



ROD Autism Team Newsletter



School's Out for the SUMMER!!!



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Happy Summer Break 2019!

In this Issue:

Upcoming Workshops Offered by Children's Hospital

**A 3-Day Workshop on Discussing Sexuality and Health Relationships
with Tweens and Teens**

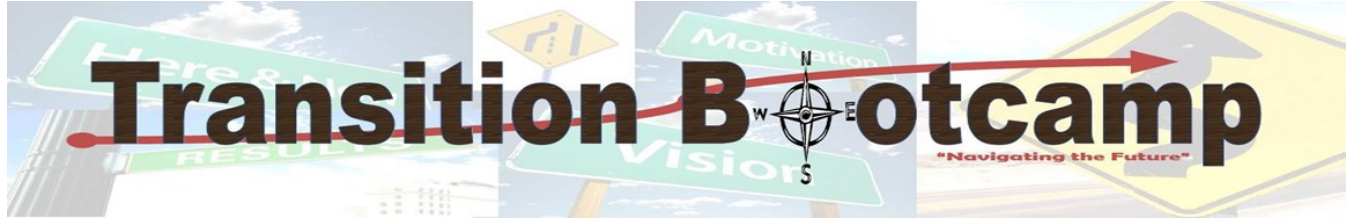
How to Plan for an Upcoming Move

Tips for A Good Night's Sleep

Keeping Kids Safe and Creating Safety Plans

And A List of Gift Ideas for Children with ASD

We hope you have a wonderful, restful, and safe summer.



BOOSTER SESSIONS 2019

Booster sessions are intended to provide information on the transition from school to adult life for youth with disabilities. Families, individuals with disabilities, educators, and other professionals are invited to attend these sessions at no charge.

Booster sessions are two hours long and take place in the evening.

Session 4: SSI/SSDI

Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2019

Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

Location: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Office Building (MOB)

3430 Burnet Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45229 5th Floor Rooms 5.201 & 5.202

Speakers: Kelly Draggoo, Social Security Administration

Register Online: <https://bit.ly/2NifSft>

Session 5: Financial Planning for Families of Children and Adults who have Developmental Disabilities

Date: Tuesday, July 9, 2019 Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

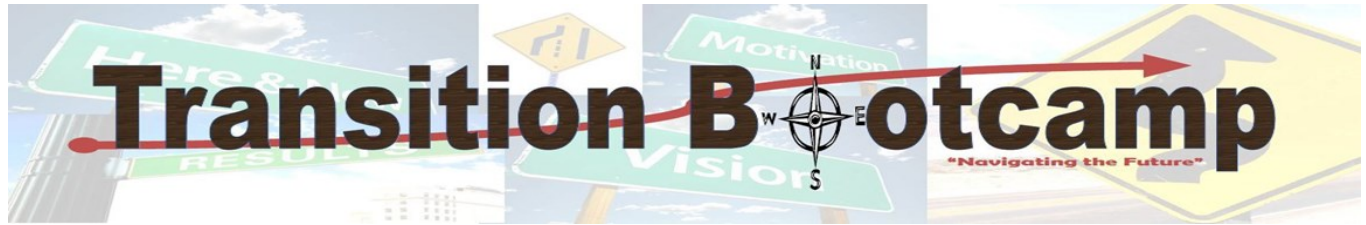
Location: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Office Building (MOB)

3430 Burnet Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45229 5th Floor Rooms 5.201 & 5.202

Speakers: Nick Hancart, Ohio Treasurer's Office,

Barry Jamieson, CMP Financial

Register Online: <https://bit.ly/2GUsYyk>



Session 6: Guardianship and Alternatives

Date: Thursday, August 8, 2019

Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

Location: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Office Building (MOB)

3430 Burnet Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45229 5th Floor Rooms 5.201 & 5.202

Speakers: Andrew Brennan, *Disability Rights Ohio*; Jane Gerhardt, *Family Member*; Lisa Portune, *Family Member*

Register Online: <https://bit.ly/2V9sF6K>

Session 7: Transition from Pediatric to Adult Health Care

Date: Wednesday, September 11, 2019

Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

Location: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Office Building (MOB)

3430 Burnet Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45229 5th Floor Rooms 5.201 & 5.202

Speakers: Jason Woodward, MD, *CCHMC*

Register Online: <https://bit.ly/2U3yCIK>

Session 8: Relationships, Sexuality and Safety

Date: Thursday, October 10, 2019

Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

Location: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Office Building (MOB)

3430 Burnet Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45229 5th Floor Rooms 5.201 & 5.202

Speaker: Amanda Tipkemper, *The Children's Home* & TJ Nestheide, *HCDDS*

Register Online: <https://bit.ly/2T3KDKB>

THE SPECTRUM OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY IN AUTISM

SAVE THE DATE!

Recommended
for mature
audiences

June 24th-26th, 2019 8:30am-4:00pm

Event Location:

**Xavier Cintas Center
1624 Herald Ave.
Cincinnati, OH 45207**

Target Audience: *individuals with autism, family*

members, and professionals. Information will be designed to address the full autism spectrum across the life span; however, much of the content would apply to the broader disability community.

Registration and additional details will follow!

Questions? Contact Anne Tapia 513-636-7616 anne.tapia@cchmc.org



Keynote Speakers

Melissa Dubie, M.S., *author of Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health: A Curriculum for Teaching Adolescents/Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Social Challenges*

Panel of Self Advocates

Breakout Session Topics will address:

Ages and Stages of Development and Sexuality	Supporting School Personnel
Hygiene and Proactive Strategies	Intersection of Behavior and Sexuality
Females on the Spectrum	Need for human contact outside of sexual relationships (across the lifespan)
Healthy Relationships	Social Skills and Sex Education
Trauma Sensitive Sexuality Education	Safety, Technology and Social Skills
Masturbation	Proactive IEP Planning
LGBTQ+	Supporting Families at Home and in the Community During Adolescence
School age, Transition age, and Adulthood	And more!

Published online at: <https://www.yourstoragefinder.com/moving-with-autism>

Moving With Autism

How to Plan Your Transition to a New Home



If you have a loved one with autism, you know how important predictability and routines are. All of that goes out the window when you have to pack up your house and move. Whether it's around the corner or to a new country, relocating can be especially difficult for a family member who is on the autism spectrum. Although you can't eliminate all anxiety a move may cause, you can do many things to make the process easier on your loved ones and yourself.

Since [autism affects an estimated 1 in 59 children](#), you are not alone in your desire to find information that can make home relocation easier. The need to keep your child or family member on the autism spectrum on a routine remains just as important — possibly even more so — when you move from one home to another. Fortunately, a wealth of resources are designed with families like yours in mind. This guide highlights ways to plan and execute the transition to your new home.

Preparing for the Move

Introduce the topic

First and foremost, it is imperative that you talk about the move with your family member on the autism spectrum ahead of time. Individuals on the autism spectrum need to be prepared for what is about to take place. Parents magazine advocates [plenty of advance notice](#): “Announce the news with enough warning. A few weeks may be all a younger child needs, but teenagers need a month or more to prepare mentally.”

Accentuate the positive

Do not be surprised if your family member does not immediately jump on board with the idea of the move. Those with autism like routine and familiarity, and a move upsets those things. Therefore, it is important for you to explain positive changes the move will bring. The National Autism Society suggests [pointing out benefits](#) of the move, such as bigger bedrooms, bigger yards to play in, or closer proximity to places your child likes to visit.

List places to look forward to

When discussing the upcoming move, take the time to describe the new places your child will enjoy. Tell your child about nearby parks and libraries that he or she will be able to visit frequently. Look for other places in your new location that you know your child will be excited to visit.

Create a visual schedule

Those on the autism spectrum also greatly benefit from a visual schedule of the moving process. Parents magazine suggests, “Make a [visual schedule of the moving process](#). Images that represent cleaning out, packing boxes, a moving truck, a drive and hotel stay, and unpacking will help give meaning to the word ‘moving.’ ” Mark your family calendar or your child’s personal calendar clearly with notations for the impending move.

Visit if possible

Next, if possible, visit the new home. Give your child the opportunity to see his or her new home before moving day. Allow your child to go inside the house and explore the surrounding area. If you are moving a great distance, take advantage of online tools such as [Google Earth](#) or videos of the home used by realtors to show your child his or her new home.

Explain what goes and what stays

Depending on the age of your loved one, you may have to explain what moves and what stays. [The Center for Autism Research](#) explains, “Similar to a very young child, a child with ASD may need to be told about what is actually moving with the family to the new house and what is staying behind. For example, the child’s bed and toys are going to be in the new house, but the bathtub is staying.” They suggest having children put stickers on items that want to move with them. If your child places a sticker on an item that stays, such as the toilet, it gives you the chance to explain why this item will not be moving with you.

Secure new information

Next, you need to cover the basics. For example, begin teaching your child his or her new address. You should also send records to the new school and doctors well in advance. In the busyness of the move, do not let these things fall to the side. Having important documents secured and prepared for the transfer is critical.

Read about moving

Finally, you can prepare your family member with autism for the big transition by reading books about moving. Reading children’s books together is a great way to help young people understand the moving process, with their simple explanations and illustrations. See Great Schools’ [7 Great Children’s Books About Moving](#) and Scholastic Parents’ [Planning a Move? Help Your Kids Get Settled with These Stories About Moving](#).

Use social stories

[Social stories](#) are a technique created by Carol Gray in 1991 to “help autistic people develop greater social understanding and stay safe” by providing “short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, [with] specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.” Given the upheaval a move can cause for your loved one with autism, using social stories is an effective way to prepare your child for the move.

Here are some tips for using social stories to help your child with the upcoming transition:

- Introduce a social story approximately four weeks before the move.
- Help your loved one picture the new location by showing photos of the home, their room, the neighborhood, their school.
- Include pictures of the moving truck.
- Include pictures of the packing boxes.
- Consider adding in a new home layout.

