

# Autism Strategies



118 Strategies  
Learned and Lived  
by a Family of Eight  
with **Two Sons** on the Spectrum.



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**\$265,000,000,000** (*that's 265 BILLION DOLLARS!*)

Think about that!

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If, as reported, more than 265 Billion Dollars per year are spent on autism experts...

why are so many autism families still struggling to feel complete?

A theory? Too many experts aren't experts at all. At least NOT at helping you with practical application.

Sure, we SHOULD do this and that – everybody seems to have great *advice*.

But have you ever LIVED through raising a child on the spectrum? When nothing seems to work? When you're sleep-deprived, haven't done anything for yourself in years and are at your breaking point? As SO MANY autism parents can become?

Don't get me wrong, we certainly appreciate all the advice and service they have provided for our family and our two sons on the autism spectrum – we just had it wrong.

We *assumed* that by following their guidelines it would help lower stress in our home. It didn't.

We *assumed* when we spent THOUSANDS on autism therapies, doctors, experts, A.B.A., and so many other recommended interventions, we would get some relief. We didn't.

Here you'll find a list of strategies TESTED in a home where we are raising 6 kids (2 of them diagnosed on the autism spectrum). THIS list of strategies was developed over 10 years of LIVING and RAISING our 2 sons on the autism spectrum.

Some of these you'll have seen before, some may be new...

ALL, to be effective, must be done in a spirit of love for our families and especially our kids on the spectrum.

But before we get into the specific autism strategies in this book, let's discuss for a moment a few skills YOU will need to acquire... that's right, YOU... the parent.

Why?

Because ***YOU need to be at your best, when they are at their worst.***

No one is helped when we're ALL melting down together. When our child on the spectrum is struggling... either onset by uncontrollable forces... or by their choice – yep, that happens as well – that's when we need to call on OUR skills to stay calm.

Frankly, our job as autism parents is NOT to calm the storm... rather to calm ourselves... until the storm passes.

Easy to say... but not so easy to do, right?

So, let's first cover a few skills WE will need to develop... FOR US... the parents, to be able to maximize the effectiveness of these 118 autism strategies.

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### **Three Parenting Skills**

The first parenting skill we'll need to learn is how to "SNAP" ourselves in to a more productive... CALM AND LOVING STATE... when things start to go wrong or get escalated.

What do I mean by that?

Well, this may sound harsh, and I don't want it to... but one of the worst things you can do to your child on the spectrum is "join" their chaos. It's a pattern WE were stuck in for years.

Let me explain by telling you a little story about us.

There was a time when we were in real trouble as a family. The stress in our home was overwhelming. I'll never forget the day... I was done with it all.

And found myself standing in front of my car with my car keys in my hands... ready to leave my family... for good.

Nothing I had tried was working. The therapies, the expert's guidance, the ABA, none of it had helped us to better manage our home as we raised our kids on the spectrum.

Our home was STILL like a combat zone. – the screaming, the scratching, the biting, the hitting, the throwing of anything he could lift when ANYTHING didn't go his way. He was in COMPLETE CONTROL of our home. We were walking around in fear... of a 6-year-old!!?!!

That's why I was standing there... alone... frustrated... discouraged... depressed... at the end of my rope.

"This isn't what I signed up for," I raged in my mind. "I can't handle it. I'm going to get in my car and drive... and I'm going to keep on going. I'm done. I can't live this way."

Then, suddenly, a MEMORY POPPED INTO MY MIND.

I recalled a conversation I'd had with my dad years ago after I had made a stupid mistake in a ball game that had cost my team a sure victory. Humiliated and embarrassed, I told my dad that I wished the ball had never come to me; I'd rather the burden of victory or defeat fall to somebody else.

"No," my dad told me. "If you're going to fail, fail on your own terms. Don't run and hide. FIGHT!"

Humbled by the memory, I knelt in prayer and poured out my soul—right there under a pecan tree in the front yard. I told God that I was willing to stay and fight, but that none of the methods or solutions we had tried worked. What could we do differently?

Were we destined to a life of hardship and misery?

I felt God's simple – but VERY PAINFUL – answer.

The problem isn't your sons. And it's not your wife.

It's you.

I went back inside and apologized to my wife. I vowed that from that day forward, I would work on MYSELF — and let the chips fall where they may with my sons on the spectrum.

Then – amazingly – when I started looking for the solutions within myself, I found them.

