

ASD inPreschool

A3.2 Guide for Parents

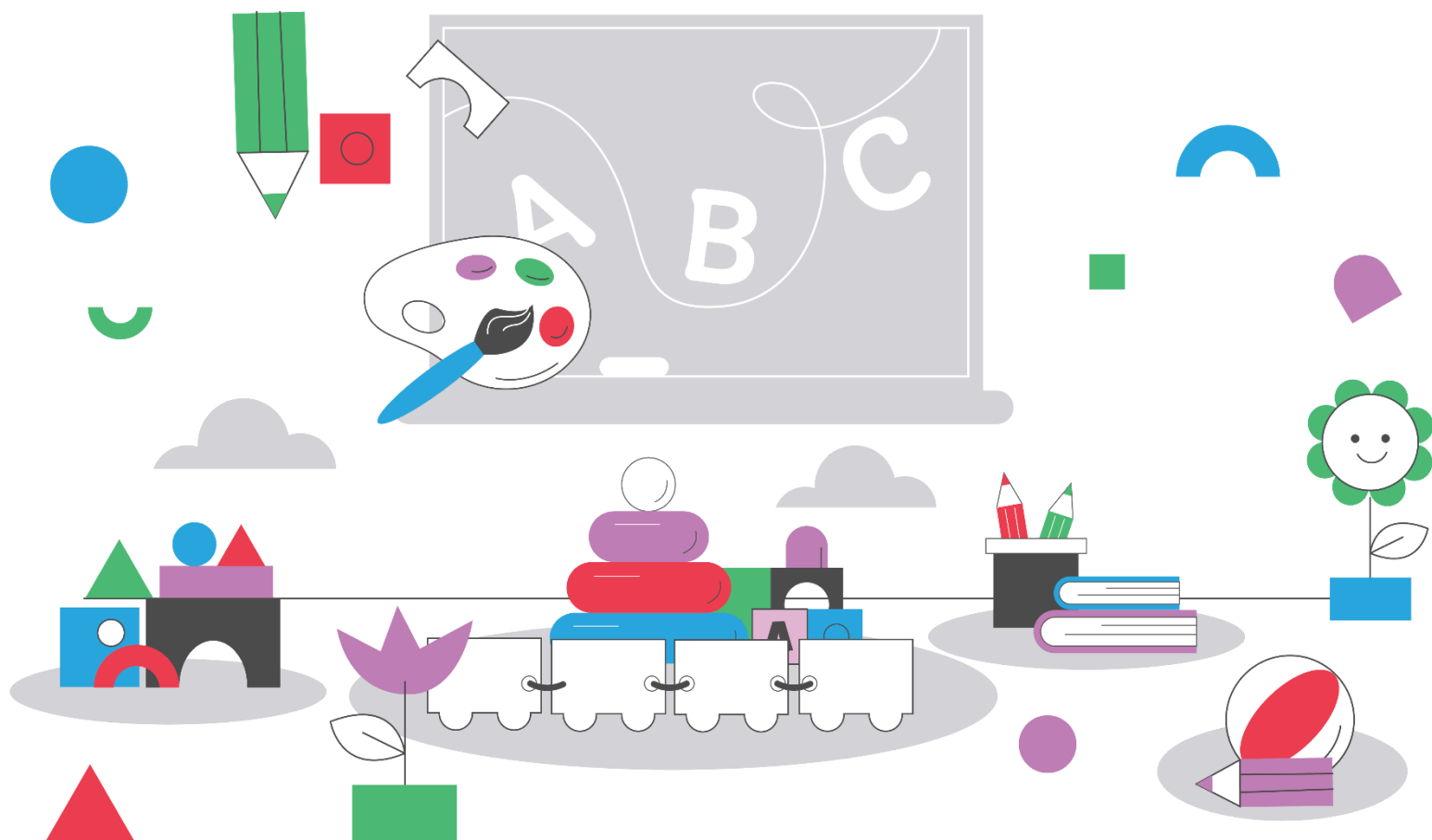


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Chapter 1: Introduction – Purpose and Overview of the Guide

Raising a preschool-aged child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can bring moments of joy, discovery, and connection — and at the same time, moments of uncertainty. Many parents wonder how to best support their child at home, what strategies truly make a difference, and where to turn when they need guidance. This guide was created to help families feel confident, supported, and empowered in their daily routines.

Children learn everywhere — during breakfast, at the playground, while getting dressed, and when cuddling before bedtime. Everyday moments are powerful opportunities to help your child communicate, play, learn, and feel secure. This guide translates professional knowledge into simple, practical steps that families can use immediately, without needing specialized training or equipment.