- Add maps to help orient them. The National Autism Society suggests, “[Mark the house](#) and other important landmarks on [a map], such as their school, the park, grandma's house, friends' houses and local shops.”
- Show pictures that illustrate the busyness of moving day so your child can expect the chaos and mess of unpacking.
- Conclude the social story with photos of the new community.

Tips for Packing Up the House

When the time comes to start packing up the house, it is a good idea to get your child on the autism spectrum involved in the process. How much involvement your child can handle is largely determined by age. Allowing your child to sort items and label boxes will give him or her a sense of control that is sorely needed to help ease anxiety during a time when the routine is in upheaval.

Decorate boxes

Allow your child to decorate packing boxes with pictures of what's inside or what room they'll go in. Similar to using stickers to mark items he or she wants to make sure will move, allowing kids to pack and then make visual cues for which items are inside which boxes will help ease worries and fears.

Label boxes

Another wise thing to do is mark and label boxes clearly, so your child can find what he or she is looking for easily. For instance, once you arrive at your new home, you want to be able to quickly and easily locate the toy, or DVD your child has to have at that very minute to avoid a meltdown.

Pack your child's room last

It's a good idea to pack your child's room after all the other rooms. Parents magazine also suggests, “Pack favorite toys and comfort items last. Give kids a choice for what to keep unpacked until the last day.” This will give your child longer access to things that he or she needs to feel less anxious as moving day approaches.

Unpack your child's room first

In contrast, once you're in the new house, unpack your child's room first. The sooner your child's space feels familiar, the sooner he or she will feel safe and settled.



What to Do on Moving Day

Devise a safety plan

Your priority on moving day is everyone's safety; therefore, it is important to make a safety plan. For example, consider that many children with ASD tend to wander, and keep this in mind when moving into your new home. Your child will not know his or her new home or neighborhood, which makes the potential for wandering even more dangerous.

[Parents](#) recommends, “If your child with ASD is prone to climbing or wandering, keep in mind the height of stacked boxes and the likelihood of open doors and windows on moving day.” Likewise, you may want to consider having the alarm system installed and functional before you move in.

Give your child simple tasks

On moving day, let your child help by doing simple tasks. For example, have your child sweep rooms or make notes of which boxes have been packed. Pathfinders for Autism reminds parents, “If your child is sensory-seeking, [allow him to help](#) lift and move heavy boxes. For some, this physical pressure helps create a calming sensation.” Ultimately, your child’s involvement in moving day will depend on their age and ability.

Let your child miss the move

Alternatively, you could make a plan for your child to be somewhere else. For some individuals with ASD, the chaos of moving day is simply too much. If this is the case, it likely would be better for them not to be involved in the moving process. Have a trusted caretaker keep your child on moving day, instead.

Create a comfort kit

You also can collect comfort items like toys, small books, or even electronics in a bag and keep it on hand for whenever your child needs them. In addition to comfort items, you can also add some of your child’s favorite foods to the kit.

Ask for help

It is also wise to ask a trusted friend or family member for help on moving day. Whether you are paying movers or relying on help from family and friends to move you in, you will still need an extra set of eyes to help keep an eye on your child. This is especially important for families with a child on the autism spectrum who tends to wander. This helper can watch and entertain your child, and help keep them away from potential hazards and unsettling chaos.

Take breaks

Finally, take breaks as needed. Moving day is bound to be stressful, so be sure to give yourself and your family breaks often. Keep in mind that while moving day is challenging for you, it is especially challenging for your family member with ASD.

By stopping and taking breaks to eat or do something like fun (such as going out for pizza and games), your child will feel more at ease. As Pathfinders for Autism points out, “Yes, it may add a bit to your moving time, but [breaks most likely take up less time than meltdowns](#).”

Feeling Safe in Your New Home

In addition to making sure your home is safe for your child by installing alarm systems and locks, there are other things you must be on the lookout for in your new neighborhood. For example, look for potential safety issues such as high fences, pools, ponds, and other bodies of water.

Beware of hazards

As the Center for Autism Research discusses, “Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) sometimes seem particularly drawn to all kinds of water [...] Children with ASD may even leave the house looking for water simply because they like it, and, during times of stress, children with ASD may seek out water sources to calm themselves.” If your new home has access to water hazards, see CAR’s [Tips for Water Safety](#).

One way to make your child and yourself feel safe in your new home is to observe the neighborhood and identify potential hazards. For instance, walk through the neighborhood with your child, making note of landmarks and safety hazards. Clearly explain the dangers of each potential hazard to your child.

Meet your neighbors

Additionally, take time to meet your neighbors and introduce your child. Make your new neighbors aware that your child is on the autism spectrum, and let them know any other pertinent information (such as whether your child has a tendency to wander). Provide your neighbors with your contact information, and tell them what you would like them to do if they see your child in need. Most likely, your neighbors will be willing to look out for your child if they are simply made aware of his or her needs.

Helping Your Child Cope with the Move

Parents should anticipate the move being difficult on their child with ASD. Moving means changing their comfortable routines and rearranging all that is familiar. However, as the National Autistic Society explains, “You may not notice [behavioral changes](#) immediately, but weeks after the move.” This will vary from one individual to the next. The best thing you as parents can do is be understanding of the fact that moving is not easy for your child — and begin by recognizing the challenges your child will face and try to respond accordingly.

Re-establish the routine

For example, try as hard as you can to keep your child’s routine as close to the same as possible. For example, while you are in a new house, look for opportunities to stick to the usual routine such as when and what your child eats.

Organize and familiarize

Likewise, set up your child’s bedroom in a way that is familiar. As the Center for Autism Research explains, “[Organization and structure](#) will help your child to feel safer and settled and perhaps result in fewer meltdowns.”

Plan for triggers and reactions

Also, you should be cognizant of other potential triggers and have a plan for dealing with them when they occur. Here are a few examples of challenges your child may face upon moving:

- **Overstimulation** – If your child appears overstimulated, have them take a break and step away from the item or the situation, or have a caregiver take your child elsewhere.
- **Sensory seeking** – If your child is sensory seeking, let them lift or push something heavy and use their muscles.
- **Anxiety** – If your child seems to be struggling with anxiety, look for ways to reassure them. Make use of the comfort kit you have put together that contains familiar items. You may also want to play a favorite movie or music.
- **Sadness** – Try to make the moving process fun for your child and focus on positives. However, it is also important to help your child to identify this feeling of sadness and explain that it is okay to feel sad about moving.

Hazards – Look for safety issues in the new neighborhood (such as ponds). Spend time talking to your child about any potential hazards in your new home or community. You must also make sure all adults are aware. To help you handle hazards in your new home, use safety devices such as GPS trackers, alarms, and door locks.

Anticipate and invest in safety

In order to help your child safely adjust to your new home and environment, you should consider their personal needs. For instance, if your child with ASD does tend to wander, you should invest in safety products such as door alarm systems that will help you cope with these tendencies.

Similarly, Autism Speaks has a [Guide to Safety Products and Services](#) that can be useful, especially during a move. For example, the guide lists information about where to purchase wearable identification like arm bands and smart technology apps like [ICE4Autism](#).



Settling into Your New Home

Once the moving truck has departed and the boxes have been unpacked, it is time to settle in and begin making your new house feel like a home. Since you have a child on the autism spectrum, you will need to anticipate their struggling with aspects of the new house here and there. Therefore, it is important to take a broad view of settling in.

Make things seem familiar

Begin by making the surroundings as familiar as possible. Your child most likely struggles with change, as most children with ASD need unchanging routines. Therefore, try to do things in your new house the same way you did in your previous home. For instance, arrange rooms the same way wherever possible. This will feel familiar to your child and will help them settle in sooner.

Return to routine

Likewise, you want to return and stick to your routine as much as possible. While things will naturally be different in your new space, there are many things that can stay the same, such as bedtime and mealtime routines. These will help your child cope with the bigger changes taking place.

Cook a favorite meal

Nothing says home like home-cooked food, so aim to cook your child's favorite meal soon after moving into your new home. This comforting gesture will be well received by your family in what seems to be a time of disturbance.

Notice small changes

Keep in mind that your child with ASD may struggle with smaller changes than larger ones. The National Autistic Society explains, "Bigger changes may not affect some autistic people as much as [small and subtle changes](#). For example, the fact that the front door is different, the light switches are not where they are used to be, or they can hear strange noises may affect them."

Bring back familiar sensations

Parents may want to try to recreate familiar sounds and smells. For instance, if your child is used to sleeping with a sound machine, this tool also should be used in the new home. Or, if your child is used to hearing certain sounds at night that do not exist in your new home, such as street traffic, try a sound machine to recreate those familiar noises.

Give your child time

It is wise — and necessary — for parents to give their child time to adjust. Go slow. Recognize that the moving process is overwhelming, and your kid needs to take it one step at a time. This is not the time to give your child more to do; it's time to lighten the load. For example, although routine is important, this may be a time when you don't enforce daily chores. Your child may have a hard enough time simply coping with the move without trying to do anything extra.

Connect with old friends

You also can help ease the transition and help your child settle into the new home by encouraging them to stay in touch with old friends. With technology today, it is easier than ever for kids to stay connected to their friends, even if they move away. As Pathfinders for Autism explains, "Being able to [share their new experiences with old friends](#) can be a form of transitional therapy."

Meet new friends

Similarly, you can also help your child settle into your new home by scheduling playdates with new neighbors. This will help both you and your child connect with others in your new home. You will both need community support, and by actively pursuing relationships with others in your new home, you will feel more supported. Additionally, if you can set up playdates with children who will attend the same school as your child, it will make the transition to a new school easier for your child.

