



FaithWorks Counseling

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UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING A FAMILY MEMBER WITH AUTISM (Level 1)

What Does Level 1 Autism Mean?

- Level 1 ASD is often called “high-functioning autism.”
- Children may have average to above-average intelligence but need support with social skills, flexibility, and sensory regulation.
- Every child is unique—their abilities, challenges, and needs can vary day to day.

Common Strengths

- Excellent memory for facts and routines
- Strong interests in specific topics (e.g., trains, dinosaurs, numbers)
- Honesty and straightforward communication
- Creative problem-solving and unique perspectives

Common Challenges

- Social interaction: Difficulty making or keeping friends, may prefer routines over playdates
- Communication: May take things literally, miss sarcasm or body language
- Emotional regulation: Can become upset with changes in routine or unexpected events
- Sensory sensitivities: May react strongly to noise, textures, lights, or crowds

How You Can Support

1. Communicate Clearly

- Use simple, concrete language.
- Give one-step directions instead of multi-step requests.
- Allow extra time to respond.

2. Support Daily Routines

- Routines provide comfort and predictability.
- Use visual schedules, charts, or timers to prepare for transitions (school, bedtime, meals).

3. Encourage Social Growth

- Model social behaviors (greetings, turn-taking).
- Arrange short, structured playdates with one child at a time.
- Praise efforts to interact—even small ones.

4. Respect Sensory Needs

- Offer quiet spaces if the child feels overwhelmed.
- Let them wear headphones, soft clothing, or sunglasses if it helps.
- Avoid forcing participation in activities that cause distress.

5. Support Emotional Regulation

- Teach calming strategies: deep breathing, squeezing a stress ball, counting to 10.
- Use a feelings chart or “zones of regulation” to help them express emotions.
- Validate their feelings: “I see you’re upset. Let’s take a break together.”

How Family Members Can Help

- Parents/Caregivers: Be consistent with expectations and routines. Use positive reinforcement.
- Grandparents: Offer patience, support routines, and engage in activities the child enjoys.
- Siblings: Learn to be role models, practice patience, and celebrate small successes together.

What to Avoid

- Don’t assume the child is being “difficult”—they may be overwhelmed.
- Don’t force eye contact, hugs, or social interactions.
- Avoid sudden changes in plans without preparation.

Helpful Phrases to Use

- ✓ “First we ____, then we ____.” (Helps with transitions)
- ✓ “You have 5 more minutes before ____.”
- ✓ “Would you like to do A or B?” (Gives choice and control)
- ✓ “I see you’re upset. Let’s take a break.”

Resources

Recommended Books

- Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew – Ellen Notbohm
- Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism – Barry Prizant, PhD
- The Autism Sourcebook – Karen Siff Exkom
- Parent a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder – Albert Knapp, PhD

Parent Training Programs & Online Modules

- Triple P – Stepping Stones – www.triplep.net
- Incredible Years – Autism Spectrum & Language Delays <https://incredibleyears.com/programs/parent>
- AFIRM Modules (Evidence-based Practices) – <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu>
- Autism Navigator Parent Resources – <https://autismnavigator.com>

Key Takeaway

Children with Level 1 Autism thrive when surrounded by understanding, patience, structure, and love. Family support is the foundation that helps them build confidence, independence, and healthy relationships.