Children with autism may have difficulty with social interactions. They tend to have a harder time understanding social rules and may struggle with creating and observing boundaries.

However, there are ways to help children with autism develop these social skills:

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

• Schedule play dates with children who are typically developing. Children learn through imitation.

• Use teachable moments. Explain to your child what could have been done in a specific situation and/or use redirection.

• Create stories starring your child that can prepare them for being in social settings, such as “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 they are feeling. For example, if they don’t like something another child is doing, help them address the situation, such as, “I don’t like when you...” This will help your child create boundaries, but can also be used when they are not respecting someone else’s.

• Encourage your child to ask others to play. Bring a ball or bubbles to the park, for example, and your child can ask any of the following depending on their language level, “Want to play? Come play? Play?” If your child is enjoying the activity, encourage them to ask for “more.” Prepare them, so they know what to do when someone says “no.”

• Give behavior-specific praise to help your child understand what they’re doing well, such as “I like the way you...,” or “Great job asking to play.”

• Allow children to ask questions. Sometimes they don’t understand why something is expected of them and explanations help them grasp concepts better.

Remember that you can adapt these tips to meet your child where they are based on their language and cognitive abilities. For example: if your child is nonverbal, then using visuals can help.