



SHARK

STRONG HEALTHY AND RESILIENT KIDS

Autism Resource Guide: Supporting Your Child After an Autism Diagnosis

We understand that receiving an autism diagnosis for your child can be overwhelming. Below is a collection of trusted resources and tips to help you better understand autism and begin building a strong foundation for your child's development.

LINKS

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network Website Statement on Autism](#)
- [Autism 101](#) – In-depth 1 hour class on the basics of Autism from Seattle Children's
- [Ambitious About Autism Website](#) – Great website covering many issues from childhood through adulthood
- [Sensory Differences](#) - Overview of sensory issues in autism
- [Teens Explain Autism](#) - Short video clips from autistic young people explaining what it's like being autistic
- [Know Yourself Website](#) - Resources for autistic teens (including videos and worksheets)
- [Friend in Me](#) - Service pairing kids with autism together to socialize and play games online

QUICK TIPS

Building Resilience in Children with Autism

Resilience helps children adapt, grow, and thrive. Here are key factors that support resilience in kids:

1. Positive and Supportive Parenting
 - Consistent routines, empathy, encouragement, and celebrating small wins.
2. Adequate Sleep
 - A predictable bedtime routine can help with behavior, focus, and mood.
3. Community and Friendships
 - Look for inclusive activities, autism-friendly events, or support groups where your child can build social skills.
4. Problem-Solving Skills
 - Teach your child how to work through challenges with this 5-step model:
 - Identify the problem
 - Brainstorm solutions
 - Choose the best one
 - Try it
 - Review how it went

NEXT STEPS

- Join the SHARK Facebook parent support group. Contact: lgasca2@dhs.lacounty.gov.
- Join the SHARK Parent Buddies Program. Contact: lgasca2@dhs.lacounty.gov
- Don't hesitate to ask questions—we're here to support you!

- Shark Team



SHARK

STRONG HEALTHY AND RESILIENT KIDS

Guía de Recursos sobre el Autismo: Apoyando a su Hijo Después de un Diagnóstico de Autismo

Entendemos que recibir un diagnóstico de autismo para su hijo puede ser abrumador. A continuación, encontrará una colección de recursos confiables y consejos para ayudarlo a comprender mejor el autismo y comenzar a construir una base sólida para el desarrollo de su hijo.

ENLACES

- [Declaración del Sitio Web de la Red de Autodefensa Autista \(ASAN\)](#)
- [Autismo 101](#) – Clase profunda de 1 hora sobre los conceptos básicos del autismo del Hospital Infantil de Seattle
- [Ambitious About Autism](#) – Sitio web con información sobre temas desde la niñez hasta la adultez
- [Diferencias sensoriales](#) – Descripción general de los problemas sensoriales en el autismo
- [Adolescentes explican el autismo](#) – Clips de video cortos de jóvenes autistas explicando cómo es ser autista
- [Conócete a ti mismo](#) – Recursos para adolescentes autistas (incluye videos y hojas de trabajo)
- [Friend in Me](#) – Servicio que conecta a niños con autismo para socializar y jugar en línea

CONSEJOS RÁPIDOS

Desarrollar Resiliencia en Niños con Autismo

La resiliencia ayuda a los niños a adaptarse, crecer y prosperar. Aquí hay factores clave que apoyan la resiliencia en los niños:

1. Paternidad positiva y de apoyo
 - Mantenga rutinas consistentes, practique la empatía, brinde estímulo y celebre los pequeños logros.
2. Sueño adecuado
 - Una rutina de sueño predecible puede mejorar la conducta, la concentración y el estado de ánimo.
3. Comunidad y amistades
 - Busque actividades inclusivas, eventos amigables para el autismo o grupos de apoyo donde su hijo pueda desarrollar habilidades sociales.
4. Habilidades para resolver problemas
 - Enseñe a su hijo a enfrentar los desafíos con este modelo de 5 pasos:
 - Identifique el problema
 - Proponga soluciones
 - Elija la mejor opción
 - Pruébela
 - Revise cómo le fue

PRÓXIMOS PASOS

- Únase al grupo de apoyo para padres en Facebook de SHARK. Contacte: Igasca2@dhs.lacounty.gov.
- Únase al Programa de Padres Compañeros de SHARK. Contacte: Igasca2@dhs.lacounty.gov.
- No dude en hacer preguntas — ¡estamos aquí para apoyarle!