Find a babysitter

For many parents, one of the most important "settling in" tasks is finding the perfect babysitter for their child. Whether you're a working parent or one who just needs help a few times a month, finding a babysitter who is capable of taking care of and loving your child with ASD is important. And you never know when you will need someone in an emergency. Ask your new neighborhood friends for recommendations and check sites like [Care.com](#) to find babysitters in your area.

Making Connections

No matter where you move, you will need to make connections to survive. As the proverb goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." As a parent of a child on the autism spectrum, you no doubt have seen the beauty in connecting with others who live similar lives. Finding other parents who are going through what you are going through makes life so much easier.

Build a network

Look for opportunities to build your personal support network. For example, meet your neighbors. Look for fellow parents in your child's new school to build a connection. If you are moving to a new city or state, consider joining a local meetup such as [Moms Club International](#) to help you build a support network for yourself and your child. Meetup groups are great places to find other parents and arrange playdates.

Have your child join a group

When it comes to making connections, you should also look for ways to connect your kid to his or her new community. For example, sign your kid up for a local Scouts program or a sports league. These are great ways to get involved and build relationships.

Ask for recommendations

By connecting with other parents, you will have people to ask for recommendations such as the best doctors, hair stylists, and more. These relationships will go a long way in making your new community feel like home. Both you and your child will feel more secure when you know others are looking out for you.

Find support locally

In addition, you should look for local autism support groups and advocacy organizations to connect with other families facing similar challenges. Here are just a few resources that can help you connect with other ASD families in your new community:

The [National Autism Association](#) has chapters all across the country.

[Yellow Pages for Kids](#) is a resource to help parents find educational consultants, psychologists, educational diagnosticians, health care providers, academic therapists, tutors, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, coaches, advocates, and attorneys for children with disabilities, as well as special education schools, learning centers, treatment programs, parent groups, respite care, community centers, grassroots organizations, and government programs for children with disabilities.

[Autism Speaks](#) publishes listings of autism-friendly events. Join a local [Autism Speaks chapter](#) and search for an event in your new location.

[My Autism Team](#) is an online social network for parents of kids with autism.

Search Facebook and other social media using keywords like “Autism support group near me” to find local autism support groups.

Moving with an IEP

If your child is school-aged when you move, you will have to also deal with easing the transition to a new school. As a parent, this also means you have some additional work to do.

Research new schools

For example, it is important for parents to research schools before the move to make sure the school your child will be attending is capable of meeting your child’s needs. Unfortunately, not all schools offer the same services to students.

Compare services available

As the Center for Autism Research explains, “When you move to a new school district, your child is [not necessarily guaranteed the same services](#) he or she was receiving. If your family moves during the school year, the new school district must provide services comparable to those in the previous district’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) until the district has time to adopt the existing IEP or develop a new one. The new school does not need to provide identical services, but it does have to try to provide similar ones.”

Learn new requirements

However, if you are moving to a new state, your child may need to have a new evaluation done. This may need to be done in order to develop a new IEP. This also means there is a possibility you may discover the state does not have the same special education eligibility requirements. Therefore, it is important for parents to keep important documents from their child’s school, counselor, and doctors secure during the move.

Visit the new school

If your child is transferring schools, it is important to schedule visits to the school and appointments to meet with the school counselor prior to the move. This will help your child anticipate the change and prepare. It will also give the school the opportunity to prepare for a new student and find comparable services.

Similarly, the Center for Autism Research provide a great example of a [social story about going to a new school](#) that you may find useful in preparing your child with ASD for this additional adjustment. Like the social story that was suggested for the big move, this is a visual tool designed for children with autism to identify the changes to come at a new school.

Embrace the New

Moving can be overwhelming for anyone, but it is especially challenging to individuals on the autism spectrum who depend on routine and structure. With the right preparation and tools, though, you can help your child cope with the move and embrace the new. As parents look for ways to prepare their child in advance, the child will become more capable of coping with new changes. Using clear explanations and social stories, re-establishing routines, and giving children a sense of control, parents can ease their child's fears and anxieties.

Before long, your new house will be a home with similar routines to your old ones. Give your child time to adjust to this "new normal." Don't expect it to be easy, but do expect it to be possible. And, in the midst of the chaos, choose to embrace change bravely and smile in the face of fear. Your child will follow your example.

STRENGTHS OF STUDENTS WITH ASD!!



Published online at: <https://www.sleepjunkie.org/autism-and-sleep>

The Ultimate Guide to Helping Children With Autism Sleep Soundly at Night



It can be difficult for children with autism and other special needs to fall asleep and stay asleep at night. Those lost hours of slumber not only take a toll on the children – who may be more irritable and prone to behavior problems – but also on their bleary-eyed parents. If you are struggling to help your child “power down” or relax at night, you are not alone.

Just how far-reaching is the problem? Research has found that **40 to 80 percent of people on the autism spectrum struggle to sleep**. These problems include waking early in the morning, waking frequently at night, not being able to fall asleep at night, sleeping for only short periods, daytime sleepiness, and irregular or erratic sleep patterns. Many parents report that their children with autism struggle with bedtime meltdowns, inability to sleep in a bed, frequent night terrors, nighttime wandering or sleepwalking, and even binge eating at night. All of these behaviors add up to lack of sleep for the entire family.

Children, both neurotypical and those with special needs, need sufficient sleep to grow and develop. The National Sleep Foundation recommends that toddlers (between the ages of one and two) sleep 11 to 14 hours a day, including nap times. As they progress into the preschool years (ages three to five), the need drops to 10 to 13 hours per day, which may be divided between nighttime sleep and nap time. Between ages six and 13, children need nine to 11 hours of sleep per day, without naps.

In a household with a child who has **sleep concerns**, those numbers may seem out of reach. Nighttime wakefulness and **lack of sleep** can lead to more meltdowns and behavior challenges for the special-needs child and increased irritability and stress for the whole family. Parents and children who do not get enough sleep are at higher risk for illness because sleep is critical for the immune system.

So why do so many children with autism or special needs struggle to sleep well? Research is ongoing, but there are a number of potential causes. Some of these include:

Abnormal circadian rhythms. The circadian rhythm is the body's natural sleep cycle. In children with sensory processing differences, including children with autism, this can be disrupted. In other words, children with autism may not naturally get sleepy when it is dark and wake up when it is light.

Not perceiving social cues. Many elements of sleep hygiene are based on social cues. Observable changes like going upstairs, turning off lights, or seeing siblings get ready for bed are subconscious signals that bedtime is near. However, many children with autism have vibrant inner worlds and may have difficulty perceiving or interpreting these external signals.

Anxiety or neurological conditions. If a child with special needs has additional neurological or mental health conditions, like anxiety or epilepsy, sleep struggles will be worse. This can include fears and racing or repetitive thoughts.

Physical discomfort. Children who suffer from reflux or constipation, but cannot express their medical need to a caregiver, may struggle to sleep.

Insufficient melatonin production. If the body does not naturally create melatonin, a hormone that signals sleep, the child will struggle to fall asleep.

Hypersensitive sensory system. A sensory system that is alert to all environmental factors can prohibit sleep when even the smallest change in the environment occurs. Dishwashers, air flow, squeaky doors, light leaks, or other household stimuli can be a problem.

Clearly, this is a complex challenge without a simple solution. That's why this guide includes more than 90 tips to help your family get more restful sleep. All children have unique needs, likes, and dislikes so it might take some trial and error to find the strategies that work for your son or daughter. But with some persistence, you can achieve better sleep for your special child and the rest of your family.

First Steps

Before you can start changing the home environment to encourage better sleep, you need to see if there are any medical factors that affect your child's sleep. If sleeplessness is due to a medical condition that is unrelated to the child's autism, then changing the home environment will do little good. A thorough medical evaluation and any recommendations from your child's doctor are important first steps.

Make an appointment with your child's doctor to determine if there are any medical issues that could be causing the sleeplessness. A thorough physical exam is the first step to take. Sometimes small medical issues, like bladder concerns, can keep a child with autism up at night.

Keep a sleep diary. Track your child's sleep patterns for at least a week. Note when and how long your child sleeps, how often your child gets up, and anything you notice like snoring, body position, unusual movements and so forth. (If your child will tolerate wearing a sleep-tracking device, it can provide detailed insights.) How does your child's behavior differ the day after sleeping well or sleeping poorly? Share the information with your doctor.

Consider a sleep study. A sleep study can rule out sleep apnea, breathing problems, or conditions like restless leg syndrome that could be making sleep difficult for your child. Keep in mind that a sleep study can be stressful for a child with autism, so talk to your child's doctor or therapist about how to best approach the study for the most positive experience.

Discuss light therapy with your doctor. When a child's circadian rhythms are out of balance, light therapy can help restore that natural balance. Light therapy uses light that is close to natural sunlight to help wake up your child's circadian rhythm. Sitting in this light for even just 30 minutes in the morning or early afternoon can help signal melatonin production and natural sleep in the evening.

For more information on the first steps to take in helping a child with autism or other special needs sleep, visit these resources:

[Seattle Children's Hospital: Autism and Sleep Problems](#)

[Raising Children: Sleep Problems – Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[American Pharmacists Association: Managing Insomnia in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Children's Hospital of Los Angeles: Sleep Issues and Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Spectrum: How to Get Children with Autism to Sleep](#)

Home Environment



Your child's home environment can set the stage for restful sleep when it is properly controlled. But it can also make sweet dreams elusive. Often, sensory issues in the home environment make it difficult for a child with special needs to slumber. These are some factors to consider.

Light

Control the lighting in the sleeping room. While every individual is different, most of the time a cool, dark, and quiet environment is the best sleep environment. Control the light in your child's bedroom or any other sleeping location to avoid overstimulation at bedtime.

Invest in blackout curtains. The body responds to darkness at sleep time. Blackout curtains can create a calming environment for sleep.

Reduce exposure to blue spectrum light in the hour before bedtime. Blue spectrum light, like the light from most technology devices, suppresses melatonin production. If your child is struggling to sleep, turn off electronics an hour before bedtime to reduce this effect.