I knew that my sons on the spectrum lacked the capacity to understand how to control their emotions and make sense of their world. I knew their lives were every bit as frustrating as mine — probably even more.

Then I had AN AMAZING EPIPHANY: I realized that when my sons went into meltdown mode, it triggered a "cry or fight or flight" response in them. Usually fight.

And more importantly, I realized that when my sons melted down, it triggered the same "cry in fear or fight or flight" instinct in me and my family. Again, usually fight, for me - and cry in fear... for my wife and typical kids.

In other words, their meltdowns were triggering... OUR meltdowns.

When they fought, we fought back.

The difference – My wife and I and our typical sons had the capacity to CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE. They didn't. At least not at that time.

We read dozens of books, attended EVERY seminar and scoured the internet looking for any methods, techniques, principles, examples, and mentors we could find to help US change our patterns.

AND... WE PRAYED FOR THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

I'll never forget the day my son had a meltdown, during which he took a REAL HARD SWING at me.

I was able to duck out of the way, but the punch still caught me square in the ear — hard enough to draw dripping blood.

Fireworks of pain went off in my head, and a feeling I was so familiar with – FURY AND ANGER – started to boil over.

But this time I stopped myself. I made a choice. I refused to get sucked into the conflict.

It took every ounce of power and strength I had to not “knock him out” cold, but instead of striking back, I looked at my son, and with teary eyes, gently said... “Please don't hit me. I love you.”

It was a turning point for both of us.

*“Being kind and patient towards somebody when they are coming at you with fists is the hardest thing in the world for me. But it was the only solution. Otherwise, I knew – long-term – I would forever lose.”*

The very cool part?

The minute we started changing OUR reaction and patterns, our sons on the spectrum started changing THEIR reactions and patterns.

And THAT is exactly the parenting skill WE ALL NEED... if we are to have the ultimate success with our kids on the spectrum... We MUST LEARN to control our emotions and reactions... and change our patterns... so we can help them... change THEIR patterns.

I'll never forget talking one of our insiders after she'd learned this skill when she almost SCREAMED at me...

*“Everyone tells me what I SHOULD do when things get hard. But THEY never were able to finally tell me HOW TO DO IT? Now, that I know HOW TO DO IT... our lives have been transformed.”*

With this skill developed... the next time your child is at their worst... YOU... can be at your best.

Here's a video story: <https://youtu.be/cLroXYDkYII>

NOTE: If you find yourself lacking in this parenting skill, we can help. This is the **FIRST SKILL YOU WILL LEARN** (+ much more detail, with an action plan, + a worksheet) in our “Thrive In Chaos” program. You can check that out here: [CLICK HERE](#)

<https://insiders.thriveinchaos.net/special-limited-offer>

And when you’re done with that first lesson, you **WILL** have that skill.

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**But let’s say that maybe YOUR BEST... isn’t good enough.** THIS... is what was happening to me... and was the second parenting skill I had to acquire if I really want to be successful with the autism strategies in this book.

I don’t know about you, but I didn’t grow up with perfect parents that modeled perfect parenting. My guess is you didn’t either.

And a lot of the time, I was simply repeating what had been bred into me by my past experiences.

I’ll never forget the time my son on the spectrum, Erik, went ballistic after being with his brothers. What happened next? I simply, and without being conscious of it, repeated a pattern that I had been taught as a child.

*"WHAT DID YOU DO?!"* I screamed at my two older typical sons, Alek and Zak.

*"Nothing, Dad. We swear. We don't know what tipped him"* they replied... with fear... and tears in their eyes.

As I angrily looked at them - I'm sure they could see it on my face - I noticed something I'd never noticed before. They were backing away with their hands up in a defensive pose as if I was about to beat them.

Wait. What?

I’d never do that. But...

Had I yelled at them before? I'm not proud to say it, but probably... yes.

Had I conditioned them to be afraid of me? I'm not proud to say it, but probably... yes.

Was it their fault their younger brother on the spectrum, was melting down? Who knows? Probably not. It didn't take much to get him to melt down. Something as simple as not being able to find one little puzzle piece could do it.

But what I DID know... was that a pattern of screaming at my typical kids... and them scared of me... when my 2 sons on the spectrum melted down... HAD to stop.

But that's what had ALWAYS been done in our family.

It's a... TRADITION?

But... maybe not healthy... in the short term – OR, long term.

Then it hit me.