- Shark Team



Autism Resources

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (or Autism”) is a neurodevelopmental diagnosis that affects two large areas of children’s lives - 1) **social communication & interactions** and 2) **behavior**. Symptoms in these two areas in most cases are present in early childhood, even if it isn’t diagnosed until later. Every child with autism is different and symptoms range from very mild to severe. There is no “cure” for autism and it’s not something that children grow out of, but there are therapies that lead to improvement in symptoms and development in social skills.
- Some examples of differences with social communication & interactions could include problems with back-and-forth conversations, problems with speech, difficulties with relationships (either challenges making friends OR being overly friendly/familiar with strangers), avoiding eye contact, or not understanding someone else’s emotions or personal space. Some examples of challenges with behavior could include repetitive actions (ex: lining up toys, flipping things over, hand flapping), inflexible routines (ex: needing the same schedule every day, eating the same exact foods for meals, etc.), very specific interests, sensory-seeking behaviors (ex: hand flapping, intense interest in lights or moving objects), or sensory-avoiding behaviors (ex: Not liking certain textures of objects or food, not liking to be held or hugged, etc.).
- Autism is not caused by different types of parenting or any specific exposures, like vaccines - Both of these theories have been proven to be untrue.
- Like all kids, every autistic child is totally unique in their own ways. However, it can be helpful to know if a child has autism because they are likely to experience common challenges, and it is helpful to know the best ways to support.
- Common strengths of autistic children include ability to notice details, creative thinking, motivated by interests and intense curiosity, highly developed sense of logic and fairness.

Do vaccines cause ASD?

- **No, there is no connection between vaccines and autism.** The first signs of autism often show up around the same time children receive their routine vaccinations, which has led to concerns about a connection—but decades of scientific research have confirmed that vaccines do not cause autism. Additionally, we know that vaccines are extremely important in preventing severe and harmful childhood diseases.
- For more details about evidence showing a lack of connection between autism and vaccines, as well as a little about the history that led to this harmful myth, visit the following link: [Autism-vaccine link debunked - Mayo Clinic Health System](#)

What are early signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- [3 Early Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\) - HealthyChildren.org](#)

What do I do if I think my child might have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- If you're concerned that your child may have autism spectrum disorder, discuss this with your health care team. Make a list of things that you are noticing at home and bring it to the clinic visit. Your provider will probably ask you more questions and may ask you to fill out some forms to get more information about your child's ways of communicating and behaviors. If you disagree with your doctor, ask them to explain their reasoning for not thinking your child has autism. If you still disagree, you are always entitled to a second opinion.
- After you have had a discussion with your child's healthcare provider, you may want to have your child tested for autism. Testing for autism is very specialized and very few people are trained to do this type of testing. The vast majority of autism evaluations are performed by psychologists at the Regional Center, normally when children are 3 years or older. You can apply for a Regional Center evaluation and specifically say on the application that you are concerned about autism (For more info on applying for the Regional Center, see our "Regional Center" webpage!).

How can I support my autistic child?

