



# **AUTISM GUIDE**

**Your Autism Guide for Foster Care.**

**What will this guide do for you?**



**This guide has been developed to give you some essential tools, tips and resources to help you to understand and care for an autistic child.**

**0330 123 5530**

**[www.credocare.co.uk](http://www.credocare.co.uk)**

# INFORMATION ABOUT AUTISM



We live in a world made up of diverse cultures and people. Autistic people make up a percentage of that diversity and they may act in a way that is perceived as being different to other people. Life is often a confusing journey where an autistic person may need guidance and support from earliest childhood. As a foster carer, you can make a huge difference to the rest of that child's life by understanding what support is needed and how to provide it.

Everyone will experience their autism characteristics in unique ways and the severity and prevalence will differ between each child.

This guide has been developed to give you some essential tools, tips and resources to help you to understand and care for an autistic child.

## Have a question?

You can contact us using the details below.

Whether you're new to fostering or thinking of transferring, we'd love to chat.

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# AUTISTIC CHILDREN MAY



- Find it hard to communicate and interact with other people, delayed speech development or no speech.
- Find it hard to understand how other people think or feel.
- Find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable.
- Get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events.
- Find it hard to regulate and express their emotions appropriately.
- Have an overwhelming need for routine and structure – if a routine is broken or something unexpected happens, autistic children may become severely distressed, often leading to a 'meltdown', which is when they lose all control over their behaviour.
- Exhibit repetitive behaviour or repeating movements like rocking and hand flapping, (stimming). They may have repetitive speech patterns, such as repeating the same words or phrases, sometimes not in context.
- Take longer to understand information.
- Become absorbed in a particular interest in, for example, TV shows, brand of toy or trains.
- Have a preoccupation with specific items such as a particular blanket or toy.

There is no cure for autism as it is a neurological and developmental condition, however with the right empathic approach, interventions and strategies, the autistic child can be guided on to how best to navigate an often confusing world. Where there is lack of skills these can be taught and increased and where there are strengths and abilities, of which there are often many, these can be recognised and encouraged. As a foster carer you would be so influential in recognising the strengths and have the reward of seeing the child's achievements, despite their difficulties.

# HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR FOSTER CHILD?



Fostering an autistic child may come with some challenges but the rewards can be immense. There may not be a sense of gratitude from the child so the recognition that you are doing an amazing job will need to come from within and from the team around you. Remembering to be empathic to their situation is key and this will help you to have patience and resilience. Fostered children are often confused and scared when moving into a new home environment. For an autistic child, this sudden change and unknown environment is likely to be extremely distressing. That's why at Credo Care we work hard to place autistic children with the right foster family who can provide the high levels of care needed by those with special needs.

Foster carers who work with children with autism need to be prepared with a toolbox of strategies and techniques to not only make their lives easier but to help their children be successful and gain the intervention they deserve. Learning all you can about autism and finding what works will go a long way toward helping your child.

All Credo Care foster carers who are caring for a child with autism have access to a behaviour specialist who will work with you to understand your foster child and think about how to meet their needs and develop their strengths.

## Meet Jan

**Credo Care's behaviour and autism specialist.**

Jan works with our foster families to plan strategies and interventions to help the young person in placement and the family as a whole.



# OUR TEN TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING A CHILD WITH AUTISM



1

**A child with autism may take longer to process information. Wait patiently for a response and don't feel the need to fill the silence.**

The way the autistic brain is wired can often affect the amount of time someone takes to process information. It is not that they do not understand. If you fill the silence by communicating the same thing in a different way, this is confusing and the processing may need to begin again. If you do need to give more information, make sure it is consistent with the information already given. For example, "we will go to the park in a minute" "get your coat on and then we'll go to the park" "do you want to go to the park later?". Choose one and stick with it.

