



Autism advice for grandparents

After your grandchild is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum you may feel unsure of how to help. ANNA TULLEMANS discusses the most common concerns.

You'll most likely find that the way you support and interact with your grandchild may be different to those of your other grandchildren. You may also find that your relationship may be different too, but you will find it just as rewarding and special.

Try to be an active part of your grandchild's life. Have special time with them on a regular schedule.

Children with Autism Spectrum really do well if they have predictable and consistent schedules and routines. Find activities that you both enjoy and do them on a regular basis.

Here are eight practical tips on making the most of the time you spend with your grandchild with Autism Spectrum:

- Make sure you are a normal part of the child's familiar routines and knows you well. They love the predictability of routine and structure as they are most comfortable when they know what is coming next.
- Have a designated special area for them where they can play with their favourite toys. For the young ones, mark this area with a picture, a sign or a symbol that they recognise as their own space.
- Prepare them for special occasions by frequently describing the details of the upcoming event. Show them pictures of what they did last time. Show them pictures of who is going to be there this time. Designate a space for them to go to when it all gets too much. Ensure that this is a more quiet space where they can start to self-regulate and calm down.
- For an outing, show pictures and have them choose where they would like to go. Only give two choices otherwise it might get too hard to choose.
- Give the child time to think about their answer. They take longer to process verbal information.
- Use the child's special interests as a basis for activities. These may change over time so be prepared with several things.
- When dining out, choose restaurants that don't require too much structured table behaviour, for example Chinese restaurants. Being able to move around is a must as the sensory overload of sight, smells and sounds may get too much. Once they are more settled you can start teaching better table manners at more structured restaurants.
- If there is going to be a longer separation to the next time you see them, put your picture up on a calendar so they can place it over the date you will be coming back. Remember that there is no need to fear a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum. Arm yourself with knowledge and you can be a life saver to the family.

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