Use blue light blocking glasses, if needed. Some children on the autism spectrum rely on screen-based technology for self-soothing and communication. In these instances, invest in blue light blocking glasses to use before bedtime. If your child won't tolerate glasses, consider a filter or film for the device.

Use a red-hued bulb if a nightlight is needed. Many children, regardless of their neurological differences, need a nightlight. Red-hued light does not impact circadian rhythms, so opt for this type of nighttime light if needed.

Address Noises

Pay attention to the ambient sounds in your home, which may be amplified for your sensory sensitive child. If you can identify noises like creaking doors, footfalls, and even the sound of your dishwasher, take measures to reduce them at bedtime. Keeping the entire household as quiet as possible after your child goes to bed is going to be helpful as you encourage healthy sleep habits. Don't forget to notice and address sounds that may come from outside your home too.

Add carpeting to hardwood flooring. This will reduce the sound of footsteps in your home when people who are not sleeping walk around.

Oil squeaky hinges. This is a simple, yet effective, way to reduce ambient noise in your home so your child may have an easier time sleeping.

Seal windows to block outdoor noises. If you notice outdoor noises, see if you can make changes to your windows to block them. Sealing the windows or upgrading to sound-reducing windows can help.

Add insulation to mute outdoor noises. If your child's bedroom has significant outdoor noise, consider adding a layer of insulation between the room and any outdoor areas.

Invest in a quality white noise machine. A white noise machine can mask ambient sounds, if your child tolerates it.

Reduce the use of technology in other areas of the home. Nothing will make a sound-sensitive child have trouble sleeping quite as quickly as the sound of someone enjoying a television program from another room of the home. Reduce the use of technology while you are encouraging your child to go to sleep.

Block doorway light. The light coming in through the doorway to your child's room can create sleep disturbances. If you cannot close the door and use a towel to block light coming in underneath, place the bed so that it does not face the doorway.

Address Smells

Recognize that odors can be very stimulating to children with sensory concerns. Research has found that individuals with autism have a heightened sense of smell. If your child can smell something in the room, sleep may be a battle.

Remove items that have a strong smell or the potential to off-gas a smell. Remember, even if the smell is pleasant to you or unnoticeable to you, it may be difficult for a child with autism to tolerate. Watch out for volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, that can make sensory problems worse.

Consider diffusing calming aromatherapy oils to help with sleep. Use caution here, because every child with sensory concerns is unique, and overpowering essential oils can do more harm than good, but many children on the autism spectrum benefit from essential oils like lavender, sandalwood, and frankincense as part of their bedtime routines.

Address Textures

Recognize that textures can be a major factor in preventing comfortable sleep. If your child is struggling to sleep, take a look at the textures in the sleep environment – from the sheets to the clothing your child wears and even the firmness of the mattress.

Choose soft, loose-fitting, tag-less clothing. Clothing that is too rough or restrictive will make sleep difficult. Choose pajamas without tags, which can be irritating to those with sensory concerns.

Use a supportive, comfortable mattress. Mattresses that are too saggy, have springs the child can feel, or are too hard can make sleep difficult.

Add a weighted blanket. Sleeping with a weighted blanket can increase serotonin production, which in turn contributes to calm in the body. A calm body is able to sleep more effectively. Choose a weight appropriate for your child's age and size. Toddlers and preschoolers need a 5-8 -pound blanket. Elementary aged children need a 10-12 pound blanket. Middle school children need a 15-20 pound blanket, and a teenager or adult needs one that is between 20 and 25 pounds.

Climate Control

Ensure the bedroom has ample airflow. Stagnant air can be uncomfortable for children with sensory concerns, and it can also harbor allergens and scents. If airflow is not natural in the room, use a fan to keep it moving.

Keep the temperature cool. No one can sleep easily when they are hot, but it is particularly difficult for children with autism to succumb to sleep if the temperature is too high. Add a weighted blanket, and they may need the room to be cooler than you think. Try lowering the thermostat, and adding an additional blanket to your own bed if needed.

Additional Concerns

Check the room for allergens. Dust, mold, mildew, and pet dander, which can hide in stuffed animals and even in an old mattress, are sometimes factors that make it difficult for children to sleep.

Consider changing the bedroom paint color. Certain paint colors encourage healthier sleep, so consider repainting your child's room. Opt for sensory calming colors, like blue or gray. Avoid brown, purple, or red, which can hinder sleep. Make sure you use an odor-free, low-VOC paint to reduce problems.

For more information, visit:

[Harkla: 10 Bedroom Ideas for Kids with Autism](#)

[Hunker: How to Design Bedrooms for Autistic Children](#)

[Dreams: How to Create the Perfect Sleep Environment for Your Child](#)

Nutrition



What you put into your body is as important in your sleep as what you put into your room. When it comes to children with autism, nutrition is often a critical part of a good bedtime routine. This can be particularly challenging for parents, as many children on the autism spectrum are highly particular about what they will or will not eat. Keeping your child's unique needs in mind, consider these tips as you look to reduce food-based sleep problems.

Keep your child's diet caffeine-free. For a child with heightened sensitivities, like a child with autism, simply avoiding caffeine before bed may not be enough. You will want to avoid caffeine as much as possible. In addition to the obvious culprits like sodas and coffee drinks, watch for caffeine in chocolate, tea, energy drinks, and coffee-flavored food. You may even find caffeine hiding in snack bars.

Stop eating an hour before bedtime. Eating is a highly stimulating experience for the senses, so stop eating before bedtime to ensure your child is not over stimulated.

Consider an early bedtime snack. There is a benefit to giving your child a snack before bed, as long as it is not too close to bedtime. A small snack that includes protein and complex carbs can keep your child from waking due to hunger or low blood sugar problems. When choosing a snack, avoid sugary foods, including fruits, which can make sleep more difficult.

Increase the intake of omega-3 fats. Research has shown that children with autism often have lower levels of these important fatty acids. Studies have shown that increasing them, even through supplements if necessary, can impact sleep patterns positively, helping children sleep better.

Consider if your child has a food sensitivity. This is something you will need to discuss with your child's doctor or dietitian, but sometimes food sensitivities, like sensitivities to dairy, can make it difficult to sleep.

Avoid gas-inducing foods before bedtime. Your child may not be able to communicate stomach discomfort but avoiding foods known to cause gas can help reduce tummy complaints when it's time for bed. Some culprits include peas, lentils, cabbage, broccoli, beans, mushrooms, carbonated drinks, and cauliflower. Whole grains and fatty foods can also be a concern.

Reduce sugar intake. Sugar is stimulating. A sugar-heavy diet can make sleep difficult. Work to reduce the amount of sugar your child eats throughout the day, and especially with dinner and after dinner.

Avoid acidic foods if you suspect your child suffers from reflux. Tomato products, garlic, onions, spicy foods, citrus fruits, and fruit juices can all make acid reflux worse, and when your child lays down to sleep the stomach acid can be quite painful.

For more information about the connection between diet and sleep, visit:

[Vanderbilt University: Strategies to Improve Sleep in Autistic Children](#)

[Food for the Brain: About Autism](#)

[Indiana University: Mealtime and Children on the Autism Spectrum – Beyond Picky, Fussy and Fads](#)

[National Sleep Foundation: Food and Drink Promote a Good Night's Sleep](#)

[National Institutes of Health: Effects of Diet on Sleep Quality](#)

Sleep Hygiene – The “Don’ts”



Hygiene is important in all areas of life, including sleep. **Sleep hygiene** refers to the practices you tackle every day to prepare yourself for sleep. For a child with autism or another sensory need, poor sleep hygiene can be derailing all your hard work in setting up a good sleep environment and controlling your child's diet. Here's a closer look at what you should not do as you prepare for your child's sleep each night.

Avoid rowdy and active play in the two hours before bedtime. Children with sensory concerns take longer to relax and rest than children who are neurotypical. Choose calming activities to help your child wind down.

Don't rely on technology to help your child relax. It's tempting to give your child a tablet or a movie during the wind-down time, but don't give in. You need to limit all technology at least one hour before bedtime to encourage proper melatonin production.

Avoid disrupting the nighttime routine. Life happens, and you may not be able to avoid disruptions forever, but try not to disrupt the nighttime routine with your child as much as possible.

Don't surprise your child at bedtime. Surprises are hard for children with autism, as they need time to process new information. Avoid changes or surprises in the hours leading up to bedtime.

Don't do homework right before bed. Homework can be distressing or stimulating. Aim to finish it early in the evening, and not right before bed. Work with your child's teacher to ensure that homework you cannot complete early can be completed at a different time.

Resist getting into your child's bed or rocking your child to sleep. These habits can actually create too much stimulation and can be difficult to break. Encourage your child to learn to fall asleep without you.

For more information, visit:

[Penn State: Examining Sleep Hygiene Factors and Sleep in Young Children With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
[Research Gate: Sleep, Chronotype, and Sleep Hygiene in Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Controls](#)

[Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre: The Influence of Bedding and Sleep Hygiene Factors on Sleep in Children Aged 2-5 Years](#)

[University of Southern Mississippi: The Relation Among Sleep, Routines, and Behavior in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Autism Awareness Centre, Inc.: Sleep Baby Sleep – Bedtime Tip for Those With Autism](#)

Sleep Hygiene – the “Do’s”



While there are things you should avoid when preparing your child for bed, there are some things you should do to make the process easier. Here are the healthy sleep habits that can help children with autism and sensory disorders get healthy sleep.

Establish and stick to routines and rituals. Create a nighttime ritual that rarely changes. This may include baths, stories, tooth brushing, changing, and tucking in. Choose activities that seem to help your child calm down, but do not stimulate your child too much.

Use a visual schedule to help your child know what is coming next. Visual schedules use pictures to show your routine, step by step, so your child can navigate the evening successfully.