2

**Think about using more ways of communicating than speech, for example visual information.**

People on the autistic spectrum are often visual thinkers. We all like visual information. How would you feel if you lost your phone with so much visual information there? Audible words can often become muddled so use visual information as well as verbal, as much as possible. Carry a notebook so you can draw pictures for people with autism if you don't have signs or symbols to hand. Alternatively, your phone is a useful tool to show visual information. It may feel patronising to use with those who have good verbal skills, however visual information is often retained for longer.

3

**Keep your communication literal, clear and direct. Do not rely on a child with autism to pick up on your body language or tone/intonation of voice.**

Children on the autistic spectrum often find the intonation in our voices hard to pick up. For example, if we say "your room is a mess!" the average child would pick up that we mean for them to tidy their room, however if a child with autism cannot read our tone of voice they will not understand implication. They may well answer "yes it is" and then we would think they are being cheeky. Do not expect a child to "read your mind." Be direct and tell them what you are thinking.

4

**Avoid using words or sentences with a double meaning or using humour that is sarcastic or could be misunderstood.**

People on the autistic spectrum see the world very literally. A saying such as “if you keep watching that TV it will frazzle your brain” can be very frightening. A friend of mine could not understand why her autistic daughter went from watching TV for several hours at a time to fearing watching TV and telling others in the family not to watch it. My friend had forgotten that she had said this sentence to her daughter as a joke, until 6 months later when the daughter confessed she was scared her brain would be frazzled.

5

**Predictability and familiarity are important for some children with autism so try to maintain a routine.**

Executive Functioning and Theory of Mind allows most people to plan, imagine and predict the future and to read the story behind what is seen or interpret the mind of another person. This ability is often reduced in a person with autism. Changing plans can often be scary, not understanding or being able to imagine what might happen next causes anxiety. Always try to keep to routine. If necessary, develop contingency plans and keep the child with autism informed with as much information as they can process. Remember visual information might be processed more effectively, so visual timetables will help greatly.

6

**Do not try to enforce eye contact. Children with autism may have difficulty concentrating on using more than one sense at a time so they may be listening and not looking.**

Do not be put off or take it personally if a child with autism does not look at you while you are talking. It is often difficult for them to concentrate on more than one sense at a time so if they are looking away it may be that they are listening to you more. Some autistics explain that looking at a person directly, almost hurts through overload of stimulation. If necessary, children can be taught to look at a person’s nose to promote social skills.

7

**Social difficulties may include unusual body language or talking at inappropriate moments, maybe about inappropriate topics.**

Because of the difficulties with Executive Functioning and Theory of Mind mentioned earlier, the autistic child might find it hard to read social cues or be unaware of what is appropriate in various and differing environments. They often enjoy creating sensory stimulation and will not realise when it is inappropriate to flap their hands or rock. Children with autism find it hard to read others so they may say things that appear socially inappropriate, all be it, true. They may not be good at taking turns with speech, not because they are being rude but because of difficulty with processing time, recognising tone of voice, hearing intonation in speech and understanding social cues.

8

**Respect repetitive behaviours which may be used by children with autism to help them cope with anxiety.**

At times, all people fidget or twiddle or doodle. A child with autism often needs extra stimulation to help them to feel calm. Some of this stimulatory behaviour may seem odd to the outside world and inappropriate. However, if this behaviour helps, we should respect that and make space for them to be able to regulate themselves. If the behaviour is socially unacceptable it may be that we can give them times and places where they can behave in that way to their senses content, whilst at the same time looking for alternatives which are more socially acceptable to give them the sensory stimulation they crave. It is sometimes due to anxiety that some stimulatory behaviour occurs, therefore consider ways to reduce the anxiety and the behaviour will reduce. Sometimes the behaviour is performed purely for pleasure, therefore consider giving the child a substitute. Do not press for reasons of why a child has behaved in a certain way; they may not know.