What else was I doing that was unhealthy for my family... and me... and was limiting our growth... and progression... and happiness... and maybe even... gulp?!... making things worse.

The harsh reality for me was that there were things in my past that were holding me back. Beliefs I had, ideas on parenting I had, mistakes I was consistently making that were based on my past experiences.

Was I even capable of being the kind of parent my kids needed? I wondered that often... because some of my past experiences had “shaped” me in a way that was limiting my ability – and my confidence – ESPECIALLY MY CONFIDENCE.

But obviously, we can't change the past. But what we CAN do, is REFRAME our past experiences so that they can be an asset moving forward.

As we learn to stop leaning on our past as an excuse and start making the past an asset, we will free ourselves from guilt, shame and blame and start to learn to take control of our emotions and use them in more productive and industrious ways.

No longer will we say, “Well, that's just the way I am” and let our past experiences, unconsciously rule our lives in possibly harmful ways.

Here's a video story: <https://youtu.be/sVz6IXhJphE>

So, the second parenting skill we need is to know how to “Make the Past an Asset” in our lives.

BTW: This is the “LESSON TWO” and we cover it in our “Thrive In Chaos” program (in much more detail, with an action plan, + a worksheet) if you're interested. [CLICK HERE](#)

<https://insiders.thriveinchaos.net/special-limited-offer>

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And finally, the third skill we needed to develop was HOPE and CONFIDENCE that we were capable and able to create a world where we could all thrive as a family.

We needed to be able to look forward to the future.



Just like what had happened to us, way too often we find ourselves wondering...

“Is THIS our new life?”

Especially if you – like us – had done everything all the “autism experts” had suggested.

You name it, we’d tried it. But still we were struggling. We were on what we called, “The Autism Roller Coaster.”

You know what I’m talking about, right?

Sure, we did EVERYTHING they suggested. We spent thousands and thousands on therapies, ABA experts, doctors and specialists but we were still slaves to autism.

We couldn't go anywhere, we were losing friends, even our family seemed to start abandon us. Nobody wanted to be around the kind of chaos and stress we were living through.

IF we got any sleep at all, we'd wake up in the morning wondering, "What's gonna happen today?" I'd drive home with a pit in my stomach KNOWING there was going to be some type of fight or craziness or who-knows what - every day.

I'll never forget the day I finally coaxed him to tell him Mom "I love you." We were on cloud 9. Two days later, he physically attacked our family and we could barely remember the moment.

Or the time, when we finally potty trained him. Seriously, we cried we were so happy. Less than a week later he smashed his head through a window in a fit of rage and I remember as I held him still for stitches - I could barely remember the good times.

It seemed the “lows” were so low, we were digging a pit of despair with no ability to escape.

Then I had a DEEP realization.

I realized my sons’ diagnosis was possibly a lifetime diagnosis. I knew that meant I may experience a lifetime of service to them and it may – at times – be difficult.

So, I committed the time and learned principles, and developed the tools necessary that gave me hope and a desire to look forward to their and my futures.

Once I was able to learn this skill – the skill of HOPE and CONFIDENCE – I was never again motivated by their progress; I was never even motivated by their effort – or their lack of effort.

Here’s a video story: <https://youtu.be/OzHn4YVC5d0>

Developing the skill of HOPE and CONFIDENCE allowed me to learn to be motivated because I love them, just the way they are.

And that is what you’ll get, too. IF, you learn this parenting skill

NOTE: This is LESSON THREE and is shared in our “Thrive In Chaos” program (again, with much more detail, and an action plan, + a worksheet) if you’re interested. [CLICK HERE](#)

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And as I was able to create a thought process that allowed me to look forward to the future with optimism and hope I became so much happier than I could have ever imagined.

THESE are the three parenting skills you’ll need to learn to maximize your success with ANY strategy you may discover or try.

Keep in mind, almost NO STRATEGY works when we (as the parents) are out of sorts...

However, almost ALL strategies work when we are applying them in a spirit of calmness, kindness and love.

So, without any more psych-babble... here are the 118 Autism Strategies.

## Obsess much? Passions and obsessions.

1. **Manage the access... not the interest.** Everyone gets to choose what they love. But NOT all the time every minute of every day. Help them to find others who enjoy their interest, so they don't feel compelled to "spew all-they-know... all over everyone."

By the way... collections are very good reward systems.