Start your routine 20 to 40 minutes before the actual bedtime. This will help signal your child’s natural sleep cycle and encourage your child to start winding down.

Perform a massage or a back rub. This can help soothe your child. Start at the neck and slowly massage down to the base of the spine using slow, rhythmic strokes to create a calming experience. Make this part of your bedtime routine if your child responds well to it.

Do wake your child up at the same time every morning. Just like a routine bedtime is important, waking your child at the same time every morning is also helpful.

Do insist on having the same room be the room for sleep, as much as possible. Making the room itself part of the sleep routine will help encourage healthy sleep habits.

Do use the bed primarily for sleeping, not other activities. This will help your child associate the bed with bedtime, not homework or play time.

Make your nighttime routine short and efficient. Dragging this process out will not help your child sleep well. Keep it short and sweet!

For more information about healthy sleep hygiene for individuals with autism, visit:

[Autism Community Training: Solving Sleep Problems in Children with ASD](#)

[NYU Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: 5 Strategies to Help Your Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder Get Some Sleep](#)

[Child Mind Institute: Encouraging Good Sleep Habits](#)

[Happy Sleep Head: Sleep Guide for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Parent to Parent: Sleep Hygiene](#)

Get Creative



What can you do if these methods do not work for your child? One of the key truths about autism is that it affects each person uniquely, and what works for one may not work for the next. Sometimes, parents, who know their children well, must get creative. Here are some unique solutions that may help make sleep more peaceful in your home.

Give your child a bedtime pass. A bedtime pass is a ticket your child can turn in if they feel they must get out of bed. It may be used for bathroom trips, drinks of water, parent visits, or anything the child deems necessary. This gives your child some measure of control at bedtime. Set up the bedtime pass so that it can only be used one time per night. The bedtime pass needs to be a tangible item that the child can turn in.

Create rewards for not using the bedtime pass. Total freedom is not a good idea when you're encouraging your child to sleep. Allow the use of the bedtime pass, but give your child an incentive if they choose not to use it.

Stick glow-in-the-dark star stickers to the ceiling. This can give your child something to look at or count while falling asleep, without adding too much brightness to the room. Also, because the stickers will lose their glow slowly, they can encourage further "winding down" for sleep.

Track your child's sleep with a wearable device. A fitness tracker can give you insights into how well your child is sleeping. Use one to track the quality of your child's sleep if you suspect a problem. If you notice that your child is not getting deep sleep, you can discuss your concerns with their doctor.

Use a sleep sack for further support. Children with autism may not be able to stay asleep if they kick off their covers. Use a sleep sack to help keep them covered and comfortable.

Invest in a visual clock or picture timer. Your child may not be able to remember times or tell time, but they can look at pictures. Try using picture clocks or timers to tell them when it is time to get up or when they have to stay in bed.

Use pictures on mom and dad's door. Put a picture on mom and dad's door that indicates whether or not your child with autism can come in. During the night, the picture could be a stop sign or a sleep-related image, then in the morning, it could flip over to show sunshine or an image that signals the day has already started. This will give your child a visual reminder of when mom and dad need to sleep, which can help with early morning wake-ups.

Elevate your child's mattress if you suspect stomach upset is preventing sleep. This can alleviate acid reflux and even gas, and is a simple solution to one common cause of autism sleep disturbances.

For more creative sleep solutions, visit:

[Autism Parent Magazine: Innovative Device May Help Your Child with Autism Sleep Better](#)

[Autism Support Network: Sleep and Autism – Helping Your Child](#)

[The Autism Analyst: Autism and Bedtime – How to Get a Good Night's Sleep](#)

[SpringerLink: An Assistive Sleeping Bag for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Epidemic Answers: Sleep Strategies for Autism, ADHD, SPD, and Other Developmental Delays](#)

Troubleshooting



Sometimes, no matter how careful you are, you will run into problems with sleep. It is simply part of raising a child with special needs. If you find consistent problems, then it is time to employ some troubleshooting techniques. Here are common problems you may face, and a few ideas to address them:

Child Won't Go to or Stay Asleep

Practice a fading parental presence. When children with autism have trouble falling and staying asleep, leaving them to cry it out is not going to work well. It is simply too much anxiety for a child with autism to handle. A better solution is to practice what is known as a fading parental presence. Place a chair next to the child's bed, and sit in it so your child can see you while falling asleep. Gradually move the chair each night until you are no longer needed in the room.

Avoid the temptation to rock or hold your child if he wakes. This will make it harder for your child to learn to self-soothe. You will need to attend to your child if he wakes up, but try to keep interactions minimal so your child does not rely on you to go to sleep.

When your child wakes, go into the room and help her soothe, but do not pick her up. Patting the back or simply being in the room can sometimes be sufficient. The key is to teach the child to handle the self-soothing independently of you.

Gradually start leaving your child with an explanation that you will return to check on him. Eventually, your child may learn to fall asleep independently of your presence.

Children who Wander

Install door alarms on all outside doors that are loud enough to wake you at night. This will protect your child should he try to leave the house when wandering at night, which is a very serious risk.

Use child-proof door handles. This may not work for all children with autism, as many are quite good at figuring out childproof locks and puzzles, but it is a strategy to try.

Add a secure, lockable baby gate at the top and bottom of all staircases. Again, this will add another barrier, both physical and visual, to protect your child.

Make sure potential hazards within the home are stored out of sight and out of reach. The knives, cleaning supplies, and other household hazards need to be stored somewhere your child cannot access. It is important that this storage location also is out of sight, so your child does not try to access it.

Cover all electrical outlets. A wandering child at night can cause an electrical fire playing with outlets.

Anchor your furniture. Should your child try to climb furniture while you are sleeping, anchors are a critical safety mechanism.

Gently lead your child back to bed if you catch her wandering. Many of these tips are designed to protect your child if you are unaware of the wandering. If you see the child wandering, gently lead her back to bed, repeating the process until you have established sleep again.

Consider a GPS tracker. A wearable GPS tracker worn at bedtime will give you peace of mind if your child does wander in spite of your best intentions.

Children who Sleepwalk

In addition to the tips for wandering, for a sleepwalking child you will want to be aware that **your child is not awake**. They have no control over their behavior when sleepwalking.

Do not try to wake a sleepwalking child. Instead, lead the child back to bed and settle them in for sleep. Waking your child may cause them to become anxious, which will make it more difficult to get back to sleep.

If you cannot lead your child back to bed, consider taking them to the restroom. Many children, regardless of neurology, will sleepwalk when they need to use the restroom. Alleviating this need can help the child return to sleep.

Consider moving bedtime earlier. Sometimes children will sleepwalk because they are not going to bed early enough. Slowly easing the bedtime to an earlier time may help.

Night Snacking or Binge Eating

Consider putting childproof locks on the fridge and pantry to prevent your child from binge eating while you sleep. Binge or rapid eating is common among many children with autism or other special needs, and if you have made it clear this behavior is not appropriate, your child may engage in it after you have gone to bed. Since this has serious health risks, including obesity and the risk of aspirating, you need to prevent it with locked cabinets.

Make the kitchen and refrigerator inaccessible. It might not work with an open floor plan, but if possible, eliminate temptation by closing off the kitchen completely. Depending on your child's age, you might be able to use a baby gate, child proof door knob cover, or latch high on the door.

Night Terrors

Recognize that night terrors are more concerning for you as a parent than your child. Night terrors involve crying and screaming at night as if in distress, but are not something the child remembers. Unlike a nightmare, night terrors have little repercussion for your child.

Soothe your child back to sleep, but avoid waking them fully. A night terror is hard to watch, but if you can simply soothe your child back to sleep without waking them fully, watching to ensure they are not injured when thrashing, you may be able to salvage the rest of the night.

Avoid daytime sensory overload to reduce night terrors. Children with autism may suffer more night terrors if they experience sensory overload during the day, so work to reduce sensory input, especially in the hours before bedtime.

Talk to your doctor if night terrors persist. Since children with autism are more prone to experiencing anxiety, you will need to talk to your doctor if these behaviors persist.

For more help troubleshooting sleep problems, visit:

[Mayo Clinic: Sleep Terrors Diagnosis & Treatment](#)

[Autism Alliance of Michigan: Help with a 19-Year-Old with ASD who Does Not Sleep at Night](#)

[Car Autism Roadmap: How Common Is Sleep Disturbance in Children with ASD?](#)

[CentralReach: Resolving Sleep Issues with Children on the Autism Spectrum](#)

Tips for Changing Routine



Once you establish a good routine for bedtime, it seems that life will throw change at you. Family vacation, adding a new sibling, or even just moving to a new home can hurt your child's sleep routines. Change is difficult for all children, but it can derail an autistic child's routines and impact all the progress you have made for sleep. Here are some tips to help manage the changes that life inevitably brings:

When you need to adjust to a new bed or bedroom, practice desensitization. Desensitization strives to gradually introduce an unfamiliar space. Start with allowing your child to use the room for non-sleeping activities. Then, use it for nap time. Then, move his bedding into it, but allow him to sleep elsewhere if needed. Eventually, as your child realizes the exposures have no negative side effects, he will embrace the new space.

Bring comforts from home when traveling. It's not possible to desensitize your child when traveling, so bring as many comforts from home as possible. Your own bedding, for example, will feel and smell like home, and that may help sleep to happen.

Use a sound machine and fan when traveling. Airflow and ambient noises are problems when you are on vacation and staying in a hotel, so bring supplies from home to help with these common issues.

Use social stories to help your child prepare for the change. Social stories break down what is about to happen into easily digested pieces with pictures, and many children with autism respond well to them.

Pack a go-to bedtime box when moving house. It may not be possible to have your child's new bedroom set up completely in your new house when you need to move, so pack a box with the bedtime supplies that make bedtime easier for you, like stuffed animals, sound machines, and bedding. Use as much as you can from your old house as you establish bedtime in your new house.

