

Supporting Someone with Autism

A Practical Workbook for Parents, Families & Carers

Welcome

Supporting someone with autism can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also bring challenges, questions and moments of uncertainty. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, sibling, partner, friend or carer, your support can make a meaningful difference.

This workbook has been created to help you better understand autism, strengthen communication, reduce stress and build confidence in supporting the autistic person in your life.

Remember, every autistic person is different. There is no single "right" way to be autistic, and no one approach works for everyone. The goal is to understand the individual and create an environment where they feel safe, respected and valued.

Module 1 – Understanding Autism

What is Autism?

Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference. It affects how a person experiences the world, communicates and interacts with others.

Being autistic is not an illness or something that needs to be "fixed." Many autistic people see autism as an important part of who they are.

People experience autism in many different ways. Some may need significant daily support, while others live independently. Every autistic person has their own strengths, challenges, interests and personality.

Common Characteristics

An autistic person may:

Communicate differently.

Prefer routines and predictability.

Experience sensory sensitivities.

Find social situations tiring.

Develop deep interests in particular topics.

Need extra time to process information.

Become overwhelmed in busy environments.

Not every autistic person will experience all of these characteristics.

Autism is a Spectrum

The autism spectrum isn't a scale from "mild" to "severe."

Instead, think of it as a unique combination of strengths and support needs.

One person might:

Struggle with loud noises.

Love meeting new people.

Need support with organisation.

Another might:

Be very independent.

Avoid social situations.

Need help with unexpected changes.

Both are equally autistic.

Myths and Facts

Myth: Autistic people don't have emotions.

Fact: Autistic people experience emotions deeply but may express them differently.

Myth: Everyone with autism is the same.

Fact: Every autistic person is unique.

Myth: Autism is caused by poor parenting.

Fact: Autism is a lifelong neurological difference and is not caused by parenting.

Myth: Autistic people don't want friends.

Fact: Many autistic people value friendships but may socialise differently.

Reflection Exercise

Think about the person you are supporting.

What are their greatest strengths?

What situations help them feel calm and comfortable?

What situations seem overwhelming or stressful?

Key Message

Understanding comes before support.

The more you learn about the individual—not just autism in general—the better equipped you'll be to provide meaningful, compassionate support.

Module 2 – Understanding Communication and Sensory Needs

Communication is about much more than talking. Autistic people may communicate, understand and process information differently. Learning these differences can reduce frustration and strengthen relationships.

Communication Differences

Some autistic people are very talkative, while others use few or no spoken words. Many communicate clearly but may interpret language more literally.

You might notice that the person you support:

Takes words literally.

Finds sarcasm or jokes confusing.

Needs extra time to answer questions.

Prefers clear, direct language.

Finds eye contact uncomfortable.

Expresses emotions differently.

These are differences in communication—not a lack of intelligence or interest.

Helpful Communication Tips

Try to:

- ✓ Speak clearly and calmly.
- ✓ Give one instruction at a time.
- ✓ Allow extra time for a response.
- ✓ Avoid saying multiple things at once.
- ✓ Check that you've both understood each other.
- ✓ Be patient and avoid rushing.

Instead of saying:

"Can you hurry up?"

Try:

"Let's put your shoes on now, then we'll leave in five minutes."

Simple, clear language is often easier to process.

Understanding Sensory Needs

Many autistic people experience the world more intensely.

Things that others barely notice can feel overwhelming.

Sensory sensitivities may include:

Loud noises

Bright lights

Crowded places

Certain smells

Clothing textures

Food textures

Unexpected touch

Some people also seek sensory input, such as rocking, fidgeting or using sensory toys to help regulate themselves.

When Someone Becomes Overwhelmed

Signs may include:

Covering their ears.

Becoming unusually quiet.

Pacing or rocking.

Increased anxiety.

Difficulty communicating.

Wanting to leave.

Crying or appearing distressed.

These are often signs that the environment has become too much, not that the person is being difficult.

How You Can Help

If someone becomes overwhelmed:

Stay calm.