2. **Allow for "talk-time."** Give them the attention they need and LISTEN to the details of what they enjoy. Simply put... show interest in their interest. Yep, your brain will be FULL of seemingly useless information, but you'll be a "hero" to your child.
3. **Introduce new options regularly.** The more "interests" they have the more well-rounded they'll be. It's easier to find a friend when you share a common thread.

## Like a bird. Food and nutrition

1. **Learn to use first, then statements.** Alternating bites of food from what they love to what they \$\$\$!?!#@! can be effective. IF... you exercise patience. Start this early and they'll learn how to get "what they want."
2. **Take your time. Don't rush.** Your child will feed (pun intended) off your mood. If they feel pressured, they may pressure back. If they know there's a time limit... they may just "wait you out."
3. **Never say, "You're a picky eater."** This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If they hear you or siblings say this, they may believe it! Variations of that are telling others - in their earshot - that they don't like certain textures or smells... or whatever... they'll believe you.
4. **Have your child tested.** To ensure they are getting at least the minimal amount for their health. That's all we really need, right?
5. **Stay patient.** Forcing them to eat when they are anxious or resistant can create a power struggle in which they will (mostly always) win. Eating should NEVER be a battle. Arguing, punishing or manipulation may make them feel controlled and they will want to escape.
6. **It's food. Be flexible in your approach.** If your child will only eat eggs waffles, pizza and apples, have plenty on hand and feed them that for breakfast lunch and dinner. Just because YOU want a variety doesn't mean THEY do.
7. **Eating habits change.** All of us adjust our eating habits throughout our lives. Help them try new things... they'll choose. Nutrition is the goal. NOT compliance, NOT variety, NOT popularity.

## Got the wiggles? Self-stimming behavior.

1. **Shape... don't eliminate.** It's part of many diagnosis. Insisting they can't flap or bounce or repeat a SpongeBob line can escalate into a behavior that is more difficult. Help them shape the behavior by trying to understand the purpose. Stress balls, a place to pace, chewing on a cloth instead of their lip are reasonable replacements.
2. **Get out and exercise.** Ensuring they get good exercise can reduce self-stimulating behaviors. Be creative. Chase leaves that are blowing. Create a "timed-event" where they can compete. If a child needs to pace, put things far away from each other.
3. **Stay away from dead time.** I know, I know. You need it... but maybe they don't. The less wait time you can create the better.

## That's disgusting. Inappropriate behavior.

1. **Have a way to lower YOUR stress when things go "wrong."** Being able to manage yourself is vital. When they're at their worst is when they need you at your best. Learn coping strategies for YOU.
2. **Slow down your thinking.** When you find yourself ramping up... remember, fight NOR flight NOR cry is acceptable and ask yourself, "WHAT AM I THINKING?" If it's NOT productive and/or may make the situation worse... STOP. And decide what will make it better for everyone.
3. **Write a contract - with yourself.** What will you do when "X" happens? Pre-thinking and writing your future reaction - while in a "sane" state, will help you keep your commitments.
4. **Celebrate!** Rewarding your child... and YOU... are a vital part of changing behaviors. Decide ahead of time - with your child if possible - what your reward will be and keep your commitments.

## Bad Language. Dealing with unusual verbiage.

1. **Repeating of movie lines or echolalia can be useful.** When your child can repeat what they've heard in the right situations, it shows emotional understanding. This is great. Now's the time to model the appropriate phrase back. Help them "reset" with appropriate phrases.
2. **Autism awareness means you get to let others know movie lines are being scripted.** Be unafraid to tell others "that's a line from..." And ask them to help you with appropriate responses.
3. **Laugh!** Writing down what your child says and does will provide MANY opportunities to smile and laugh. Don't be such a fuddy-duddy or embarrassed. Let them feel free to express themselves with no fear of retribution.

## Holy Crap! Puberty

1. **Speech or developmental delay does not mean physical delay.** Puberty will arrive whether they - or YOU - are emotionally ready or not. Embrace the opportunity to have simple sexuality discussions with them.
2. **Don't do it alone.** There are books and audio programs and a myriad of options to help with this discussion. Search it on google and reap the rewards of others experience.
3. **There's public and private.** Help them understand the difference by assigning a simple... "PRIVATE" and ask them to bring this back up at home.
4. **Model YOUR values and rules.** When can they date? Can they date? When did you? Be clear and teach them early what's appropriate behavior and what's NOT by the way you act, your words and ESPECIALLY... your behavior. Your behavior is a bigger influence than anything.
5. **No means no.** This is where literal thinking helps. Share this phrase, help them to understand and abide by and respect others wishes.
6. **Relationships are natural.** All of us want to feel connection. Help them understand the appropriate way. If we don't teach and model this, they may do it THEIR way... and we may not like it.