Keep as much routine as possible the same. Even when traveling or when moving to a new home or new bedroom, keep your bedtime routine in place as much as possible.

Move bedtimes gradually. If you find that you need to adjust a bedtime either later or earlier, do so gradually. Change the time in 5 or 10-minute increments until you have arrived at the new, preferred time.

Understand that new additions to the house will disrupt bedtime routines. Adding a sibling or a pet to your home may disrupt your child's sleep cycles. Though it will feel like you are starting over, you need to be aware that these changes are huge to a child with autism. Be patient and work to reestablish the good sleep hygiene habits you have had in place.

Keep a new sibling or pet out of the child's sleep space. The addition of pet dander or the introduction of a new sibling can make the bedroom feel different, which will impact sleep. Keep these new additions out of your child's bedroom until she has had time to adjust to them being part of the family.

For more help with changes in routine and a child with autism, visit:

[Special Learning, Inc.: Negative Response to a Disruption of Routine](#)

[National Autistic Society: Preparing for Change](#)

[Seattle Children's Hospital: Autism and Dealing with Change](#)

[Indiana University Bloomington: Change Is Good! Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum when Introducing Novelty](#)

Conclusion

Sleep concerns are a major issue for children on the autism spectrum and their parents. Sleep deprivation can disrupt family dynamics and make living life with sensory differences an even greater challenge, but restful sleep can lead to a peaceful home environment. Children with autism, because of their unique neurology, will struggle to sleep, but parents can help. With these tips and strategies, and a patient, loving approach to the sleep problem, parents can guide their children into healthy, restful sleep, which will benefit the entire family.



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Keeping Your Child with Autism Safe

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A Recent study by the American Journal of Public Health examined national mortality data and found that individuals with a diagnosis of autism died on average 35.8 years younger than individuals in the general population. Their research also found that the difference in deaths caused by injury was almost as striking.

Most parents place their children's safety as a top priority as a rule. But for parents of children with autism, the reality is that it can be even more difficult to keep your children safe from themselves and others simply because of the nature of their disorder. However, parents of children with autism should not live in constant fear: there are tips parents and caregivers of kids with autism can follow to make sure they stay safe.

Characteristics of Autism

A U T I S M

Persons with autism may possess the following characteristics in various combinations and in varying degrees of severity.



Image via Autism Society

People with ASDs (autism spectrum disorders) share some symptoms, such as difficulty with social interaction, and their brains process information differently than those of unaffected people. Children with ASDs may exhibit a common set of characteristics that naturally make them more susceptible to danger. For instance, people with ASDs commonly have no real fear of dangers and an apparent insensitivity to pain. An inappropriate response—or no response at all—to sound is another common characteristic that could open the door to danger.

Scientists do not yet know the cause of ASDs. According to the [CDC](#), ASDs occur in people of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. While it is estimated that autism affects 1 in 88 children, boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to be affected by autism; in fact, the number of boys affected by autism is 1 in 54, compared to 1 in 252 girls. And, [Autism Speaks](#) points out that the prevalence of autism is not just growing: it is “the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the United States.”

Estimated Autism Prevalence 2018

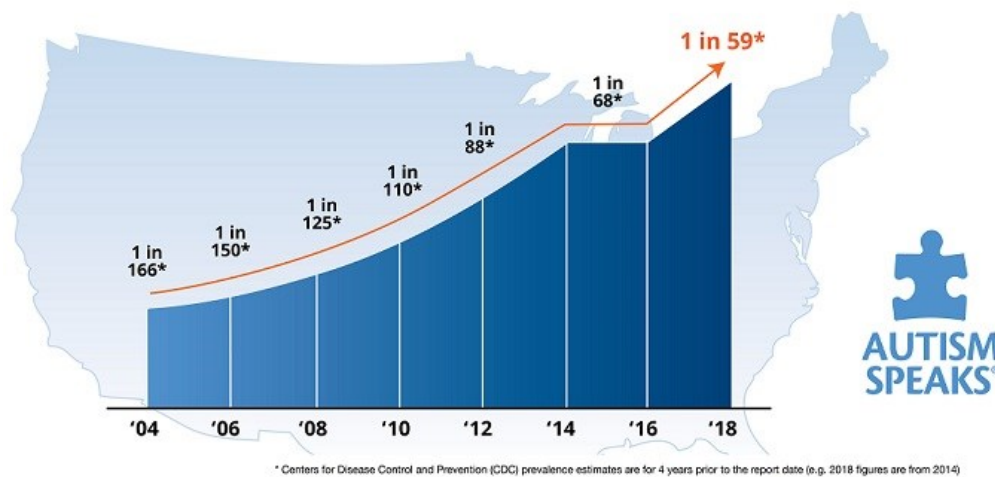


Image via [Autism Speaks](#)

Keeping all children safe is important. But, keeping children with autism safe becomes even more of a priority because of their social, communication, and behavioral challenges.

5 Tips for Creating a Safety Plan

Autism Speaks recommends that parents of children with autism create [safety plans](#), and there are some basic tips to keep in mind when creating those plans for your child with autism.

1) Include family and community members who come into daily contact with your child with autism. Keep in mind school personnel, daycare providers, neighbors, extended family, etc. Make sure you have contacted each person and discussed your most pressing concerns about your child's safety.

- 2) Think about all of the places in which your child needs to be protected. This probably includes home, school, friends' homes, community centers, etc. Then, be sure to evaluate them for safety and to put preventative measures into place in each area. It is especially important to remember to include safety skills in your child's Individual Education Program (IEP) in your school district.
- 3) Consider the top safety risks for individuals with autism: wandering, pica (the tendency to eat or crave substances other than normal food), drowning, and household toxins. Take the necessary precautions for safeguarding your child against these safety risks and practice safety skills with your child other family members.
- 4) Give your child a form of identification with contact names and numbers listed. Make sure your child always wears or carries this identification, especially because wandering could be a concern. Or, purchase a child locator and clip it to your child's shoe, belt, etc.
- 5) Contact your local communications center, police department, and/or 911 call center to communicate your concerns and safety plan with the appropriate officials. Remember, you are your child's best safety advocate.

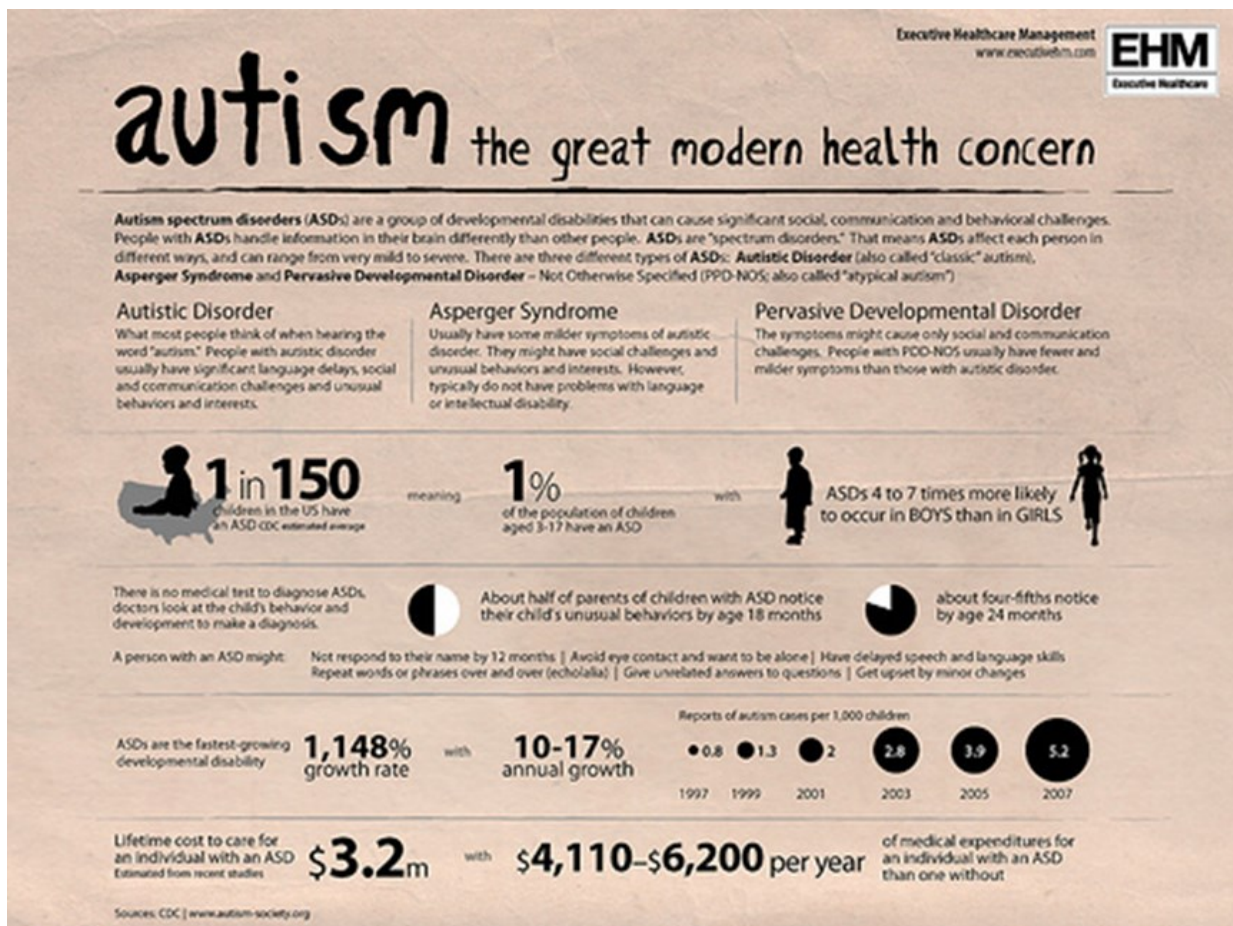


Image via GDS Infographics

Safety at Home

The home can be a very dangerous place for any young child, but it can be even more dangerous for your child with autism. The difference is that the safety measures and precautions most parents implement for very young children may need to be in place for a much longer period of time for children with autism. Consider this checklist to keep your child with autism safe at home