Reduce noise where possible.

Move to a quieter place.

Speak gently.

Avoid asking lots of questions.

Offer reassurance without pressure.

Give them time to recover.

Sometimes the best support is simply being present.

Activity – Sensory Profile

Think about the person you support.

Things they enjoy:

Things they avoid:

Situations that seem overwhelming:

Things that help them feel calm:

Top Tips

- ♥ Every autistic person is different.
- ♥ Communication differences are not communication deficits.
- ♥ Small adjustments can make a big difference.
- ♥ Understanding sensory needs can reduce stress for everyone.
- ♥ Patience, acceptance and consistency build trust.

Key Message

The goal isn't to change the autistic person—it's to understand how they experience the world and adapt your support in ways that help them feel safe, respected and understood.

Module 3 – Supporting Daily Life, Routines and Emotional Wellbeing

Daily life can sometimes feel unpredictable and overwhelming for autistic people. Having understanding, structure and flexibility can make everyday tasks feel more manageable.

The Importance of Routine

Many autistic people find comfort in routines because they provide:

Predictability

A sense of safety

Reduced anxiety

Clear expectations

Unexpected changes can sometimes cause stress, even if the change seems small.

Examples include:

A cancelled appointment

A different route home

A substitute teacher

A change in meal plans

Visitors arriving unexpectedly

Preparing someone for changes in advance can often make them easier to manage.

Helping with Changes

You can support by:

- ✓ Giving as much notice as possible.
- ✓ Explaining what will happen.
- ✓ Using calendars or visual schedules.
- ✓ Keeping other routines the same where possible.
- ✓ Offering reassurance.

Remember that needing routine is not being stubborn—it can be an important way of managing anxiety.

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing

Like everyone else, autistic people experience a full range of emotions. However, recognising, understanding or expressing feelings may sometimes be more difficult.

They may show distress by:

Becoming quieter than usual

Withdrawing from others

Becoming irritable

Stimming more frequently

Finding it harder to communicate

Appearing overwhelmed

Listening without judgement can make a huge difference.

Encouraging Independence

Supporting someone doesn't mean doing everything for them.

Encourage independence by:

Breaking tasks into smaller steps.

Giving choices where possible.

Allowing extra time.

Celebrating progress.

Offering support only when needed.

Confidence grows through encouragement and practice.

Looking After Yourself as a Parent or Carer

Supporting someone else can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be emotionally and physically demanding.

It's important to remember:

♥ You don't have to be perfect.

♥ It's okay to ask for help.

♥ Taking care of yourself helps you care for others.

Simple ways to look after yourself include:

Taking regular breaks.

Talking to someone you trust.

Joining a support group.

Making time for hobbies.

Getting enough rest where possible.

Celebrating the small wins.

Reflection Exercise

What routines seem to help the person you support?

What situations regularly cause stress?

What could you change to make one part of daily life easier?

One thing you've done well recently as a parent, family member or carer:

Remember

Supporting someone with autism isn't about having all the answers.

It's about being patient, learning together and creating an environment where the person feels accepted, understood and valued for who they are.

Every small step you take can make a lasting difference.

Module 4 – Education, Work, Relationships and Building a Strong Support Network

As autistic children grow into teenagers and adults, their support needs may change. Encouragement, understanding and the right adjustments can help them thrive at school, work and in everyday life.

Supporting Education

Every autistic learner is different. Some may excel academically but struggle socially, while others may need additional learning support.

Helpful ways to support include:

Working closely with teachers and support staff.

Sharing information about sensory or communication needs.

Encouraging routines for homework and study.

Preparing for changes such as new classes or school trips.

Celebrating effort as well as achievements.

Remember that success looks different for everyone.

Supporting Employment

Many autistic adults have valuable skills and strengths, including:

Honesty and reliability.

Attention to detail.

Strong focus on interests.

Creative thinking.

Excellent memory.

Problem-solving abilities.

However, workplaces can also present challenges.

Reasonable adjustments might include:

Clear written instructions.

Flexible working arrangements.