Our goal is to help you:

- Understand your child’s strengths and developmental needs.
- Create meaningful routines that support learning and emotional well-being.
- Build positive interactions that strengthen your relationship.

- Work together with educators and professionals so your child receives consistent support across home and preschool environments.

Every child with ASD is unique, and so is every family. This guide celebrates that individuality while offering flexible strategies that you can adapt to your child's pace and personality.

How this Guide Complements the Educator's Intervention Guide

While educators focus on structured learning, therapy strategies, and classroom organization, this guide is designed specifically for family life. The emphasis is not on teaching like a professional but on living daily routines in ways that help your child thrive.

For example:

- The Educators' Guide explains how teachers support transitions in a classroom.
- This Parent Guide offers practical steps for helping your child handle transitions at home, such as moving from playtime to mealtime or getting ready to leave the house.

By focusing on real-life family moments, this guide ensures that strategies feel natural, achievable, and relevant to your everyday routines.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2: Understanding Autism in the Preschool Years

Offers a simple, parent-friendly explanation of ASD and how it may appear during early childhood. You will find tips for noticing early signs, understanding your child's behaviors, and knowing when to seek professional advice.

Chapter 3: Creating Supportive Home Environments

Explains how to build calm, predictable routines at home. You will learn strategies for mealtimes, play, dressing, transitions, sensory needs, and setting up spaces that help your child feel comfortable.

Chapter 4: Encouraging Play, Learning, and Communication

Shows how everyday play can strengthen communication and learning. Includes practical activities, simple communication tools, and ideas for supporting shared attention and imitation — all through joyful interaction

Chapter 5: Building Connections – Family, Community, and Well-being

Focuses on collaboration with teachers and professionals, connecting with community resources, supporting siblings, and taking care of yourself as a caregiver.

Chapter 2: Understanding Autism in the Preschool Years

Raising a preschooler on the autism spectrum can bring a mix of joy, pride, worry, and many questions. Every autistic child has their own way of seeing and experiencing the world, with unique strengths as well as challenges. In this chapter, we look at what autism can mean in the preschool years so that you can better understand why your child behaves in certain ways and how you can support them with confidence at home.

What is Autism? A Simple Overview for Parents

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a **neurodevelopmental difference**. This means that from early on, a child's brain develops and processes information in a way that is a bit different from most other children. These differences can influence how a child **communicates, relates to other people, plays, and experiences the world** around them.

Autism is **not a disease** and it is **not caused by parenting, stress, or something you did or didn't do**. It is a natural form of diversity in how human brains work. Many autistic people and families see autism as an important part of who they are – with its own strengths and challenges.

Because autism is a **spectrum**, it can look very different from one child to another. Some children:

- use only a few words or no spoken language yet,
- need a lot of help to cope with noise, change, or busy places,
- find it hard to join group play or to understand social rules.

Others:

- speak fluently but struggle to understand jokes, hints, or social “small talk”,
- have very specific interests (for example trains, numbers, letters, animals),
- need support mainly in certain situations, such as transitions or new routines.

Most autistic children share differences in a few key areas, but each child has their **own profile**. Many have particular **strengths**, such as a good memory for details, strong focus on things they enjoy, honesty, and a unique way of seeing patterns or noticing things that others miss.

Autism is usually lifelong, but how it shows can change over time. In the **preschool years (around 2–6 years)**, families often notice first signs in everyday life: maybe their child plays differently from peers, does not respond to their name consistently, reacts strongly to sounds or touch, or finds changes in routine very hard. These early observations can be an important starting point for understanding your child better and, when needed, seeking professional advice and support.

How Autism May Show at Home in the Preschool Years

Every autistic child is different. Not all children will show all of the behaviours below, and many children without autism may show some of them sometimes as well. What often stands out in autism is a **pattern** across several areas and that these differences are **strong and long-lasting**.

The examples below are about everyday life at home. They are not a checklist for diagnosis, but may help you recognise things you are already seeing in your child.

Communication & Understanding

At home, you might notice that your child:

- uses few words or mostly single words (“juice”, “car”) and often pulls your hand or points instead of asking;
- repeats words or phrases they have heard (cartoons, songs, your questions);
- understands familiar phrases and routines (“Let’s go in the car”) better than open questions (“What do you want to do?”);
- does not always respond to their name or seems deeply absorbed in their own activity.

Social Interaction & Connection

Your child may enjoy being with you but connect in their own way. For example, they might:

- prefer to play alone or next to others rather than directly with them;
- use eye contact differently (briefly, sideways, or mainly with objects rather than faces);
- show affection by bringing you objects, standing close, or leaning against you rather than using hugs or words;
- find family visits or busy gatherings tiring and seek a quiet space.