- **Furniture** – Secure especially top-heavy furniture to the wall with furniture brackets or safety straps. Don't forget that some electronics also may be heavy or easily pulled over by your child, so use items such as TV safety straps.
- **Cleaning products** – All cleaning products should be locked in a safe location. You may want to put them in a locked area in the garage or basement, so they are not in the main living space of your home.
- **Freezers** – If you own a chest-style freezer, keep it locked at all times. Storing the key in a safe place where your child cannot access it is a good idea.
- **Doors** – Key locks may be enough for some children affected by autism, but you may want to use door alarms to prevent your child from leaving your home without your knowledge. Again, remember to keep your keys in a place out of your child's reach. If your child has been known to wander (see the section on wandering below), you should use a child locator. There are several types available, especially online, but any you choose would help ease your mind about your wandering child.
- **Visitors** – As with any child, you should teach your child with autism the safety rules about opening the door to visitors, especially if he is home alone. The old safety rule of not opening the door to anyone when home alone is especially important for a child with autism who has a severe language or speech delay or who is completely nonverbal. One way to communicate this rule to your child with autism is to create a social storybook with pictures to help explain the rules.
- **Hot water** – Sometimes children with autism struggle with sensory challenges, so they may be more at risk for getting burned by hot water simply because they cannot feel hot and cold. One simple solution is to turn down the temperature on your hot water heater. If you have an older child with autism, you may want to practice turning on the hot water with the cold water. You may even put stickers on the hot water knob to remind your child that it is a potential danger to him. Don't forget to do this in the shower as well as on your sink faucets.
- **Fire** – As with all children, practicing for a house fire is an important safety measure. Some children with autism may become frightened of the loud alarms in your home, so you may want to purchase a smoke detector that records your voice rather than a traditional one. Another fire safety tip is to take your child to your local fire department so he can become familiar with the firemen and the gear they wear when they enter your home because some children with autism handle stressful situations better when they have experience with them beforehand, in a calmer setting.

- **Swimming Pools** – If you own a pool, fence it in and make sure your gates are self-closing and latch above your child's reach. Keep all pool toys and other interesting items out of the pool area when they are not being used. Ask your neighbors with swimming pools to follow these safety tips and make them aware of your child's potential for wandering. Prior to the Danish study on mortality rates in people affected by ASDs, a California research team pointed to drowning as the cause of the elevated death rate of individuals diagnosed with an ASD, so swimming pool and water safety lessons are crucial for children with autism.

Kids with Autism Wandering Away from Home

A recent study funded by Autism Speaks, through its support of the Interactive Autism Network (IAN), an online project bringing together families affected by autism, and published in the journal *Pediatrics* shows that children with ASDs wander away from home, stores, and school more often than unaffected children. Through the use of parent surveys, researchers found that nearly half of children with autism attempt to wander or run from a safe, supervised place, and more than half of these wandering children go missing long enough to cause worry. Of the children who caused worry, 65% of the incidents involved a close call with traffic, and 32% involved near drowning.

Overall, the occurrences of wandering increased with the severity of the ASD, and the children who wandered most commonly left their own homes or ones they were visiting. Most parents listed the main reason for their child's wandering as being their enjoyment of running and exploring, but other reasons included visiting a favorite place or escaping a stressful situation or an uncomfortable sensory stimulus. The study highlighted the need for parents to develop safety plans with their families, teachers, police, and other community members to protect children with autism who wander and to be able to locate them.

6 Tips to Help Prevent Wandering

The National Autism Association recommends that parents and caregivers use the following tips to help prevent wandering by understanding wandering patterns and eliminating triggers in children with an ASD:

- 1) Determine which type of wandering best describes your child (is he directed by goals, is he a sudden runner, etc.).
- 2) Recognize what triggers the wandering incidents.
 - ~If it is a goal, allow the child to explore the goal in a safe and supervised manner (for example, if the child's goal is to get used to water, schedule a time for water play each day).
 - ~If it is to escape something, address the issue (for example, there may be too much noise at a certain time of day that the child is trying to get away from).
- 3) Develop and implement strategies to help your child deal with his triggers in a way that helps him to cope with the trigger rather than running away.

4) Include known triggers in your child's IEP so that he may work on calming techniques with the appropriate school personnel.

5) Acquire appropriate social stories and review them with your child.

6) Share your child's goal, fascination, or need to escape with all people who are involved in your child's daily routine to aid them in preventing your child from wandering.

Moreover, the Autism Wandering Awareness Alerts Response and Education ([AWAARE](#)) Collaboration is working toward reducing autism-related wandering incidents and deaths. Some of the tips they specifically recommend for parents of wandering children with autism include the following:

~ **Contact a professional locksmith, security company, or home improvement professional to promote safety and prevention in your home.**

~ **Get a tracking device for your child with autism and check with local law enforcement for Project Lifesaver or LoJack SafetyNet services.**

~ **Have your child wear an ID bracelet or necklace that includes your name, telephone number, and other important information. If your child with autism will not wear a bracelet or necklace, consider a temporary tattoo.**

~ **Teach your child to swim, but remember that teaching a child to swim does not mean he is safe in or near water.**

~ **Introduce your neighbors to your child with autism and provide a photograph with your name, address, and phone number so they can call you immediately if they see your child outside of your home.**

~ **Provide first responders with key information on handouts (you should distribute these to your family, neighbors, friends, and coworkers as well): include the name, age, and physical description of your child with autism as well as his favorite song, toy, or character so the first responders are able to communicate with and calm your child more easily.**

Safety at School

Because children spend such a large amount of time in school, it is just as important to know how to keep them safe in the classroom as it is at home. The following six tips should help to keep your child with autism safe in their home-away-from-home.



Image via [Masters in Special Education](#)

- **Visit your child's school and classroom prior to the start of the school year.** Evaluate the building in the same way that you evaluated your home. Are there doors and windows that lock? Can your child reach the locks? Is there any water nearby? Are there any sensory triggers that could result in your child running away? **Are there times when your child will be transitioning from one place to another without supervision?**
- **Take your child to school prior to the start of the school year.** Show him his classroom and the restroom facilities and introduce him to faculty and staff.
- **Schedule a meeting with all of the faculty and staff who will be in contact with your child.** Give them copies of the key information handouts and share your concerns with them.
- **Schedule an IEP meeting before school begins and a follow-up meeting once the school year is underway.** Be an active participant and advocate for social skills, safety training, and learning goals to be included and evaluated as part of the IEP process.
- **Meet with the principal about the school's policy on bullying.** A study published in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* found that about 46% of children with autism in middle and high school reported to their parents they had been victimized at school within the previous year, compared with just over 10% of unaffected children.

Safety in Public

Because of the unpredictable nature of going on an outing, one of the most important things you can do is prepare your child with autism before going to a public place. Telling your child where you are going and why may ease his anxiety about changing the routine of his day and may prevent a meltdown. Health Central recommends a few things that may make the preparation for the outing easier for your child and yourself.

- Use pictures so the child can become familiar with the new place. This will also give you an opportunity to discuss some safety measures you may take with your child, such as holding hands when you cross the street, watching for the appropriate signal before crossing the street, etc.
- Tell social stories to describe the public place and the relevant skills that will be needed to have an enjoyable outing. Remember to emphasize something that an individual does well, so that your child will have a better understanding of what he should do in the public place you are going to visit.
- Explain what will happen when you go on the outing. There is no way that you can anticipate everything that will occur, but you can highlight key points and reassure your child that he will enjoy himself. And, if something unexpected happens, remain calm so that your child does not pick up on your level of anxiety.
- Create a schedule and plan activities that your child enjoys. You should be prepared to keep your outing short and your expectations reasonable.
- Practice traffic safety rules and role-play public outing scenarios. For example, when you cross a street, verbalize the rules and then have your child recite them as you cross the street. Follow this routine each time you cross a street. This behavioral skills training is critical to a child with autism's understanding of public safety rules and has even better effects when a parent or teacher trains the child in more realistic situations.

Whether your child with autism is home, at school, or in a public space, make sure you have equipped him with the materials, skills, and knowledge necessary to stay safe. Remember, you are his best safety advocate.

More Safety Solutions for Kids and Families:

[Safest Convertible Care Seats](#)
[Digital Cameras for Kids](#)
[Best Baby Proofing Products](#)
[Smart Home Systems](#)
[Smart Home Security Products](#)
[Home Automation Products](#)



Safety.com Team

The Giant List of Gift Ideas for Children with Autism & Sensory Needs



I created this list last year before Christmas. When I went to google to search for inspiration for my own son and the results brought up nothing useful I started curating ideas for other parents.

It feels like the older my son gets, the harder it is to choose gifts for him. Plus, a lot of children with autism have narrow areas of interest which can add to the challenge of finding gift ideas for autistic kiddos. No matter what the special occasion is, or what your budget is – there will be something on this list for everyone. It will be updated occasionally when I discover new products that I think others will love.

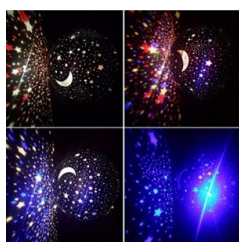
This list also includes some of the most popular items among all my readers because I know that these are gifts myself and many others can recommend.

Gift Ideas for Children with Autism



Disney Rocking Hammock

There are so many benefits to swinging and rocking. It's a natural mood lifter, provides a pile of sensory input to all of the sense which encourages the development of sensory integration, and it can be both calming and alerting. There are tons of therapy swings out there – I chose this one because it's small, comfortable, and affordable. Your child can kick back and relax literally anywhere. If a swing is what you want, but this one doesn't quite fit your needs, here is a great list of [10 therapy swings for under \\$100](#).