## Here comes the STORM. Moodiness.

1. **Increase exercise when it begins.** Exercise increases endorphins. It's good for them... and YOU. This will also decrease physical aggression and increase mood stability.
2. **Give them more choices.** Things that don't really matter should ALWAYS be their choice. The more control you can give them over simple stuff... do it. The more choices they can make for themselves the happier they'll be.
3. **Model and teach relaxation.** Something calms YOU down. Something can calm them down. Search until you find it and use it - for YOU and THEM. Focus on positives in your life and model doing it so they can see.
4. **Medication - as a last resort.** This may sound harsh, and I don't mean it to, but it needs to be said. "Don't let YOUR laziness be the reason you medicate." Try EVERYTHING (even if it's hard) before medication.

## Hugs... and other - sometimes unusual - affection.

1. **Discover how they... and YOU can feel affection for each other.** Don't assume the way YOU feel loved will make THEM feel loved.
2. **Don't just tell them, "I love you." Be specific.** "I love it when you..." "I love watching you..." "I can tell you're wonderful because..." "it makes me smile so big when I see you..."

3. **Simple things can be powerful.** Take them for an ice-cream cone (just the two of you.) Ask them if you can watch a movie WITH them. Sit on the floor with them and play with Legos... or hot wheels... or Barbie's.
4. **Love is a powerful word.** But it's more powerful when it's an action. (see above)

### **Santa Claus and death.**

1. **Be clear and use easily understandable words.** Be confident in how you describe events and concepts. Don't delay conversations.
2. **Grief is different for everyone.** Behavior changes, high emotions and confusion may be indicators of a grieving soul. Allow for mourning. Then brighten with future statements.
3. **Teach the social skills of death and legend.** The more they understand (even if it takes A LOT of time) the better they will become at accepting new and different information.
4. **Involve (maybe) them.** At your discretion, seeing the body in a casket or buried can help with closure. Alternatively, a small private memorial may be better. Get help with creative ways to address this.
5. **Allow time to pass.** Grief can take time. Be understanding and patient.

### **Therapies, Specialists and Experts... oh, my. How to choose.**

1. **Be involved.** Dropping your child off and picking them up may be inadequate. Don't let this be the standard for you and your child. To get the most out of your therapies watch WHAT happens and commit to reinforcement at home. A daily and weekly focus on tasks reinforces for your child and brings consistency in to their lives
2. **A.B.A.** A.B.A. therapy should commit to the following rules. All involved will focus on doing what's best for the child (long-term) - with respect for the child and their uniqueness. AND... all therapies should be done in a spirit of love. And obviously, forcing compliance is not in the spirit of love. If ABA meets this criterion, ABA can be vital in setting traditional expectations.
3. **Speech Therapy, Floor Time, Etc. can all serve the child.**  
NOTE: Again... ALL therapies should commit to the uniform rules: All involved will focus on doing what's best for the child (long-term) - with respect for the child and their uniqueness. AND... all therapies should be done in a spirit of love. And obviously, forcing compliance is not in the spirit of love.
4. **ASK.** Can you watch? Are they okay with allowing you to record the interactions? Their answers can not only tell you a lot about their abilities, but a lot about their training and temperament. Temperament matters...

## **It's NOT combat... it's collaboration. Dealing with the special education team.**

1. **Know the rules.** Rules and laws can be complex. Have a basic knowledge of what is required by your State.
2. **More bees with honey.** Maintain a positive and collaborative attitude or you will get thrown out of the game and your child will suffer. Sure, they'll follow the law, but your child may get treated to the minimum daily requirements.
3. **Caregivers are not "getting rich."** They generally care about people or they would not have entered this field. Be the reason they stay... and love your kids. Your kids feel it when they feel loved and it is reflected in their willingness to work.
4. **Keep a notebook.** When you think of questions, write them down and carry them with you when you meet with teachers. It's easy to forget.
5. **Bribery works.** I know you shouldn't have to... and you don't. But when you bring treats to a meeting (cookies, brownies, cake, etc.) it CHANGES the way others FEEL about you AND your CHILD. When people "like" you, they automatically treat you (and your child - especially your child) better. Note: It's not really a bribe, it's a reward.