Play & Interests

Play often has its own style. Your child may:

- line up toys, sort them by colour or size, or focus on parts (wheels, doors, buttons);
- have very strong interests in certain topics (trains, numbers, letters, animals) and want to repeat the same games, books, or videos;
- enjoy real objects (keys, remote controls, kitchen items) more than toy versions;
- watch pretend games like “tea party” but find it hard to join in or change the story.

Sensory Experiences

Sounds, lights, touch, tastes, and movement can feel more intense – or less intense – than for other children. You might see that your child:

- covers their ears for everyday noises (vacuum cleaner, blender, traffic) or avoids certain textures and clothes;
- becomes very upset during haircuts, toothbrushing, or nail clipping;
- seeks strong sensations by jumping, spinning, crashing into cushions, or closely watching moving objects or lights.

Routines & Flexibility

Routines often help your child feel safe and in control. They may:

- insist on the same cup, plate, route, or order of activities;
- react strongly if a favourite activity must stop, if plans change suddenly, or if something is “not as usual”;
- have big emotional reactions (crying, screaming, lying on the floor, running away) when faced with unexpected changes.

These reactions are usually signs that your child is overwhelmed or confused, rather than being “difficult on purpose”. Later chapters will explore how you can support your child with routines, transitions, play, and sensory needs in everyday family life.

Strengths and Diverse Profiles

Autistic children are not only defined by their challenges. Many show clear strengths from an early age, even if these do not always fit the usual “preschool picture”. You may already see that your child:

- notices small details that others miss (a tiny change in a room, a logo, a sound far away);
- has a strong memory for songs, pictures, routes, or facts (remembering where things are, exact words from a story, or the way to grandma’s house);
- can focus deeply on things they enjoy, spending a long time with blocks, cars, letters, or animals;
- is honest and direct, with clear likes and dislikes and little “social pretending”.

These strengths and challenges look different for every autistic child – there is no single “autism profile”. Your child may need support in some areas and shine in others.

In the next chapters, we will look at how you can use these strengths in daily routines (Chapter 3) and in play, learning, and communication at home (Chapter 4) to help your child feel confident and included.

Noticing and Observing: What You Can Look For at Home

When you worry about your child, it is natural to focus on difficult moments. It can be very helpful instead to **observe everyday life over a few days** and look for **patterns** – what is hard, what works well, and what seems to help. This is not about turning you into a “therapist”, but about getting to know your child’s needs more clearly.

You might keep a small notebook or use a note app on your phone. A simple structure could be:

- **Situation**
 - *When and where?*
 - e.g. mealtimes, getting dressed, playtime, going out, bedtime.
- **What went smoothly?**
 - e.g. “Brushing teeth worked well when we sang the same song as yesterday.”
- **When did my child struggle?**
 - e.g. “Got very upset when we turned off the TV without warning,”
 - “Refused to put on the scratchy jumper.”
- **What seemed to help?**
 - e.g. a favourite toy, a quiet space, a cuddle, a short visual cue (“First pyjamas, then story”), extra time, or a clear countdown.

Even a few short notes over several days can show you and professionals **where the main challenges are and what already helps**. Remember: observing is **not about judging** your child or yourself. It is about understanding how your child experiences the world so that you can support them in ways that feel safe and manageable for both of you.

When to Seek Professional Advice

Many parents wonder: “*Is this still within the range of ‘typical’ – or should we get it checked?*” You do not have to answer this question alone. It can be very helpful to talk with your **pediatrician or a specialist** if you notice a clear pattern of differences over time.

You might consider seeking professional advice if, for example, your child:

- uses **very few or no words** for their age, or mostly repeats what others say;

- rarely responds to their name or to people trying to get their attention, even in a quiet room;
- has very strong reactions to everyday experiences (sounds, touch, smells, clothes) that make daily life hard;
- seems to lose skills they had before (for example, words they used to say disappear, or they stop making eye contact or gestures they used before);
- has big difficulties with change (routines, places, people) that regularly lead to meltdowns or make it hard for the family to go out, play, or follow daily routines.

Seeing a professional is **not about putting a final label on your child**. It is a way to **gain clarity, ask questions, and access support** if needed. If autism or another developmental difference is confirmed, early understanding and support can make everyday life **easier and more enjoyable** for your child and for your family – at home, in preschool, and in the wider community.

How to Respond Supportively – At Home and Together with Preschool

Finding out that your child may be on the autism spectrum can bring many feelings at once: relief that there might be an explanation, worry about the future, sadness that some things may be different from what you imagined, and also hope. All of these reactions are normal. At the same time, there are gentle ways you can respond that already make a difference for your child and for yourself.