LED Light Projector

I've seen variations of this projector all over the place and for different prices. The first one I bought was actually \$2.50 at a Dollar store. It wasn't very good quality but we had the chance to use it a few times. I fell in love with these star projectors because they're amazingly calming. They can end a meltdown in seconds. I do recommend a high-quality projector [like this one from Amazon](#) simply because of the added durability. I burnt through a few of the cheapies and finally ordered one that would last.



AquaBeads

I'm officially in love with these things. You use the small colored beads to create your image on the tray and then mist the beads with water – and voila! They stick together. This activity is relatively mess-free, it's a great fine motor game, it's a *quiet* game that encourages kids to sit and focus. There are different sets available to match with your child's interests. Who are your kid's favorite characters? There are tons of aqua bead sets including [Finding Dory](#), [Mario](#), [Cars](#), [Minions](#), [Frozen](#), and more.



Vibes Earplugs

If your kiddo is sensitive to loud noises they *need* these earplugs. If you've used the noise reducing headphones, you know they're big and bulky and they muffle out noises.

Vibes earplugs reduce the volume by 22 decibels without muffling sounds so they don't affect the sound quality, only the volume. They're also very discreet which is great because some kids do feel embarrassed by the big bulky ear muffs in places like school.

There are three different size silicone pieces for inserting into the ears so anyone can find a good fit with these.



Kids Reveal Book Box

This is a new subscription box that comes with 2-4 expertly selected books each month. When gifting the box you can prepay for 3, 6, or 12 months.

Reading to children is important to help them acquire and master language skills. Build your child's vocabulary by reading aloud every day. Instill a love of books at an early age, and watch their imaginations grow!



Tranquil Light Up Turtle

The soft lights and calming sounds of this turtle help kids feel calm and fall asleep. The lights create a fascinating visual sensory experience that looks like being underwater. Just like the star projector, there's something inexplicably relaxing about watching this turtle.



Touch and Feel Puzzles

These are perfect for younger children. The puzzle pieces are thick making them easy for small hands to manipulate. Each animal has a textured piece for touch & feel to introduce your little one to different textures. Building these basic three-piece puzzles introduces early problem-solving skills to toddlers and young children.



Play Tent

This is the exact tent I purchased for my son for Christmas 2017. He likes to hide or be covered up, which was my reason for buying it for him. He even sleeps in it sometimes. You can see [photos of it in his bedroom here](#).



Regulation Putty

Regulation putty has nine little characters hiding inside who express different emotions with their facial expressions. Playing with the putty encourages stress reduction and focus. The putty is medium resistance making it a good choice as a [proprioceptive input activity](#).



ABC Look & Feel Bag

This is an educational fidget toy for young children. It encourages the development of fine motor coordination and visual perception. It will keep your kiddo occupied for quite a period of time as they search for every letter of the alphabet hiding in the pellets.



Air-Lite Barrel Roll

If I ever have the space to create the sensory room of my dreams, this will be a must-have. My kids love to spin, roll and go upside down. The barrel roll does all that while encouraging sensory integration, balance, and gross motor planning.



Lacing Activities

There are so many different lacing activities, I couldn't pick one. These are amazing for building fine motor skills, and for calming down. My son keeps wooden beads in his break box at school and uses them when he needs a few minutes to himself.

Basic Skills Practice Board

This is a classic Melissa & Doug toy and helps kids with all kinds of tasks that many with ASD struggle with. Kids can practice zippers, buttons, snaps, buckles, etc on the bear.

For many kids, it's easier to learn in a playbased environment where there is no performance expectations and pressure.



Electric Nail Trimmer

I don't know about everyone else's, but my sensory kiddo will do everything in his power to avoid the nail clippers. His nails get long and dirty. His toenails are even worse. He freaks out even when I gently trim them with the small baby nail clippers. So this is amazing. This quiet and gentle nail file, which can be used even on newborns, files down delicate nails and nails on delicate kiddos.



Infantino Sensory Blocks

I actually purchased these for my toddler, but they're equally popular with him, my 4-year-old and my 7-year-old. The kids love that you can build them out sideways. They easily interlock anyway you place them so they're awesome for kids who struggle with lining Legos up just right and end up frustrated.



Mental Blox

The first time I saw these, my son was using them in his second grade class. All the kids and the teachers love them. They're a great way to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving and other executive functions.



Teeter Popper

This is a super unique sensory toy that is great for active sensory seeking kids because its design really incorporates input for all of the senses. Kids will find a hundred different ways to rock on this thing. The suction cups on the bottom keep it stable and make a popping noise that kids *love*. The teeter popper helps improve core strength, balance, coordination and gross motor skills through play.



String Art

I fell in love with this DIY kit as soon as I saw it. Kids use a template to create three images on canvases.



Gel Floor Tiles

These gel floor tiles filled with cosmic colors are great for sensory seekers of all ages. Kids can walk on them, sit on them, or touch them and watch the colors ooze and mix together which is a uniquely calming experience.



Leapfrog Magnetic Phonics

We purchased one of these for my youngest son's first birthday. He's two now, and he and his four-year-old sister love using this toy. Everything is magnetic, we stick all the pieces on the door of the fridge. Kids use their fine motor skills to pick up the pieces (letters, numbers, etc.) and fit them into space on the toy. It plays catchy music to teach children about phonics and counting. Picking up the letter or number and pushing it into the spot reinforces the information they are learning. My two-year-old can identify several letters from playing with this toy.



Leap Band

Everyone knows how important physical activity is for your health. But research shows it also has a significant impact on emotional regulation and learning abilities. This is why the Leap Band made my list. The Leap Band is a kids fitness tracker that has 50 different active challenges for kids to encourage physical activity. The parental controls let you set up play times and manage the challenges. Kids get to pick a virtual pet that thrives when they are active. More points are rewarded the more kids move.



Nanotechnology Kit

I love educational toys and kits. Children retain the most information when they are learning kinesthetically through play. This kit is perfect for preteens/teens as it covers the complex concepts of nanotechnology helping kids understand just how small a nanoparticle is. If you know a child whose special interest is nanotechnology, they definitely need this kit.



LED Race Tracks

I bought two sets of these for my 7-year-old just so he would have more pieces to build with. The flexible tracks click together and can be manipulated into different twists and turns. There are LED lights in every track piece and also in the car. The lights are so calming to my son he would build his track and simply watch the car drive around. He will play with these with the light off or build tracks so they go under his bed or under the sofa so he can watch the lights under a dark area.



Educational Insights Science Club Kaleidoscope

I keep an eye on the newest educational toys available through my shopping app and discovered this one and it's definitely a must-have. Do you remember using a kaleidoscope as a child? Not only are these great for visually oriented children but they also introduce early physics and geometry concepts to kids.



Kinetic Sand Play Set

Kid love kinetic sand – it's a blast. It stays wet, can be molded, doesn't stick to your hands, and it's easier to clean than regular sand. This playset comes with an inflatable bin to play with it in. If you are concerned about the mess (I am!) a great solution is to purchase some disposable plastic tablecloths from the dollar store. When your kids are done playing you can fold it up and throw it away for an easy cleanup.



Hop 66

These are fun, encourage kids to be active, and help develop balance, core strength, and coordination. They're great for the kids who never sit still, too.



Ready, Set, School

Kids learn best through play, and not just early learning concepts but social skills as well. One of the best ways to prepare your child for school is to play school. It will benefit your child to learn what to expect at school by playing in a familiar environment and with no performance expectations. You can take turns being the student and the teacher, which will help your child learn basic social interactions that they will need in school – like raising your hand for a question or asking to use the washroom.



Grocery Store Playset

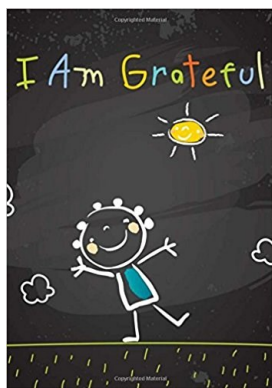
This playset is another great way to teach your child social skills and expectations in a shopping environment. You can also work on real-life math skills with the play money. Practice social interactions you can expect to have with a cashier. Such as saying hello, the cashier giving you the total and you passing them your payment and accepting change, etc.

[Read here about the developmental milestones of children's pretend play skills.](#) This can help you get a feel for where your child is currently, how much prompting and guidance you should be doing, and how to encourage pretend play development.



Play Foam Alphabet Set

You've probably heard of play foam or "floam" before. It's definitely a unique tactile sensory play item on its own. This set comes with alphabet cards and foam so kids can practice their letter formation by using the foam to shape the letters on the cards. The hands-on sensory experience helps kids solidify learning concepts and better commit the information to their long-term memory so this is a great way to teach letter formation and recognition.



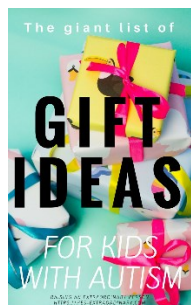
Gratitude Journal

If you're shopping for an older child or teen, a gratitude journal is a great gift idea. They promote self-care, they are therapeutic and encourage different ways of thinking which help develop executive functions, and social skills. Writing can also help your teen develop communication skills and is a great [self-regulation strategy](#).



Active Monkey Balance Board

I love Alex toys. They're unique, quality toys that are affordable and designed to benefit the children who play with them. This one – the Active Monkey Balance Board – is a perfect choice for a child with sensory needs. It promotes the development of balance, coordination, bilateral coordination, gross motor planning, and sensory integration.



I hope you found the perfect gift for the child with autism that is on **your** shopping list! If you're Christmas shopping don't leave without visiting my list of [Stocking Stuffers for Kids with Autism and Sensory Needs.](#)