompany you to a new store. Sit down and look at the pictures and/or watch the video together so your son can become familiar with the new environment.

You might even take a virtual drive to the store using Google Maps.

#3 Practice and build tolerance
When you feel your child is ready to make an actual trip to the store, I suggest starting with a short trip and small purchase. Reward any degree of success with praise and perhaps a small prize or favorite activity.

As you sense your child is getting more comfortable with the short trips, gradually increase the length of time that the two of you are in the store. At this point, try to incorporate these trips into a regular routine – but always with fair warning – so your child can learn to expect them.

Repetition is important. And occasional reversals are likely. So don’t give up!

#4 Prepare a schedule
Many children – and adults – on the autism spectrum greatly benefit from having a clear schedule for the day ahead. Visual schedules are particularly helpful, and the Autism Speaks visual supports guide can help you make one.

A morning review of the day’s activities can help your child gain a sense of where he’s going and what he’ll be doing. So on the morning of a shopping trip – or even the night before – sit
down with your child as you add a shopping trip to the schedule. Or invite him to add it at the specified time.

It can help to schedule one of your child’s favorite activities following the shopping trip and together enter it on the day’s schedule. This can be as simple as time to play with a favorite toy or game with you.

**#5 Remember: Rest is best**
It can greatly increase your son’s chances of success if you make sure he’s well rested before the outing. In fact, the same goes for you! Being tired tends to shorten everyone’s tolerance.

**#6 Identify triggers**
You know your child best. Are there certain sights, sounds or situations that tend to produce to a meltdown? You might try visiting the store without your son with an eye for such triggers. For some people with autism, fluorescent lighting is a trigger. Others are bothered by the loud hum of air conditioners or the blare of clerks calling to each other over the intercom.

**#7 Provide personalized “armor”**
Identifying triggers enables you to provide personalized support. For example, if loud sounds provoke anxiety in your son, he might be helped by headphones. If overhead lighting is a problem, he might be willing to wear sunglasses or a baseball cap. Many parents find these strategies make a world of difference for their kids.

**#8 Getting ready to shop…**
Before leaving the house, consider prompting your son with a finer breakdown of what you’re going to do on this shopping trip. For instance:

* We will drive to the store.
* We will park in the lot.
* We will walk into the store.
* We will find the items we want.
* We will pay for them at the register.
* We will walk back to the car.
* We will drive home.
* And we will play a game of Uno.

If, like many people with autism, your child responds best to visual information, try making a personalized story with pictures about the above steps. A frame from “Going to the Store,” a personalized teaching story by the University of Washington READI Lab. READI stands for Research in Early Autism Detection and Intervention.)
#9 Have a signal
Make sure there’s a way for your child to communicate to you when he begins to feel overwhelmed. We know that children who have autism vary widely in their ability to communicate. So one child might be able to simply say “I need a break.” Another might need to learn a sign – such as hands over ears. Picture communication systems are yet another option. (See the Autism Speaks visual supports guide mentioned above.)

Even if you child can’t reliably communicate when he’s getting overwhelmed, there are often behavioral cues that you can learn to recognize in time to leave the store or otherwise provide support before the meltdown.

#10 Bring “cool down” items
Meltdowns happen. Sometimes, having a favorite comfort item on hand can help ease the crisis. Despite all the best plans, meltdowns happen. You can ease the crisis by bringing an object or activity that you know will soothe. This could be a favorite toy or blanket. It could be a special little song.

All these strategies have the same goal: To provide optimal conditions for your child when taking him into an overly stimulating environment. By preparing ahead of time, you can increase the chances that the shopping trip – or any outing – will be more tolerable for your child and entire family.

AUTISM SOCIALIZATION

• **Use routines.** Routines can help ease anxiety because the child knows what comes next.

• **Schedule play dates** with kids who are typically developing. Kids learn through imitation.

• **Create stories** starring your child that can prepare him/her for social settings: "Ashley goes to the park," or "Mark is going on a play date." These stories can help create expectations and also help with transitions.