Supporting Your Child in Everyday Moments

Autistic children often show their needs more through behaviour than through words. Instead of asking “Why are you doing this?”, it can help to ask “What might you be trying to tell me right now?”. A meltdown may be a sign that the situation is too loud, too bright, too confusing or changing too quickly. Running away from a group might mean “I need a break” rather than “I don’t like other children”.

You can support your child by taking their feelings seriously, even if you cannot change everything around them. Simple sentences such as “This is really hard for you”, “The noise is too much, isn’t it?” or “You really wanted to keep playing” can help your child feel seen. Small adjustments often go a long way: turning down background noise, moving to a quieter room, giving a short warning before you end an activity, or letting your child bring a favourite toy, blanket or headphones into challenging situations. Clear and simple language, sometimes supported by a picture or gesture, can make it easier for your child to understand what will happen next.

You do not have to transform your whole routine at once. A few small changes that you repeat consistently can already help your child feel safer and more in control. The next chapters will offer more concrete ideas for adapting daily routines and the home environment (Chapter 3) and for supporting play, learning and communication (Chapter 4).

Supporting Yourself as a Parent

Caring for an autistic child can be deeply enriching and also demanding. Your own well-being matters. It is common to feel confused, exhausted or scared about what lies ahead, and at the same time relieved that you are starting to understand your child better. You do not need to carry all of this alone. Talking with someone you trust – a partner, friend, relative, another parent or a professional – can make worries feel lighter and open up new perspectives.

Try to allow yourself small moments of rest wherever possible: a short walk, a quiet coffee, a few pages of a book, a phone call with a friend. If someone offers help with childcare, the household or

paperwork, it is okay to say yes. You are an important part of your child's support system; looking after yourself is also a way of looking after your child.

Bridge to School: Sharing Concerns and Observations

You know your child better than anyone else. Preschool educators see your child in a different environment, with other children, routines and expectations. When these two views come together, you can build a stronger support network around your child.

You might begin by simply sharing what you notice at home: "We see that our child becomes very upset when plans change suddenly," or "At home, having a quiet corner and a favourite toy helps when things get too much." You can then ask the educators what they observe: "How do you see my child playing with others?", "What seems to calm them when they are overwhelmed?", or "Are there times of day or activities that go especially well or are especially difficult?"

The notes you have made at home (see Section 2.4) can be a useful starting point. Educators may recognise similar patterns or add new information from the preschool setting. Together, you can look for ideas that work both at home and in preschool. Chapter 3 will explore how you and the preschool can coordinate routines and environments, while Chapter 5 will offer more detailed tools for ongoing collaboration and communication.

You do not need to have everything sorted out before talking with preschool. Simply opening a respectful conversation and sharing your observations is already an important step in building a safe and supportive world around your child.

As you begin to recognise how autism may show up in your child's everyday life, the next step is to think about what you can actually do at home to make things feel safer, calmer and more predictable. It offers practical ideas for shaping mealtimes, play, getting dressed, outings and bedtime in ways that take your child's communication style, sensory needs and love of routines into account – so that everyday life can work better for your child and for your whole family.

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Chapter 3 :The importance of creating supportive home environments

As parents, you are the most important teachers in your child’s life. The early years (ages 0–6) are crucial for social and emotional growth. For children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the world can often feel overwhelming, unpredictable, and loud. The goal of "Creating supportive home environments" is to transform your home into a **predictable, calm, and safe place**, where your child can recharge, learn social skills without the pressure of the outside world, and master daily living skills with confidence (Sood, et al., 2014).

By establishing clear routines and using simple visual tools, you can significantly reduce anxiety and challenging behaviours. The strategies below are practical, easy to implement, and designed to foster consistency between home and school, giving your child the strongest foundation for success.

The foundation: predictability, calmness and safety

A supportive home environment starts with two core components: predictability and calmness. Children with ASD thrive on knowing what is coming next and having control over their immediate environment.

Component		Suggested action
Establish predictability	Consistent structure	Do things in the same order everyday E.g. wake up → breakfast → brush teeth → get dressed
	Visual schedule	Use simple pictures or photos to illustrate the steps of the day, starting with waking up and ending with bedtime. Place the schedule in a central location (refrigerator or bedroom wall) so that your child can reference it, and help them feel in control.
Cultivate calmness	Sensory audit	Pay attention to light, sound and smell. Use warm, dimmable lights, and reduce background noise (e.g. turn off the TV unless it is actively being watched, or use white noise machines for sleep)
	Order and organisation	Store toys and materials in labeled bins (word or picture). Clutter can be visually and cognitively distracting.
	Safe corner	Designate a quiet, low-stimulus area (e.g. a small tent, a beanbag chair or a corner with a weighted blanket) where your child can go when they feel overwhelmed.

