

# 10 Ways to Help Your Child Now



As a parent whose child has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, you may feel like your life has been turned upside down. And, like thousands of other parents affected each year, you may feel confused, afraid, angry, and unsure about what to do next.

Most likely, the doctor who gave your child the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) recommended therapies based on your child's individual needs. This could include occupational therapy, speech therapy, or applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy. Other than that, you may be feeling like you are on your own in terms of figuring out how to adjust to your family's new situation.

The good news is that you aren't alone. There are many resources available to help you better understand autism and ways you can address the situation. In this article, we will share 10 things you can do now to give your young child and family the best chance to thrive. It's all based on our years of experience taking care of children and families just like yours.

1.

## START WITH THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE.

Know there is hope. A diagnosis of autism does not change who your child is or what he or she can accomplish in life. It just means your child will take a different path, and you will need to adjust your parenting to help them get there. Research on autism has increased over the past few decades and so have the resources and treatment options available.

You and your child are not alone. Today, 1 in 36 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and millions of children under 18 are living their lives with an autism diagnosis. The likelihood that you know someone who has firsthand experience with autism is growing every day.

As you digest the news of the diagnosis, don't forget the importance of your family. Increase communication with your spouse or partner about how your life may change, and develop a plan on how you will adjust. You need to get on the same page as far as accepting the diagnosis, agreeing on the plan, and next steps.

There are many helpful resources out there, from national advocacy organizations to local parent support groups. And there are highly effective programs to help children with autism enjoy happy, fulfilling lives. At Opya, we help hundreds of children and their families find ways to adjust and thrive.

2.

#### DO YOUR RESEARCH – UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

Doing your research can also help calm your nerves and help you focus on what's next. There are two kinds of research: understanding your child and understanding your therapy options. A big step toward understanding what your child is going through and how to best interact with your child is to learn more. Start with where your child falls on the autism spectrum. Did the professional who diagnosed your child indicate your child is high functioning, low functioning or somewhere in between? This will be helpful as you learn more about how to best move forward with treatment options as well as how you can best communicate with your child.

You should also observe your child. For example, try to figure out why certain triggers may cause a meltdown. Learning to identify and avoid these triggers may help minimize meltdowns, making life a little easier while you search for professional help. As you begin to understand how your child's mind works, you can adjust your parenting to give them the best support. It also helps when you explain their autism diagnosis to other family members, friends, and neighbors.

3.

#### DO YOUR RESEARCH – UNDERSTANDING YOUR THERAPY OPTIONS

The second kind of research involves understanding your therapy options. As with other medical conditions, there are many perspectives on how to treat ASD. Part of your challenge will be to sort through various information sources to determine which are credible.

Start by trying to understand all the options available to you for the care and development of your child. Options may include treatments such



as speech, occupational, and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapies. You can also learn more about and follow autism advocacy groups, subscribe to helpful newsletters, and follow credible and helpful social media accounts. There are plenty of books, videos, and websites that can help you understand your options. Some of the large national organizations provide a wealth of information on their websites and are worth checking out, including:

- [Autism Speaks](#)
- [Autism Society of America](#)
- [National Autism Association](#)

4.

#### BECOME YOUR CHILD'S ADVOCATE

You may find yourself filling multiple roles for your child, including care coordinator, therapist, parent, teacher, and more. But the most important role after loving parent will be that of your child's advocate. Your role as advocate will be critical throughout your child's journey, and it will evolve over time.

You want to become familiar with the legal rights you and your child may have. Familiarize yourself with terms such as IEP (individualized

education program), EI (early intervention), IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education). The sooner you understand your rights, the sooner you can become your child's best advocate. As a well-informed advocate, you can ensure that your child gets the resources and support in each phase of their development to live a happy, fulfilling life.

5.

#### CHOOSE YOUR PATH

Now that you are more informed about ASD and you've made the decision to advocate for your child, you need to determine the best path for your child and your family. There are different ways to handle your child's care, and the best course may depend on where your child falls on the autism spectrum. Either way, therapy is essential. Some therapies focus on one challenge such as speech or motor skills, while others have a broader scope and are more intensive such as ABA behavioral therapy. You should develop a good understanding of the therapies that are supported by research and recommended by credible experts.

For young children between 18 months and 6 years of age, ABA therapy has been shown in clinical studies to achieve the best results. Applied Behavior Analysis involves many techniques for understanding and changing behavior. ABA can be adapted to meet the needs of each unique child, can be provided in many different locations – at home, at school, and in the community – and teaches skills that are useful in everyday life.

Other forms of therapy that may be recommended based on your child's needs include Speech

Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Feeding Therapy. Speech Therapy addresses articulation, language, social and Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) skills. Occupational Therapy focuses on improving fine motor, gross motor and sensory processing skills as needed for every-day activities. And Feeding Therapy can help picky eaters enjoy a variety of foods.

As you think about therapy options, you will want to decide whether you want your young child's therapy to be in the home setting versus in a clinic. This is a personal decision, and there are benefits to both settings. At Opya, we believe that in the early childhood years before the child is school age, home is the optimal place for children to receive ABA therapy. Home is a child's natural environment, which can feel safer and more comfortable for them. We think of autism care as an evolution. In the home, therapists can help the child develop the important life skills they will need to transition to new environments, like elementary school. Read more about our guiding principles to therapy [here](#).