## **Child support. Making life more livable.**

1. **Assume they understand.** NEVER talk about a child in front of them as if they are not present. Refer to them with love, kindness and respect at all times.
2. **Prepare for things as best you can.** Any time you can do recon BEFORE an event, you'll get better outcomes. Enough in life will automatically fall to the unknown. Think about what they will need to know and even prepare for the unexpected by setting expectations for the unexpected.
3. **Create a schedule.** Many of our kids need structure. Use a calendar, a day planner, whatever you can create that gives the feeling of control.
4. **Teach them to swim - PLEASE!** At an early age introduce the joys of water. Allow them to squirt YOU with a water gun - and then squirt back. Help them remove the fear of water as early as possible.
5. **Know who you can trust.** These kids of ours WILL have behavioral problems. Invite others in to your life and express to them YOUR ways of working with your child. Ensure friends are aware of their - and occasionally YOUR - special needs. People WANT to help... if you share with them your journey.
6. **Encourage typical friendships.** Our kids CARE about how others see them. It's human nature. But sometimes they don't know HOW to show that. Use every opportunity - even painful ones - to teach social skills. As well, model forgiveness of others and forgiveness of self. They learn the most from us.
7. **Model kind language, kind acts and patience.** Our kids learn more from what we do than what we say. Make sure they see you doing good in all things.

8. **Celebrate seemingly small things.** Mangle a meltdown well? Handle an IEP like a champ? Pat yourself on the back. Your child self regulates? Squeeze them with all your might and celebrate the accomplishment.

### **I.E.P. Nuff said...**

1. **Have correct expectations.** Acknowledge that a school team cannot teach a child everything they need to know and learn. However, teachers should acknowledge that a large portion of the child's day is with them and is the most important social situation they'll likely receive.
2. **Talk about their future first.** If possible, spend time on long-term goals. Eventually, they will graduate out. What's the plan for then and work towards that accomplishment one-day-at-a-time.
3. **Focus on what's important.** Schools cannot teach everything. Prioritize goals that will help them become as productive as they can be and achieve their full potential... whatever that may be.
4. **Work WITH them.** Work towards consensus... NOT compromise. Each team member may have a different view, but all can determine together, a plan that is best for the child.
5. **THINK before you speak.** A lot of goodwill can be undone in a moment of hastiness. I realize you are their advocate and will demand what's best for them - they deserve that. But too many end up with a "less-than-committed" educator when you're an a-hole. NOTE: I KNOW that's harsh. But we can all come off like that when we don't use our kind words.
6. **Understand THEIR perspective... or they won't care about yours.** They have limitations just like you. Listen to them and acknowledge what they believe. Everyone at these meetings believes they have the child's best interest at heart. When you start there, things always go much better.
7. **Be complementary.** Your child is not the only one they support. Praise them for their efforts. Share with them good news. Give credit to them when goals are met. Everyone loves a complement.

### **Life is ALL change. Making transitions easier.**

1. **Write or draw a social story.** Use pictures and words to illustrate new (exciting) things. Don't forget to include things that will stay the same and focus on them enough to give comfort.
2. **Be involved.** If time permits, volunteer in the Library one day a week. Be part of a field trip, brings snacks, share lunch (their favorites.) It not only show your support for your



child but makes you are supportive of others efforts. You may even have a chance to teach a tactic that's worked for you - it happened to me.

3. **Write a top ten for newcomers.** Write a brief list of current critical issues. Include what you want others to know most. Simple idea. Can work like magic.
4. **Be communicative.** Make yourself available as much as possible. Never fuss when they call you with issues. You are the source and they'll stop - you don't want that - believe me.
5. **Ask them to call with good news.** Have them take a picture, tell you the stories of success. It makes THEM feel like they are succeeding and you both get to experience the joys - together.