Managing daily routines and transitions

The biggest meltdowns often occur during **transitions** (moving from one activity to the next) or during unstructured routines. Structure is key to success.

Routines: making the predictable successful

Routine	Strategy
Mealtime	<p>Stick to a consistent time and location. If picky eating is an issue, present food consistently but without pressure. Use a visual First/Then board ("First eat two bites of broccoli, then play with your tablet.")</p> <p><i>Visual available in Annex 2.</i></p>
Playtime	<p>Use a choice board (pictures of preferred activities) to help your child select what to do, giving them ownership. Structure playtime by setting clear limits (e.g., "Train time is 15 minutes, then we tidy up.").</p> <p>Check this video that explains how to create a choice board: https://ocali.org/Choice-Board-Real-Pictures</p> <p><i>Blank template available in Annex 3</i></p> <p><i>Visuals available in Additional Resource 3.</i></p>
Bedtime	<p>Establish a non-negotiable, calming routine 30 minutes before lights-out: Bath → Story → Cuddle → Lights Off. Use soft lighting and quiet voices.</p>

Harnessing the power of visual supports

Visual supports use the child's strength in visual processing to teach and manage behaviour.

Visual Tool	How to use it at home
Choice Board	A laminated board with 3–5 choices (e.g., LEGOs, puzzle, book, tablet). Your child points to or hands you the picture of their choice.
First/Then Board	A simple two-part visual that links a required activity ("First: homework") with a highly preferred reward ("Then: TV time"). This builds tolerance for non-preferred tasks.
Social Stories	Short, positive narratives you read before a new event (e.g., going to the dentist, meeting a new sibling). They describe the situation, what others are doing, and what your child should do.

Communicating expectations clearly and positively

The way you talk to your child is critical. Aim for clear, simple language and a positive focus.

- Be direct and simple: Use short, declarative sentences. Instead of "Are you ready to put your shoes on and go outside now, honey?", say, "Shoes on. Time to go."
- **State what to do, not what not to do:** Avoid negative phrasing. Instead of "Don't run in the house," say, "**Walk slowly inside.**" Instead of "Stop screaming," say, "**Use a quiet voice.**"
- **Praise the effort, not just the outcome:** Provide specific, positive reinforcement immediately. Instead of "Good job," say, "**Thank you for showing me your quiet voice!**" or "**You worked hard to put your dishes away!**" This helps them understand exactly which behavior you want to see again.

Consistency: home and preschool partnership

Your child benefits immensely when their world is consistent, whether they are at home or at school.

- **Communicate with the educator:** Share your home visual schedule with your child's preschool teacher and ask about the structure they use. Use the same vocabulary for activities (e.g., if the school calls it "Circle Time," use that term at home).
- **Share successful tools:** If a specific social story or transition technique works well at home (e.g., using a high-five gesture to signal a transition), share that with the teacher. Conversely, adopt successful school strategies at home.
- **Regular check-ins:** Use a communication notebook or app to share observations about behavior, sleep, and appetite. When you work as a team, you ensure your child's learning is reinforced 24/7.

Annex 1

TODAY IS

DAYS

MONDAY

TUESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY


SATURDAY

SUNDAY


DATES **1 5**

DAYS **WEDNESDAY**

MONTH **MARCH**



SPRING




SUNNY








SEASONS WEATHER

DATES




1	2	3
4		6
7	8	9
	0	2



WEATHER

	 CLOUDY	 STORMY
 WINDY	 PARTLY CLOUDY	 RAINY
		



SEASONS

 WINTER	
 SUMMER	 AUTUMN

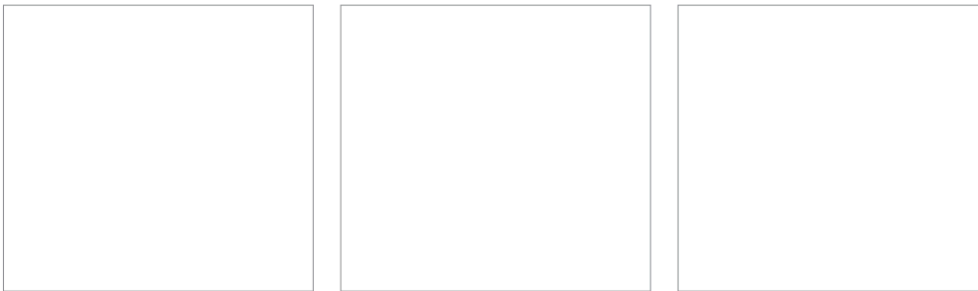
MONTH

JANUARY	FEBRUARY		APRIL
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER

Annex 2

 First	 then

Annex 3



Additional Resources

- Free printable visual schedules and daily routine charts:
https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/printable-visual-schedules-and-daily-routine-charts-for-children/#google_vignette
- Free printable choice boards:
https://ocali.org/resource_gallery_of_interventions/choice-boards
- Parenting guides in various topics:
<https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/category/parenting/parenting-guides/>