9

**Children with autism may find the environment difficult, being hypersensitive or hyposensitive to light, sound, smell, touch, taste and movement. Try to either keep the environment calm or consider ways to ensure there is stimulation if needed.**

Children with autism find it hard to self-regulate, sometimes finding stimulus around them overloading and sometimes needing more stimulatory experiences. If they become overloaded this can mean they have a "meltdown". This is not the same as a tantrum. A reaction to an overload cannot be helped. If this occurs, all you can do is try to remove the stimulus and wait for them to regain control. The key is to know the child's needs and to work with others to ensure consistency in meeting those needs.

10

**The behaviour of a child with autism is an indication of difficulties they are experiencing beneath the surface. Even if the behaviour is challenging, consider how they are being affected by their autism. You may need to be a "mental detective".**

Sometimes it is very difficult to work out why a child is behaving as they are. Are they in pain but unable to recognise where their pain is coming from? Do they have a need for more, or less sensory stimulation? Are they overwhelmed by social expectations? Are they able to predict what is going to happen and do they feel safe? Do they have difficulty communicating their needs?

There are many reasons a child may behave as they do but it is always to get a need met. Hopefully, these tips may have given you some indication what these needs might be. In order to meet the need, you first need to be a mental detective to understand what is going on beneath the surface and then, with empathy, you can begin to help. Every child with autism experiences their condition very differently and not all these tips will be beneficial to every child. You will need to know and observe your child carefully.

# TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AS A FOSTER CARER



**It is really important that you are able to maintain that resilience and sense of achievement in your fostering role so looking after yourself first means you have something to give to your child. Although it is a metaphor – put your own gas mask on before helping others!**

**Learn about autism,** but see the foster child's needs first as a unique individual. Don't focus just on the autism label.

**Accept your child, and their uniqueness.** Remember they may not appear to "give much back" but they need you and you are so important to their experience of their world.

**Talk about how you feel.** Supporting a child on the autistic spectrum can often feel like a thankless task. Understanding the reasons for some unwanted behaviour can be confusing and frustrating. Make sure you talk about how you are feeling along the journey. Don't wait until you have no empathy left. Talk to your supervising social worker and the support team around you and remember, at Credo Care we have a full time behaviour specialist who is there to listen as well as advise.

**Take time for yourself.** Don't let autism consume every waking (and possibly sleeping) hour. You deserve to be valued, noticed and content, despite the complexities of fostering a child with autism.

# TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AS A FOSTER CARER



**Appreciate your foster child's smallest achievements.** Focus on what they can do and accept their different autism characteristics. Try not to make comparisons with other children. Find reward for yourself in recognising your part in helping them to make those achievements.

**Make friends with other foster carers.** Don't get too busy with the fostering role that you don't have time to attend the Credo Care fostering support groups.

**Access services and activities that are autism friendly.** You will find support for yourself there too by your conversation with others

**Work with our Credo Carer autism specialist.** They are there to listen empathetically and to think with you about your child's needs. They can plan with you strategies and interventions to help your child and you.

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# SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFERENCES



Sensory issues are common in people with autism although each autistic person is unique, and this includes their personal sensory sensitivities. There are various reasons why a child with autism might have sensory issues. They may be sensitive to light or sounds, they might have sensitive skin and have a strong preference for only soft fabrics without tags, they might not like other children in close proximity to them, or they might have dislikes such as a door being open or great difficulty with visiting shops.

Autistic people can experience both hypersensitivity (over-responsiveness) and hyposensitivity (under-responsiveness) to a wide range of stimuli. Most people have a combination of both.

Sights

Sounds

Smells

Tastes

Touch

Awareness of body position and movement (proprioception)

Balance (vestibular)

Awareness of internal body cues and sensations (interoception)

# SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFERENCES



## Behaviours a child may exhibit when they are experiencing a sensory issue.

- Increased movement, such as jumping, spinning, climbing or crashing into things
- Increased stimming, such as hand flapping, making repetitive noises or rocking back and forth
- Talking faster and louder, or not talking at all
- Covering ears or eyes
- Difficulty recognising internal sensations like hunger, pain or the need to use the bathroom
- Refusing or insisting on certain foods or clothing items
- Frequent chewing on non-food items
- Frequent touching of others or playing rough
- Difficulty communicating or responding as the brain shifts resources to deal with sensory input (shutdown)
- Escalating, overwhelming emotions or need to escape a situation (meltdown)