### **Oh, CRAP! Toileting and self-care.**

1. **Use visuals.** Give them a model. Typically, they are highly visual learners. Don't just TELL them. SHOW them. You want independence... THEY want it to.
2. **Work is good for them... and YOU.** Work builds brain tissue. Work builds social skills, Work builds confidence. The type is less important than that they do it. Taking out the trash, putting plates in the sink, unloading the dishwasher. All good.
3. **Never do something for them that they can do for themselves.** If your goal is to have them be as independent as possible, you MUST fight the good fight. They won't want to, but you have the ability to lovingly influence.
4. **Take a step back.** Your child can reach a level of independence. Unless YOU don't allow it. Let them fail. Yes, it's painful. But if they never fail, they will never succeed.
5. **Skills cost MONEY.** Any time someone else has to perform a task for you, that will cost - at a minimum - \$5,000 per year. You don't want your child to spend their money on laundry, bathing, toileting, etc., when they could be spending it for fun.
6. **The more independent they are today, the more options they'll have.** We all want our children to reach their full potential - whatever that may be. Help them by helping them.

### **Becoming an autism expert.**

1. **Don't assume all experts are "experts."** Be an open-minded sceptic. Listen to everything. Test everything (within reason) for yourself. Keep what works and throw out what doesn't. Keep in mind, many of the so-called "experts" have NEVER raised a child on the spectrum. They can tell you WHAT to do, but many cannot tell you HOW.
2. **Keep a record of events.** Use a journal, blog, scrapbook - something that will allow you to keep notes on an ongoing basis. Don't trust your memory.
3. **Ask questions... and more questions.** Don't hesitate to ask a professional or a parent anything. Questioning doesn't mean you disagree. Anyone who is offended by questions is unsure of their foundation.

4. **Understand it'll all change tomorrow.** Your child will grow, they'll learn, they'll adapt. What works today, may fail tomorrow. Be willing to adapt as you learn.

### **That didn't go so well. Change of routine.**

1. **Visually SHOW them.** A "change" card can be a great visual. Maybe a big card with a "bi happy C" can indicate things will start going differently.
2. **Make "change" part of their routine.** It's okay to do something different on purpose. Allowing them to see it's not deadly – and can even be fun helps them to learn flexibility
3. **Teach positive change first.** Build in surprise "rewards" first. Maybe interrupt their homework with an episode of a favorite cartoon. Maybe an ice-cream cone. You get the idea.
4. **Keep a change card with you.** Changes will happen whether you like it or not. Don't fear them – look to them as opportunities to teach.

### **Sibling rivalries. That's not fair...**

1. **Split them up.** Each child should get time alone with you. Just a drive to the super-market and a chat can be fun. Invite each child to do something with you – just the two of you.
2. **Self-Advocate.** Help them to understand who they are, that they are okay being different and that they're special in their own way. Use their understanding of different types of autism to help them understand and be patient with each other.
3. **Give siblings instruction.** Model the behavior you want from them... but don't hesitate to tell them exactly how to handle situations that may arise. Keep in mind, if YOU don't have patience, neither will they. If YOU allow stress to get the best of you, so will they.
4. **Provide support.** There are support groups for siblings. Connecting with others can help them know, they're not alone and provide comfort. Resist the urge to correct them for their feelings. They feel the way they do because it can be hard.
5. **Allow them to express frustration and anger – but give them a setting.** Help them to understand there's a time for it – away from impressionable ears and eyes. This will lower their resentment and prevent them from distancing themselves from their siblings.

Note: My oldest son did a presentation about this. If you haven't seen it – get it here: <https://thriveinchaos.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/At17.pdf>

### **The other guys – Extended family.**

1. **Build autism awareness.** Teach them about autism. The good, the bad and the ugly. Send them books, send them videos, show them how you interact.

2. **Forgive easily and often.** They WANT to be helpful. Sure, they'll try and give you advice – like they'd know – and send you the latest article about how slit-peas can cure autism, but know they mean well. Be patient with them.
3. **Prepare your child for visits.** Draw pictures, help them to understand what's acceptable and not and even share your preparation with your extended family.
4. **Manage the expectations.** Let your family know what you may be able to do and that you may have to leave. Family feelings won't get hurt if others understand the "why."
5. **When you feel judged.** Again, be patient and forgiving. You've got enough to worry about without letting them get in your head. Stay above the pettiness. Note: <https://www.facebook.com/AutismLaughterTherapy/videos/253656108594686/>