Further Reading

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Chapter 4: Encouraging Play, Learning, and Communication

Why Play Matters for Your Child’s Learning and Communication

Play is one of the most powerful ways young children learn and develop communication skills. Research shows that shared play supports joint attention, imitation, and early social communication all of which are key areas for autistic children (Kasari et al., 2006). While children with autism may play differently, every form of play has value and can become a pathway to connection.

Through simple play moments, your child learns to communicate through looks, gestures, sounds, or words. Play also builds confidence, emotional regulation, and curiosity (Prizant, 2015). You do not need special training; being responsive and following your child’s interests is one of the most effective strategies parents can use at home (Sussman, 2012).

Play supports:

- joint attention
- imitation
- communication
- emotional connection
- problem-solving
- curiosity and exploration

Play-Based Learning: Simple Ways to Build Engagement at Home

Copy and Join In

Copying your child’s play is a powerful way to connect. When you imitate your child’s actions, you show them you are interested in their world. This approach is strongly recommended in early communication interventions (Sussman, 2012). You can choose a moment when you start another type of play, encouraging the child to imitate you.

Play in Short, Predictable Moments

Many children with autism learn best in short bursts. Short, predictable routines help reduce stress and support attention (Prizant, 2015).

Use What Your Child Loves

Children with autism often learn most effectively through their strongest interests. Using these interests as entry points supports motivation and shared attention (WHO, 2021).

Sensory Play to Support Learning

Sensory experiences—such as water, sand, bubbles, or movement—can help children regulate their emotions and increase engagement (WHO, 2021). Take the opportunity to verbalise the key words of the game to promote communication.

Storytelling Through Play

Using toys to act out simple stories can improve symbolic play and early language skills, especially when parents repeat actions and narrate using simple language (Kasari et al., 2006).

Music and Rhythm Games

Music can support imitation, attention, and emotional regulation. Rhythmic routines help autistic children anticipate what comes next (Prizant, 2015).

TRY THIS AT HOME: Quick Play Ideas

- Roll a ball back and forth. Choose one or two keywords from the activity, for example: ball, back or forth
- Blow bubbles and wait for a gesture or look. Choose one or two keywords from the activity, for example: bubbles or blowing.
- Tap a simple rhythm and pause for your child to respond. Choose one or two keywords from the activity, for example: tap or clap
- Hide a toy under a cup. Choose one or two keywords from the activity, for example: toy or cup
- Pretend to feed a favourite toy

Communication Strategies for Parents

Follow Your Child's Lead

Parent-led but child-centered strategies are among the most effective ways to support communication in autism (Sussman, 2012).

Use Visual Supports

Visual supports help children understand routines and expectations, reducing frustration and increasing independence (WHO, 2021).

Use Simple Language

Short, clear phrases are easier to process and imitate (Sussman, 2012).

Wait Time (5–10 seconds)

Many autistic children need extra time to process information. Adding a pause increases the likelihood of a communication attempt (Kasari et al., 2006).

Use Gestures

Gestures give your child extra clues and reduce the load on verbal processing (Prizant, 2015).

Celebrate All Functional Communication

Pointing, looking, reaching, pulling your hand, smiling — all count as communication and should be reinforced warmly (Sussman, 2012).

Create Communication Opportunities

Offer choices, pause favourite routines, or keep items slightly out of reach. These natural situations invite your child to communicate (Sussman, 2012).

DO THIS / AVOID THIS

Do this	Avoid this
Use simple phrases	Long explanations
Follow interests	Pressuring new activities
Offer choices	Giving too many items at once
Use visuals	Relying only on speech
Wait patiently	Asking many rapid questions

Building Interaction Through Storytelling, Music & Sensory Play

Storytelling

Story routines help children learn new words and concepts gradually. Repetition strengthens understanding (WHO, 2021).

Music & Rhythm

Music supports emotional regulation and imitation. Many autistic children connect strongly through rhythm (Prizant, 2015).

