



10 Tips to Support People with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

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A person is not their label

A diagnosis can describe patterns of strengths and challenges, but it is not and should never be seen as the person. **We are all the same in that we are all different.**

- We all have strengths – areas of life already mastered
- We all have weaknesses - areas of life yet to be mastered
- One person's strengths maybe another person's weakness
- ASD can simply be seen as a description of a person's strengths and weaknesses



Always take a strengths-based approach

Build support around what the person has already mastered, what they enjoy, and what sets them up for feelings of success.

- Combine strengths- and interest-based activities to develop skills
- Be flexible with learning styles – assess the outcome and then personalise learning models



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Ensure the person knows what is happening now and next

Uncertainty contributes significantly to anxiety and can increase stress.
Predictability supports safety and confidence.

- The NOW NEXT EXPECT guideline reduces anxiety for all
- Same pictures = one same understanding
- If plan changes, that's ok – embrace adaptability – simply establish a new NOW-NEXT - EXPECT



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Create predictability - without making life rigid

Routines reduce stress, but flexibility can be taught gently over time.

- Use simple routines for mornings, after school/work, meals, and bedtime
- Practical tool: **visual schedule** (pictures/words) + **first/then** language (e.g., “First shower, then iPad”)



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Consider how the person experiences life through all senses

We are all experiencing all parts of our world via a combination of our senses – behaviour often makes sense when you understand how a person is experiencing their sensory world. Ask:

1. What is this person seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and/or aware of
2. Does the person perceive they have the skills to respond to what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and/or aware of
3. If no:
 - a. Are there adjustments that can be made to reduce unnecessary exposure to particularly sensory experiences
 - b. Are there skills required for the person to feel equipped to sensory experiences



Socialising can be compared to driving a car

- Interactional skills can be strengths for some and not so for others
- Be prepared to teach/learn some or all skills required for positive social interactions for all
- Teaching may including:
 - Starting, Continuing and/or ending conversations, play – any interactions
 - Intended vs interpreted messages
 - 50:50
 - Nonverbal vs verbal communication
 - Receptive and expressive
 - Personal space
 - Every micro step



Perfectionism can be a greater DIS-ability

Perfectionism can limit willingness to try, make mistakes, and learn. Help the person see life as a classroom.

- Celebrate all steps away from the comfortable norm ... not just outcomes
- Normalise embracing mistakes as part of our learning model



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Scaffolding, task breakdown, and visual schedules are essential

Independence grows when tasks are broken into step-by-step.

- Visual schedules and visual task breakdown = using a recipe
- Use the 30cm ruler analogy
- Celebrate each step away from 0cm – no matter the size



Start with the person, not the behaviour

A person is NOT their behaviour ... rather, behaviour is always a form of communication about how a person is experiencing their life. Always ask:

- What is the person ATTEMPTING to communicate about how they are experiencing life?
- What is the part/s of life the person does not feel equipped to respond to
- What responses from others are needed to increase understanding
- What new styles of communication could support



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Support communication in the moment

When anxiety increases, existing skills with expressive and receptive communication can drop.

- Weaknesses (not YET developed skills) for some =
 - expressive communication and/or
 - receptive communication
- Reduce demands and make communication simpler
- Know the communication style is not ALWAYS what they are attempting to send
- Be prepared to see through the discrepancy – Often what is WANTED to be sent and what is ACTUALLY sent are two different messages
- Phases
 - Try to send the message a different way
 - This is what I meant; is this what you heard?



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