A quieter workspace.

Noise-reducing headphones where appropriate.

Extra time to learn new tasks.

Predictable routines.

Encouraging employers to understand autism can make a significant difference.

Building Healthy Relationships

Autistic people often value meaningful friendships and relationships, although they may approach social situations differently.

You can help by encouraging:

Respectful communication.

Healthy boundaries.

Shared interests and activities.

Understanding that everyone socialises differently.

Opportunities to meet supportive people without pressure.

Quality friendships are often more important than having lots of friends.

Creating a Strong Support Network

No one should feel they have to manage everything alone.

A support network might include:

Family members.

Friends.

Teachers or teaching assistants.

Employers.

Support workers.

Healthcare professionals.

Community groups.

Autism organisations.

Carer support groups.

Reaching out for support is a strength, not a weakness.

Planning for the Future

Life changes such as moving school, starting work or living more independently can feel overwhelming.

Planning ahead can help reduce anxiety.

Think about:

What changes are coming?

What support might be needed?

Who can help?

What information would make the transition easier?

How can routines be maintained where possible?

Breaking big changes into smaller steps can make them feel more manageable.

Reflection Exercise

What are the person's greatest strengths?

What support already works well?

Is there one area where additional support could help?

Who can you ask for support if you need it?

Key Message

Autistic people can lead fulfilling, meaningful lives when they are accepted, understood and supported.

As a parent, family member or carer, you don't need to have all the answers. Your willingness to listen, learn and advocate can make a lasting positive difference.

Remember, progress isn't measured by comparing someone to others—it's measured by helping them become the best version of themselves.

Final Thoughts

Supporting an autistic family member, friend or the person you care for is a journey of learning, patience and understanding. There will be days that feel easier than others, and that's completely normal.

Remember that autism is not something that needs to be "fixed." Every autistic person has their own personality, strengths, challenges and way of experiencing the world.

One of the greatest gifts you can offer is acceptance.

By listening, adapting, advocating and showing unconditional support, you help create an environment where the autistic person feels safe, valued and able to be themselves.

You don't need to be perfect. You simply need to keep learning, asking questions and doing your best.

Every small act of understanding can have a lasting impact.

Your Personal Action Plan

Three things I have learned from this workbook:

1.

2.

3.

Three ways I will support my loved one differently:

1.

2.

3.

My own wellbeing goals as a parent, family member or carer:

- ☐ Take regular breaks.
- ☐ Ask for help when I need it.
- ☐ Join a support group.
- ☐ Make time for hobbies.
- ☐ Look after my physical health.
- ☐ Celebrate small successes.
- ☐ Be kinder to myself.

Other:

Useful UK Resources

National Autistic Society

Support, advice, education and resources for autistic people and their families.

Website: <https://www.autism.org.uk>

Ambitious about Autism

Support for autistic children, young people and families.

Website: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk>

Carers UK

Advice and support for unpaid carers.

Website: <https://www.carersuk.org>

NHS

Information about autism assessments, diagnosis and support.

Website: <https://www.nhs.uk>

Local Authority Services

Your local council may be able to provide:

Carer's assessments

Family support

Short breaks

Social care services

Education support

Community activities

Congratulations!

Thank you for completing the Supporting Someone with Autism – A Practical Workbook for Parents, Families & Carers.

Supporting someone with autism isn't about having all the answers—it's about building understanding, showing patience and creating an environment where they can thrive.

Every conversation, every moment of encouragement and every effort to understand makes a difference.

We hope this workbook has given you practical ideas, greater confidence and reassurance that you are not alone.

Thank you for everything you do to support the autistic person in your life.

Disclaimer

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If you are experiencing severe emotional distress, thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or believe you or someone else is at immediate risk of harm, contact your local emergency services or your local mental health crisis service immediately.

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Safe Haven Connect CIC is dedicated to improving mental health and wellbeing through free educational resources, self-help workbooks, peer support and community initiatives.

Our mission is to make mental health support more accessible, reduce stigma and help people build happier, healthier lives.

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