Sensory Play

Sensory play can reduce anxiety, support focus, and strengthen shared experiences (WHO, 2021).

TRY THIS AT HOME: Sensory Connection Ideas

- Draw shapes in rice or sand together
- Gently swing or rock with your child
- Create a calm-down bottle
- Share different textures: sponges, brushes, scarves

Using Technology in Safe and Meaningful Ways

Technology can support communication when used intentionally and with adult involvement (WHO, 2021).

Meaningful uses:

- Picture schedule apps
- Simple AAC apps
- Short co-viewed videos
- Music and rhythm apps

Guidelines:

- Co-play together
- Short sessions (5–10 minutes)
- Use a visual timer
- Choose slow-paced, predictable content
- Connect the app to real experiences

SAFE TECH CHECKLIST

- Calm, predictable content
- Adult participation
- Short, meaningful use
- Supports communication or attention
- Links back to real-life play

Additional Resources

Autism Little Learners– Free visuals and home tools for routines. <https://autismlittlelearners.com/>

More Than Words – Hanen Centre – Parent-friendly communication strategies (Sussman, 2012). <https://www.hanen.org/Programs/For-Parents/More-Than-Words.aspx>

National Autistic Society (UK) – Practical early-years resources. <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/about-autism>

Autismo España – Spanish parent guides and local support. <https://www.autismo.org.es/>

Zero to Three – Early childhood development tips. <https://www.zerotothree.org/>

Uniquely Human (Prizant, 2015) – Strength-based perspective on autism. <https://uniquelyhuman.com/>

WHO – Autism Spectrum Disorders (Key Facts). Clear global guidance on autism support and early development. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>

Conclusion

This chapter helps parents understand how play can become a powerful tool for learning and communication for autistic preschoolers. It explains that simple moments of shared play build joint attention, imitation, and connection. Parents learn practical, everyday strategies such as using visuals, following the child’s lead, modelling simple language, and creating communication opportunities. The chapter also describes how storytelling, music, and sensory play strengthen interaction. Safe and meaningful use of technology is encouraged through co-play and short routines. Overall, the chapter empowers families with warm, easy-to-apply strategies that support communication, learning, and emotional well-being at home.

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World Health Organization. (2021). *Autism spectrum disorders: Key facts**. WHO.

Chapter 5: Why Collaboration and Communication Matters

Collaboration and communication between parents, teachers, therapists, and the community create a unified support system that directly enhances outcomes for autistic preschoolers. When families and educators regularly share observations about a child's strengths, challenges, sensory needs, and successful strategies, they develop a shared understanding that allows interventions to be coordinated across home, school, and community. This consistency helps children generalize skills more quickly, reduces anxiety through predictable approaches, and ensures that evidence-based practices are reinforced wherever the child learns and plays. Strong communication also boosts parental confidence and teacher competence, reduces conflicts, and creates the mutual trust needed for effective problem-solving. Beyond the classroom, involving the broader community through inclusive programs and activities provides autistic children with natural opportunities to practice social skills, build relationships, and participate meaningfully in their neighborhoods, which research recognizes as essential for comprehensive development and school success (Syeda & Bruck, 2022).

Communication strategies between teachers and parents

Consistent, structured communication systems ensure that important information about your child's needs, progress, and successful strategies flows between home and school (Entrust Disability Services, 2025). Some successful communication strategies are:

- **Communication log** – Write brief notes about sleep, mood, successes, or challenges
- **Monthly team meetings** – 10–20-minute sessions with teachers and therapists to review progress
- **Video calls** – Schedule virtual meetings for busy families who can't attend in person

What to Share

From home to school (Hays, 2005; Entrust Disability Services, 2025):

- Morning routine difficulties or wins
- Changes in sleep, diet, or medication
- Sensory sensitivities noticed at home
- Special interests that motivate learning
- Successful calming strategies

From school to home (Hays, 2005; Entrust Disability Services, 2025):

- New skills emerging in class
- Peer interaction observations

- Triggers for meltdowns or anxiety
- Activities that worked well
- Upcoming changes to routine

Communication Examples: From home to school

Less Effective	More effective
"They were bad this morning"	"They had a meltdown during breakfast when his routine changed. They may need extra transition warnings today." (Entrust Disability Services)"
"They are obsessed with trains again."	"Trains are highly motivating this week. They could be used as a reward for completing tasks!"
"Did they have a good day?"	"How did they do during circle time? Any peer interactions? Did the sensory break schedule work?"

Sample communication log

This log can be used as a shared document between parents and teachers. So they can both briefly write their observations from the home and school for better monitoring.

