

Tips for working with children on the Autism Spectrum

Every child is different. If you have found ways of doing things that works well for the child that is awesome – these are some tips for if and when things aren't working so well.

Routine	Children on the autism spectrum often respond well to having the same thing happen each day. They generally don't like lots of changes.	Same routine each school day, at school and both before and after school can help. Same bedtime; Same time to get up Go to school every day
Predictability	Children tend to comply better if they know what is happening next. Give warning when there are going to be changes.	First – pack up toys Then – have a bath Later – watch TV
Visual schedule	These are pictures which show the order things need to be done. You can use stickers to help compliance.	Too much talking can overwhelm and confuse children on the autism spectrum. Visual reminders can help reinforce routine.
Rewards	Research shows rewards generally work better than consequences. Using special interests as rewards often works well (Lego, iPad, animals). Reward Charts can be useful.	It is usually best not to take away rewards as punishment - it can cause major upsets and often does not work very well. However, families need to have their own balance of rewards and consequences.
	Rewards can be time doing something they enjoy or going somewhere. A focus on positive behaviour can be helpful in changing behaviours – but takes time.	
Triggers, “meltdowns” and other behaviours	Children on the autism spectrum may be oversensitive or under sensitive to noise, light, taste, touch or smell. When overwhelmed they will have a “meltdown”. When they need stimulation, they may use behaviours to meet that need – rocking, flapping, climbing, smelling, chewing.	An Occupational Therapist can help with Sensory needs if these are observed. Parents letting the school know what they have observed is really important. They know their child best and sharing this information helps teachers to teach the child. Noticing what triggers “meltdowns” can help teachers plan so they happen less.
	“Meltdowns” often happen after school – having quiet chill time planned can be important.	
Rules	Rules are very important. Rules need to be clear and consistent. It's a rule: “Everyone wears a seatbelt when in the car”. It's a rule: “8 pm is bedtime” It's a rule: “All kids go to school” It's a rule: “We do not hit”	You may need to be very specific in telling the child the “rule”. Other children may work it out, but these children may not. These are just examples – adjust them to suit your situation. If it is a rule – it is not debateable – it just is. You don't want too many – just ones that will make life easier with less struggles.
Outside play helps sleep	It is really important to have time outside for production of the hormones that help them go to sleep and helps to regulate the sleep/wake cycle.	Outside play with other kids. Visits to the park – lots of running. Going out bush, going fishing Not too much TV/electronic games
Getting ready to sleep	Stop use of electronic equipment at least one hour before bed. Read books, have quiet play. This settles the body and mind for sleep.	Light from electronic screens impacts on the brain and can stop the production of the chemical that helps sleep. Games can be addictive – and therefore it can be hard to get children to switch them off to go to bed.
Emotions	Children on the autism spectrum often have trouble reading other people's emotions and expressing their own. They also often have trouble with anxiety. Having a routine and calm, predictable responses can help with anxiety. Professional help is also important.	