**Remembering that your foster child might be sensory seeking or sensory avoiding at any time of each day will be important to you because you will want to ensure those needs are considered and their environment adapted where possible.**

**Sensory overload happens when an intense sensory stimulus overwhelms your ability to cope. This can be triggered by a single event, like an unexpected loud noise, or it can build up over time due to the effort it takes to cope with sensory sensitivities in daily life. Sensory overload can feel like intense anxiety, a need to escape the situation or difficulty communicating. When the brain has to put all of its resources into sensory processing, it can shut off other functions, like speech, decision making, impulse control and information processing.**

# THINKING ABOUT FOSTERING AN AUTISTIC CHILD?

## How to prepare your home



You may want to decorate a child's bedroom in bright, warm and welcoming colours, provide lots of toys and play equipment and plan lots of fun and different activities and surprises for your child. When you welcome them, you may want to introduce them to many new people, with lots of warm conversation and words.

This is a natural need for us and may suit non-autistic children, however with the autistic child keeping it simple is often the best way. When your child is settled with a routine and you know what they like and dislike, then you can start to adapt their environment to their needs.

### Here are a few tips:

- Pay attention to lighting. Use soft or diffused light (never harsh light) and avoid any lighting fixtures that are hard or reflective.
- Paint rooms in neutral or pastel shades rather than bold or bright colours.
- Keep spaces free from clutter or an excess of visual elements such as pictures, ornaments or wall hangings.
- Provide a "sensory space" for your child with sensory toys to explore. If your child needs extra sensory stimulation, toys that squeeze, push, pull, roll or are good for hugging are good choices. Depending on your child's specific needs, it may be appropriate to provide visually stimulating elements in this space such as a clock, wind-driven toys, or a fish tank. You could also include wall art or pictures of animals or something that makes your child feel happy.
- Tone down noisy wooden floors with comfortable, anchored rugs or mats.
- Choose room furnishings that are low and close to the floor. Think of alternatives such as a low coffee table and a cushion instead of a typical table and chair. (Many autistic children love to climb).
- Use a transition chart or list to help your child move from one activity to the next without stress or fear.
- Try using aromatherapy at home to calm or stimulate your child.
- Choose calming sounds from nature rather than white noise, which an autistic child may find harsh and irritating.
- Even if your child is older, design your spaces with safety in mind.
- Add comfort items such as bean bags, cocoons, play tents, floor cushions, tunnels or swings to your child's sensory space.

# THINKING ABOUT FOSTERING AN AUTISTIC CHILD?

## How to prepare your family



The autistic child loves consistency and predictability. When everything becomes too much, then the child often tries to cope by using behaviours that those who don't understand autism, may find difficult. In addition, the autistic child may relate in a very different way to the average child. It is a myth that autistic children don't like social interaction with other children and people, however they may prefer to play alongside others, or just be in the same room with little interaction, just company. For this reason some people who don't understand autism may find it difficult to make relationships. It is really important to prepare yourself and others with as much information about autism as possible remembering that it is the people around that child that may have to adapt, not the child being made to fit in.

### Tips:

- Use visual information to prepare your child for any known visits, photographs of people and as part of a timetable of events
- Remind others that some autistic children take longer to process verbal information or read facial expressions.
- Encourage language that is literal and avoid using sarcasm or metaphors or similes e.g. "your room is like a pigsty" or "I was a million miles away".
- Don't expect the autistic child to be able to read between the lines, or "just get it". Don't expect them to be able to read the emotions of others. They may appear insensitive or rude but that isn't the case. They just need explanation, verbal or using pictures.
- Help others understand that unwanted behaviour such as biting or hitting is a means of emotional expression. Responses that give instruction are best, instead of "no" or "don't" use "hands down".
- Remember this child is not just trying to push anyone's buttons or wind people up. Unwanted behaviour is usually because there is a need and it is our job to find out what those needs are and teach them a better way to get their needs met.

