



NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY AS A CAREGIVER

Your **loved one** has a diagnosis of **Autism Spectrum Disorder**.

What's next?

Behaviors and Challenges You May Recognize

Autism Spectrum Disorder (or simply Autism) is a mental difference characterized by a spectrum of non-typical social, sensory, and cognitive traits. Autism is not a disease, but rather a form of neurodivergence with its own type of normality. Still, your loved one might be going through a lot.

They may be experiencing:

- peer rejection and difficulty blending in
- sensory irritation, sensory exhaustion, and subsequent meltdowns
- differing needs they may not have fully identified (such as sensory differences)
- needing routine to reduce anxiety, coming across as rigid
- difficulty making small decisions, like what to wear or eat
- challenges in perspective-taking; difficulty seeing others' views
- processing delays and speech differences (including selective mutism)
- needing specific types of stimulation called "stims" in order to relax or focus
- gender dysphoria or sexual orientation struggles (more common with autistic people)
- difficulty practicing conversational norms and resulting social anxiety

This journey of navigating your loved one's autism diagnosis may look daunting at first. Yet, it can help to shift that compass and look at this journey as an opportunity for GROWTH. On this journey, you can NURTURE your relationship with your loved one AND yourself.

Supporting Your Loved One

You and your loved one are embarking on a growth journey and will navigate their diagnosis TOGETHER. Be PATIENT with your loved one AND yourself as you learn which coping strategies are most helpful.

The greatest gift we can give our loved ones is ACCEPTANCE of what they are going through in the moment. To help them you can also practice boundary-setting, utilize outside help, and take care of YOU! It will empower you BOTH on this journey for you to give yourself love and rest. YOU will be more able to give the care they need and THEY will witness your self-care example.

You can also provide your loved with resources. *See the next page for ways to help with autism differences.*

If you are currently experiencing a crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741-741.

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Your loved one has a diagnosis of **Autism**.

What's next?

Resources for You and Your Loved One

- The **National Institute of Mental Health** on Autism
- Autism info from The **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
- “What is Autism?” from the **Autism Society**
- An overview of autism assistive technology by **Adapt and Learn**
- Speak-aloud mobile app for nonverbal persons by **LeeLoo**
- **WrongPlanet**: a support forum for people affected by autism (and by being autistic in a neurotypical world)
- An Autism peer chat service by **HealthfulChat**
- Resource library from the **Autistic Self-Advocacy Network**
- Autism/LGBTQ+ advocacy by **Twainbow**
- **JAM Card**: a way for people with speech delays or processing issues to communicate they need “Just a Minute” (also available as an app)
- **Emergency Chat**: tool for autistic persons to communicate during meltdowns
- An app for people who struggle with daily choices called **Tiny Decisions**
- **Routinery**: an app that allows the person to set a daily routine with labels and reminders.
- **Molehill Mountain**: an app to help autistic people self-manage their anxiety.
- Search engine for Speech-Language Pathologists via the **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**
- Scholarships for families impacted by autism care expense by **Siblings of Autism**
- **Mom2Mom**: Caregiver peer support for mothers of children with intellectual disabilities

Preventing Caregiver Burnout

We give our BEST care when we are also taking care of ourselves! Make time to recharge, even with a short moment that's just for YOU. Connecting with other caregivers is another powerful form of self-care. Learn more about our One-to-One Caregiver Peer Support program on **our website**.

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