### **Till death. Marriage and relationships**

1. **It's okay to disagree.** Sometimes we have different approaches to the same issues. If the outcome was positive, keep your mouth shut. If it was not positive, WAIT. Then, when all is calm have a discussion and collaborate.
2. **No blame-game.** Sometimes when things aren't going well, we have a tendency to blame those closest. Resist the urge to blame anything on each other. Talk about what you can do together.
3. **Take time to be together.** These kids can drive a wedge in between us. Pay whatever it takes to get away together and reconnect.
4. **A night away, can-do wonders.** I know you think you can't leave them overnight with anyone. Do it anyway. It's really good for you and it's good for them – so they'll know they can survive without you.
5. **Get a hobby.** Each of you need time for the things you love. Take turns. Support each other so they can escape – both physically and mentally – for a while.
6. **Solving problems together can bring you together.** When you find yourself at each other, remind each other that you refuse, "To Let The Kids Get Between Us." If you are unified in your love for the kids, make that a starting point of agreement. As you find ways to manage things together it will strengthen your relationship more than you can imagine.

### **Dealing with HARD!**

1. **Be selective in asking for advice.** Everyone has an opinion. Making decisions by using majority opinion may not be what's best for the child. Go to your most trusted support for council.
2. **Trust yourself.** As only you know the details of your situation, think with your head... and your heart. Your intuition matters and should be taken seriously.

3. **Tell others.** Be open and honest about what's happening. There are others that may have experienced and be able to help... IF, they know what's happening
4. **Stop with the guilt and second-guessing.** We all make the best decisions we know how. Looking back and regretting or punishing oneself doesn't help anyone. Frankly it's a disservice to your child and family and you.
5. **Know the difference between emotion and fact.** It can be difficult to separate emotion from level-headed decision. But it must be done. Sometimes the best love you can show is to make those hard decisions.

### **Normality. A normal life?**

1. **Volunteer.** Church, community, centers are all good places to take the focus off you and serve others. This will also allow you to feel part of a larger group. When you think you can't... is when you MUST. It'll be great for everyone.
2. **Social media can provide perspective.** It's easier than ever to connect with "like" individuals. Sharing in these groups can provide connection and comfort. No, you're NOT the only one. We're everywhere. However, be careful you do not get drawn in to the "poor me" groups that simply post to share how tough they have it. It's not a competition.

### **Mind-talk.**

1. **Stay positive.** No matter how bad it gets, look for the positives in your life. Find joy in simple things, celebrate small moments.
2. **Live consciously.** We can all fall in to patterns of behavior and thought. If you find yourself thinking bad thought too often, break the pattern by posting positive notes for yourself or challenge yourself to find stories of success and happiness. Note: On our Facebook page, that's ALL we do: <https://www.facebook.com/AutismLaughterTherapy/>
3. **Have belief in your abilities.** You may have been given a tough deal. Know you can succeed and thrive with the right tools and strategies.

### **Getting better? Measure progress.**

1. **Keep a record.** You won't know what you've accomplished unless you know where you started. Write down events, ideas and stories. You never know who you'll be able to help. Namely... you.
2. **Keep a journal.** Start a blog, get an autism Facebook page. It's easy, it's free and it's a great place to make friends, track progress and help others all at the same time. Believe me.

3. **Review and re-evaluate.** At least once a year, review your records, pick a time around something that happens annually to remind you. Maybe an IEP, maybe a birthday.

### **YOU matter. Having a sense of self.**

1. **Get a hobby.** Seriously. I know you don't have time – MAKE time. We all need something that brings us joy. Gardening, reading novels, scrapbooking, jogging. It doesn't matter. Just do it.
2. **TEACH them to sleep.** You'd think this would be something you wouldn't have to do, but SURPRISE... you may. Create an environment of consistence. Complete darkness, white noise, a favorite blankie. Do whatever it takes
3. **Create a kid-free zone.** NONE... of our kids are allowed in our bedroom... EVER. Did this take tremendous effort to establish? Yes! Even more effort to enforce... UNTIL... all of a sudden it clicked for all of them. You need this space. Make it a priority.
4. **Create and use a schedule.** Consistency and predictability can be vital for our kids. A visual routine can help with creating a FUNctional home life. Schedules will assist YOU in becoming more FUNctional as well.
5. **Work at happiness.** Never give up. Never give in. Look for and find happiness in your life. Work like your life – and the life of your child – depend on it... because they do. The harder you work at things when they're young, the easier it is when they get older.
6. **Find a support group.** And it doesn't have to be official. A group of friends, family, neighbors. Anyone will do to help you have normal conversations.
7. **Don't import autism in to everything.** You have other things to talk about. Chat about the weather, politics, religion, sports, anything other than autism all the time. You'll be glad you did.