

How to support parents of children with autism

With 1 in 68 children identified as having autism, chances are you know a co-worker, friend, or family member affected by the disorder.

Parents often face significant financial and emotional pressures when caring for a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Support from family, friends, and colleagues can go a long way in easing stress and helping parents feel understood.

Become educated on autism.

ASD is complex and the range of symptoms varies from person to person. Learn about the child's strengths and challenges. Just as important as raising your own awareness of ASD is educating your family members. Some children with autism have trouble making friends or are bullied by other kids. Teach your own children to be inclusive and accepting of others, no matter how 'different' they are.

Reach out and stay connected.

It can be challenging, difficult, and time-consuming for parents to coordinate the services and educational needs of their child, plus manage the demands of everyday family life. Expect that parents may be busy and don't take it personally if they don't call or visit as often as they used to. Make the effort to stay in touch. Offer to stop by with coffee, or maybe a meal or dessert.

Ask how the child is doing.

Most parents enjoy sharing stories of their child's accomplishments and daily wins. Having a child with autism comes with its share of joys as well as challenges. Show your interest in how things are going for the family.

Be a good listener.

Sometimes parents need to vent. They may feel isolated, overwhelmed, or just plain tired. Offer a compassionate, listening ear and encouragement when needed.

Offer respite if you're comfortable doing so.

Rest and respite are critical for caregivers' mental health. If you and the parents are comfortable, offer to watch the child with autism or babysit the child's siblings to give everyone a break.

Show your support by participating in special events.

Events such as autism walks raise awareness in the community and help fund research on ASD. Show your support for parents by joining them in these special events in honor of their child.

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