The school system provides the next platform of primary support for your child until they become an adult and are ready to move to the next phase of their life.

6.

#### TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EARLY INTERVENTION THERAPY

You may have already seen or heard the term "early intervention," which applies to therapy support for children from 18 months to 6 years old. Research has shown that early intervention optimizes a child's overall development. Children who receive autism-specific care and support at an early and key developmental stage are much more likely to gain essential social skills and more

favorable outcomes. Because children's brains are more malleable as toddlers, the sooner you can begin therapy the sooner their brains can develop the essential skills they need to live their best life.

At Opya, we hire and train experts in early intervention ABA therapy because we know it works. Early intervention therapy is also recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and 98% of medical professionals including pediatricians, child psychologists, child psychiatrists, and developmental specialists recommend early intervention therapy. determine which are credible.

7.

#### GET FINANCIAL HELP

While it is true that autism care can be financially challenging for some families, there are financial resources available to you that can partially or fully cover the costs of treatment. If you have health insurance through your employer or an exchange, call your insurance provider and find out which treatments are covered. Many state governments require health plans

to cover autism therapies. Ask your health plan case manager for a list of in-network therapy providers in your area. Make sure you find out which providers are in network for each of ABA Behavioral, speech and occupational therapy. For example, don't assume that because a provider is in network for ABA that they are also in network for speech therapy. Opya is in network with most California health insurance plans. If your health plan covers autism care, that is most likely your best option to pay for care. However, there are other options too. For example, government resources like regional centers in California may be available to you. Funding for child services is mandated through a United States federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities.

8.

#### UNDERSTAND THE PUBLIC RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

As identified above, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that School Districts and regional centers provide services for people with developmental disabilities which includes autism. For qualified children who are under three years old, the regional centers have the responsibility for providing needed support and services through the "Early Start" program. Regional centers typically provide a variety of short and long-term services to developmentally disabled children and adults.

Once a child is three years old, school districts assume primary responsibility for providing services and education support for disabled





children until their schooling is complete. You should also reach out to your school district to understand which resources will be available to you and your child once your child reaches school age.

9.

#### FIND AN EXCELLENT THERAPY PROVIDER

Once you've decided to get therapy for your child, you need to select a provider. In addition to a list from your insurance company, you can ask your pediatrician or the professional that diagnosed your child for referrals. You can also get recommendations from parent support groups and community resources. Lastly, of course you can also search online. Create a short list based on providers that practice in your area and accept your health insurance, as well as input from trusted sources.

Regardless of how you aggregate providers down to your short list, you should interview these providers and choose the one that is the best fit for your child. In addition to the types of therapy provided and the location of the therapy (i.e., home or clinic), you want to choose a provider that you feel you will be comfortable working with.

The best therapy providers understand the importance of caring for the unique needs of each family and go out of their way to ensure that they make working with them as easy as possible.

You should also include availability and responsiveness in your evaluation. Some providers may have a six-month waiting list, while others may be able to start care much sooner.

The speed at which a provider responds to your inquiry may be an indicator of the service you should expect while your child is receiving care. Opya tries to make it as easy as possible with a quick online contact form where one of our Intake specialists will contact you by the next business day.



10.

#### JOIN AN AUTISM FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

There are amazing parent groups throughout the country and most likely one in your area. [Parents Helping Parents](#) is an example of a support group in the San Francisco Bay Area that provides information and resources for parents with special needs children. [Sacramento4kids.com](#) is a great resource in Sacramento, California. The Family Resource Centers, found in most states, provide easy access to information and assistance to support families. To find a support group in your area, ask your pediatrician or child psychologist. You can search online for "autism support group near me."

Support groups like this can be great sources of information about experiences with different types of therapy as well as resources on the important transitions for your child such as starting school. Parent groups can also help you deal with everyday situations like temper tantrums, sleep issues, how to approach family outings and more.

You may find that these organizations can also provide information about how to receive care and get financial support for care services. Questions they can answer include helping you understand the role your school district will play, how to create an IEP, and how to find other public programs in your area. They may also recommend nearby speech, occupational and ABA behavioral therapy service providers.



Finally, remember that your child is still the same child you know and love. Care for them, protect them and love them. Be patient and understanding. With the right support, resources and treatment, your child can have the fulfilling life you want for them. It may take some time for your family to adjust, but there is hope. You can still thrive. And Opya is here to support you.

**Need more info, or ready to schedule an assessment?**  
**Call 888.300.OPYA (6792) | Email [info@opyacare.com](mailto:info@opyacare.com) | Visit [www.opyacare.com](http://www.opyacare.com)**



3-Year Accreditation

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### Discover Opya

Opya specializes in personalized early intervention autism therapy services including ABA, speech, and occupational therapies for newly diagnosed children up to 6-years old. Our connected care model results in a high level of communication and collaboration between parents and clinicians that makes parents' lives easier and empowers our therapists to provide more effective care.

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