



AUTISM AND COVID-19: TALKING TO YOUR KIDS REPORT #2767

BACKGROUND: Autism spectrum disorder is a difference in the way a kid's brain develops. No one knows exactly what causes autism. A kid with autism might have trouble talking and learning the meaning of words; making friends or fitting in; dealing with changes (like trying new foods, having a substitute teacher, or having toys moved from their normal places); and dealing with loud noises, bright lights, or crowds. There is no cure for autism, but treatment can make a difference. It's better to start treatment when the child is young. Doctors, therapists, and special education teachers can help kids with talking, playing, and educational learning, while therapists help kids learn about making friends, taking turns, and getting along.

(Source: <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/autism.html>)

COVID-19: HELPING KIDS WITH AUTISM: Adjusting to a new routine has been stressful for everyone during the COVID-19 pandemic, but especially for children with autism. These children have extreme difficulty with change. Kids with autism most likely do not know what is going on and might not be able to express their fears or frustrations. Therefore, it's important for parents to talk with their child in a clear, direct, and honest way about coronavirus so it's simple to understand. For example, "Coronavirus is a germ. It can make people very sick. We have to stay away from others right now to stay healthy." It's important to go over basic rules, such as: wash hands well and often (for at least 20 seconds); try not to touch your nose, mouth, and eyes; practice social distancing (keeping 6 feet away from others); and wear a cloth face covering/face mask in public places. Be sure to give your child space and time for questions, but don't offer more detail than your child asks for. Answer the question if your child brings one up, otherwise, don't bring up the topic if it doesn't come up.

(Source: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-autism.html>)

WAYS TO HELP YOUR AUSTISTIC CHILD COPE: It's recommended to stick to routines because they are comfortable for kids with autism. Things like regular bed and wake-up times, meal and snack times, screen time, chores, and other household routines. But, also build in new routines to include school work, breaks, and exercise. Using visual schedules and to-do lists can help kids know what to expect, while timers and 2-minute warnings can help with transitions. Kids with autism who feel frustrated, worried, or scared may have more repetitive behaviors (like hand flapping or rocking), tantrums, and other challenging behaviors. It's important to find ways for your child to express feelings and help them work through strong emotions. You may try talking together, doing crafts, writing, playing, or acting out fears. For kids who are nonverbal, using augmented (or alternative) communication devices may be beneficial. You can also try calming activities, such as deep breathing, music, or watching a favorite video throughout the day. Exercise can also help ease anxious feelings. Your child's health care provider, teacher, or behavior or learning specialist can offer more tips to help your child during this time. Talk to your provider if you notice changes in sleeping or eating habits, or if your child seems more worried or upset than usual. These may be signs of anxiety or depression.

(Source: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-autism.html>)

✉ **For More Information, Contact:**

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