Date	Home note	School note
E.g. Mon 11/2025	Rough morning because they didn't sleep well. May need quiet time.	Used calm corner twice. Great during music!
e.g. Tues 11/2025	Obsessed with trains this week could use as motivator.	Used train puzzle as reward. Completed 3 tasks independently!

Supporting Your Child in Community & Play Activities

As parents, you want your child to feel safe, confident, and included when exploring new places and activities. For autistic children, predictable routines, smaller environments, and thoughtful preparation can make participation much more enjoyable. Here are some practical, family-friendly strategies to help you introduce community outings, playground visits, and group activities in ways that build success over time (Safety Tips for Community Activities | Marcus Autism Center, n.d.).

Playground Strategies

Familiar faces

- Coordinate visits with one or two families your child already knows.
- Choose peers who are patient, calm, and comfortable with parallel or gentle play.
- Build routines around predictable weekly meetups.

Off-peak hours

- Go during quieter times such as weekday mornings or late afternoons.
- Avoid high-stimulation times (weekends, after-school rush, hot midday hours).

Sensory-friendly equipment

- Seek areas with swings, sand, water play, or climbing structures your child prefers.
- Start with their favorite play element to help them settle in.
- Avoid equipment that tends to be crowded or unpredictable (e.g., large slides).

Parallel play

- Allow your child to play near peers without expectations of interaction.
- Model simple invitations like “Let’s play next to each other.”

Bring comfort items

- Pack a favorite toy, snack, sensory tool, noise-canceling headphones

Inclusive Programs & Resources

In the board below, you’ll find ideas for different types of programs and activities you can search for in your community that are often autistic-friendly and supportive for your child.

Inclusive types of programs

Type of program	Examples
Autism-friendly community events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums, theaters, zoos, and aquariums that offer sensory-friendly hours. • Reduced crowds, dimmed lights, and quiet rooms available.
Adaptive recreation programs	City parks departments often host inclusive sports, swim times, or movement classes.
Social skills groups	Therapist-led groups that focus on play, turn-taking, communication, and peer interaction.

Special needs sports leagues

football, dance, swimming and gymnastics, programs designed around individual needs.

Preparing the Community

When your child enters a new activity or environment, helping the adults and peers around them understand their needs can make a difference. Preparing the environment sets the stage for smoother transitions, better communication, and more positive experiences for your child. The strategies below can help you build supportive partnerships wherever your child goes (autism speaks toolkit, 2024).

Brief educators: Share a short “About My Child” page with strengths, triggers, preferred supports, and communication needs.

Request accommodations: Ask about quieter waiting areas, visual schedules, flexible participation, or modified tasks.

Buddy system: Pair your child with a supportive peer, sibling, for confidence and guidance.

“About My Child” Form Template

You can customize this to your child, print it, or share it with teachers, coaches, caregivers, or activity leaders.

About My Child

Child’s Name: _____

Preferred Name/Nickname: _____

Age: _____

Primary Language(s): _____

Communication

My child communicates by (check all that apply):

- Speaking
- Gestures
- Picture cards/visuals
- Sign language
- Other: _____

Helpful communication tips:

Strengths & Interests

My child loves:

Topics, toys, or activities that motivate them:

Supports That Help My Child Succeed

Visual supports (e.g., picture schedule, first/then):

Sensory supports (breaks, headphones, movement):

Preferred calming strategies:

Possible Triggers or Challenges

Things that may overwhelm or upset my child:

Behaviors you may see when they are stressed:

How You Can Help

What adults can do to support my child in this setting:

Emergency or Safety Considerations

Important notes (wandering, allergies, medical info):

Parent/Guardian Contact

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Additional Resources

Autism speaks: School Community Tool kit- A guide to provide information for use in tandem with parents/caregivers and schools to support students with autism https://link.assetfile.io/3cjm9loGkp7caJcw01GYkC/SS_2024_SCHOOL_COMMUNITY_TOOL_KIT.pdf



Collaboration between parents and school staff in mainstream secondary- This is an article by the National Autistic Society about how parents and school staff can proactively collaborate to support autistic students.
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/schools-parents>

Research on Parent-Teacher Collaboration for Autism- This page summarizes research showing that when parents and teachers collaborate effectively around autistic children, there are big gains in academic, social, and behavioral outcomes, but real-world barriers like time, communication, and resources make it hard, and tools like the Guiding Growth app can help bridge those gaps.
<https://guidinggrowth.app/research-on-parent-teacher-collaboration-for-autism/>

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Safety tips for community activities | Marcus Autism Center. (n.d.). Marcus Autism Center. <https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/safety-tips-for-community-activities>

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