• Help your child **find the words** for what s/he is feeling. If your child doesn’t like something another child is doing, help him/her address the situation. "I don’t like when you _______.”

• When going to the park, **bring a ball or bubbles.** Kids tend to love these and will come over to play. Encourage your child to ask them to play. "Want to play?" "Come play?" "Play?” Use a social phrase at their language level. When they like the activity, encourage them to ask for "more."

• **Give behavior-specific praises.** "I like the way you ___.” "Great job asking to play."

• **Practice what to do and say** when other children say they don’t want to play. Role playing can help prepare your child for these situations.
How to be Friends With an Autism Mom

Today is National Girlfriend Day - a day for celebrating friends, sisters and friends who have become our sisters.

I've realized the older we get, the harder it is to maintain a friendship. We grow up. We grow apart. And sometimes we **break up**.

Before I was a mom, there were after work dinners and drinks with girl friends. There were afternoons of shopping and getting our hair done. Friday and Saturday nights, dancing all night. On Sundays, there was brunch.

Now that I'm a mother, those days and nights are few and far between.

And being a special needs mom, friendships become even harder to maintain.

After The Boy was diagnosed, I felt isolated. There was no one in my circle of friends who could relate to what I was going through. I am fortunate that most of my friends have been understanding.

I've heard moms say that their friendships have changed after a diagnosis. One thing I've learned while on this journey is - we cannot do this alone. We need a support system. We need our friends.

So how do you stay friends with an autism mom?

1. **Be Aware.** **Autism Awareness is a two way street.** Become familiar with the diagnosis (at least the basics) and common terminology. Your friend will need you more than ever and if you have an understanding of the disability - that will make her feel less alone.
She will realize you're in it for the long haul too. I love it when my friends read or see something about autism and they share it with me. It tells me that they want to learn.

And if you have kids, take the time to explain autism to them. Chances are your friends kid may not have any friends or siblings to play with. It would be be great if you could schedule a play date. Especially if your child is a year or two older - the older child can act as a role model for the younger one.

2. **Understand HER.** Those first few months after a diagnosis, she may be distant or distracted. There may be times when she's just not available. And she may not pick up the phone when you call. It's not that she doesn't want to be bothered with you - she may just be going through a really tough time. She may be overwhelmed. And she may not want to talk about it.

Understand that she may be flaky and that it's hard for her to make plans. Childcare will always be an issue. Understand that if she cancels plans at the last minute, it's not that she doesn't want to spend time with you, it's just a bad time for her or her child. Do not stop extending invitations - one day she will say yes and you will both have a blast. However, on the day you really need your friend - she will find a way to be there for you.

3. **Listen to Her.** When you finally get your friend on the phone or out of the house. She may need to vent. She may need to cry. Let her. You don't have to really say anything. It's okay if you don't offer advice (especially if you don't have a kid with an autism diagnosis). Just let her talk and get it all out. But, don't let autism rule the conversation. Try to talk about things that will make her laugh. She'll want to know about you too, she may be too preoccupied to ask.

4. **Understand Her Kid.** Understand that her kid may not be able to sit in your house for long and they may have to cut their visit short. Understand that if your friend is visiting and she's with her kid, she may need to keep getting up to see what her kid is doing.

Make an effort to understand her kid's speech or gestures. Make the effort to get to know her kid. Talk to her kid. Ask questions. Take a genuine interest.

5. **Reach Out/Check In.** If you haven't heard from her - give a call, send a text or email. Chances are, you've been in her thoughts but she hasn't had the time to call.

6. **NEVER, under any circumstances utter the words:** All kids do that.
Maybe this sound like too much to ask of some friends. But did you know **Autism Moms have stress similar to combat soldiers.** It's easy to be friends during the good times, it's the friends that hang around through the tough times - those are the real friends.

And to all my friends - THANK YOU! Thank you for keeping the invites coming. Thank you for calling, emailing, texting. Thank you for your words of support. And thank you for being there for me and for The Boy. Thank you for being a friend!