# AUTISM RESOURCES AND INFORMATION



## **We Are Autistic - Video from the NHS**

### **National Autistic Society**

The [National Autistic Society](#) is the UK's leading charity for people on the autism spectrum and their families.

- [Advice and Guidance](#) - find a wide range of information about autism.
- [Autism Services Directory](#) - an easy way to find local and national services.
- [Online Community](#) - meet like-minded people and share experiences.
- [Transition Support Helpline](#) - get advice on making the transition from school to further or higher education.

### **Child Autism UK**

[Child Autism UK](#) offers support, advice and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) programmes for families.

- [Autism helpline](#) – 01344 882248
- [Training courses](#) – enquire about a wide range of training courses that cover social skills, behaviour management and supporting autistic children in school.

## **Ambitious about Autism**

[Ambitious about Autism](#) is a charity that provides a wealth of information, runs specialist educational services and campaigns for change.

### **Living Autism**

[Living Autism](#) provides an easy way for individuals and families to find services, advice and support.

- [Autism Glossary](#) – get to know the important terminology associated with ASD.
- [Support Group Finder](#) – enter your postcode and find support groups in and around your local area.

## **Council for Disabled Children**

Find your local Special Education Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).

- [SENDIASS](#) – choose your region and find out about your local SENDIAS Services, including address, opening hours, email and website.

# AUTISM RESOURCES AND INFORMATION



## Action for Children

Action for Children is a charity that aims to protect and support children and young people with practical and emotional care.

- [Parent Talk](#) – an advice hub covering all things parenting, including additional needs and disabilities.
- [1:1 Chat with a Parenting Coach](#) – have a free and confidential chat with a parenting coach about any topic that's affecting you.

## Autism Independent UK

[Autism Independent UK](#) helps to increase awareness of autism to the notice of all, together with well-established and newly developed approaches in the diagnosis, assessment, education and treatment.

## Bridging The Neurodivide

[Bridging The Neurodivide's](#) website is useful for all kinds of resources – over 70 pages.

The aim of this website is to help bridge the gap between neurotypical and neurodiverse understanding

## Books About Autism

[Avoiding Anxiety in Autistic Children](#)

By Dr Luke Beardon

### [Get it here.](#)

[Parenting Rewired - How to raise a happy autistic child in a neurotypical world](#)

By Charlotte Chandy and Danielle Punter

### [Get it here.](#)

[Self-Regulation Skills Workbook for Kids \(8-12\): Mindfulness, Positive Thinking, and](#)

[Self-Regulating Children's Daily Life through CBT Exercises and Emotional Guidance](#)

By Kangaroo Publications and Mary C. Norris

### [Get it here.](#)

[Loving Eric: A story about Adoption, Attachment, Autism & ADHD](#)

By Laura Morrissey

### [Get it here.](#)

# AUTISM RESOURCES AND INFORMATION



The Out-Of-Sync Child, Third Edition:  
Recognizing and Coping with Sensory  
Processing Differences  
By Carol Stock Kranowitz

**[Get it here.](#)**

Autism and Masking: How and Why People  
Do It, and the Impact It Can Have  
By Felicity Sedgewick, Laura Hull and Helen  
Ellis

**[Get it here.](#)**

The Autistic Brain: understanding the  
autistic brain by one of the most  
accomplished and well-known adults with  
autism in the world  
By Temple Grandin and Richard Panek

**[Get it here.](#)**



**Credo Care is committed to raising the standards of additional needs care for children, reducing the financial burden of long-term residential and hospice care on local authorities, and to ensure becoming foster carers is a positive experience for all our carers.**

## **Contact us on**



**Call us on: 0330 123 5530**



**Send us an email**



**Visit: [www.credocare.co.uk](http://www.credocare.co.uk)**