What Is Autism?

Someone with autism looks just like you and me, but their brains work differently.

Autism is known as a spectrum condition. That means that while all people with autism might share common difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways.

People with autism are sensitive to their surroundings. Things like light, noise, smell, movement and touch can get overwhelming at times.

People with autism like things to happen the same way. They might walk the same route to class, like to eat the same thing for lunch every day or line their pencils up in a particular order. They can sometimes get upset if their things get moved or their routine changes suddenly.

It can be difficult for some people with autism to make eye contact and sometimes they get distracted by moving objects. It does not necessarily mean they are not listening to you.

Some people with autism have difficulty reading emotions in other people, but this does not mean they do not feel emotions.

Some people with autism can have difficulty speaking or finding the right words to say. Some people with autism do not speak at all. Many find it easier to point or use visual cues instead of speaking.

Some autistic individuals react to sensory overload in different ways. Some react by screaming or getting upset, but others may withdraw or hide out in a quiet place. It is important to remember that autistic people sometimes do need a quiet moment to themselves, but that does not mean they do not like playing or spending time with their friends.
1. “Come on, laugh it off” Humour is a great coping strategy and a powerful tool for resilience as it heightens feelings of control. This is a fantastic way to release stress and handle feelings of helplessness.

2. “Don’t let this spoil everything” The ability to compartmentalise bad events and keep them from affecting all areas of life is a powerful coping skill. When something unpleasant happens during recess, for example, kids need to park their thinking about that event so they can get on with the rest of the day.

3. “Let’s take a break” When kids are troubled by events or spend too much time brooding, it helps to do something to get their minds off things for a time. Self-distraction is healthy and prevents kids from replaying awful experiences in their heads, blowing them out of proportion.

4. “Who have you spoken to about this?” The promotion of help-seeking behaviours is one of the best coping strategies of all. It can be immensely reassuring to spend time around others who are empathetic, understanding and willing to listen and help.

5. “I know it looks bad now but you will get through this” There are times when parents can do nothing else but keep their children’s chins up and encourage them when life doesn’t go their way.

6. “What can you learn from this so it doesn’t happen next time?” Parents can help kids reframe events to help them see things differently. For instance, rather than regarding a public speaking opportunity as problematic and a chance to look foolish it’s better to reframe it as a challenge and a chance to shine.

7. “Don’t worry – relax and see what happens!” Parents with a resilience mindset can help kids understand what’s worth worrying about and what’s not, and that some things won’t change no matter how much kids fret or beat themselves up!

8. “This isn’t the end of the world” When kids constantly think the worst case scenario, challenge their views.

9. “You could be right. But have you thought about … ” Realistic language leads to realistic thinking, which helps kids handle many ordinary situations that they have blown out of proportion.

10. “What can we do about this?” Help your child set some goals. Make some plans. Identify the first step and hold their hand while they take it.

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