- **Unmasking** – Social interactions (for example, like going to school) can be incredibly taxing for autistic kids because a lot of energy tends to go into "fitting in ". It is sometimes difficult for people who aren't autistic to realize how stressful and energy-draining these experiences can be. For all autistic individuals, it is important to have time and space to be completely themselves without judgement – this is called unmasking. This means that autistic kids should be encouraged to figure out what makes them happy, what their specific interests are and how to pursue them, and not worry about hiding their behaviors that let the world know they are autistic.
- **Allow Stimming** – "Stimming" or to "stim", shortened from self-stimulatory behavior, is a way of describing common behaviors of many autistic individuals. Some examples include humming, flapping hands, spinning, cupping ears, or listening to music. Stimming creates a sensory experience that can be helpful for decreasing anxiety, increasing focus, and managing sensory overload (the stimming helps block out other types of sensory input). If stimming isn't hurting the child or anyone else, we encourage caregivers to allow children to participate in their stimming behaviors.
- **Mental Health** – Autistic children are more likely to develop anxiety and depression than children without autism. If you are worried that your child is frequently stressed, sad, or doesn't have the energy to do the things they normally like to do, talk to your child's healthcare provider or school and request that they start seeing a therapist.
- **Positive and Supportive Parenting** – Having supportive caregivers is important for any child, but it is especially important for autistic kids who are at risk of being misunderstood and made to feel "wrong". There is nothing wrong with your child, the problem is that the world that we live in can be very difficult to exist in for autistic individuals. Our vision of the world is that every child is accepted for exactly how they are, but in the meantime autistic kids need their caregivers to offer frequent love, support, and encouragement. Tell your child they are perfect the way they are. Notice and tell them when you see that they are trying hard or when they do a good job. Pay attention to what they are interested in and what makes them happy and encourage them to do more of whatever that is.

- **Getting enough sleep** – We know that getting good sleep can be particularly difficult for autistic kids, but we also know that getting good sleep is especially important for autistic kids to recover from the day they just had and prepare them for the upcoming day. Being rested helps autistic kids cope with the daily stressors of life and better “bounce back” when things get hard. You may notice that, with enough high-quality sleep, your child is better able to focus, is less irritable, and has fewer or less intense tantrums or meltdowns. One of the most important ways to support your child getting enough sleep is to set up a nightly bedtime routine, even on the weekends. Some important tips for improving sleep are 1) Increasing physical activity during the daytime, 2) Avoiding caffeinated drinks after midday, 3) Put away all electronics ~1 hours before bedtime, 4) Make sure bedroom of quiet, dark, and a comfortable temperature. Sometimes, even after following all these recommendations, autistic kids struggle to fall and stay asleep. If this is the case, talk with your child’s healthcare provider about other things that might help, like Melatonin. Our general rule for using Melatonin is to start with a very small dose and increasing only to the dose that is helpful for sleep.
- **Building Community & Friendships** – Even if social interactions look different for autistic kids, having community and friends is important for feeling connected and building a network of support and learning for kids. Help your child find communities that accept them for who they are and where they can be themselves. Sometimes it can be helpful to search for social groups or clubs centered around activities that your child likes, or settings/groups that specifically say they support neurodiverse or autistic kids.
- **Develop problem solving skills** – Living in a world that was generally built by non-autistic people can be frustrating and aggravating (sometimes infuriating!) if you are autistic. Because of this, it is extremely important for autistic kids to be able to solve problems and frustrations when they show up in their lives. Easier said than done! Being able to solve problems is a complex skill, and we recommend approaching it in steps. The first step involves identifying that there is a problem (For example, what are the first signs that your child is getting upset? Can your child learn to identify these early signs?). Next, children need to be able to identify the problem (Why am I feeling like this? What exactly is the problem?). Brainstorming solutions comes next, then trying out a solution. Finally, it’s important review how things went (Did the solution work? Would I do anything differently next time?). It’s okay to focus on each of these steps individually – it may take multiple months to be able to figure out your child’s early signs that something in their environment is troubling them, and for them to identify these signs in themselves.

What therapies and treatments can help with ASD?

- Since every autistic child is different, there isn’t a cookie-cutter approach to treatment. Below are some examples of commonly used types of therapies and treatments for autistic children:
 - Speech therapy
 - Occupational therapy – Can help with sensory processing, everyday life skills, and fine motor skills
 - Feeding therapy – Can help when kids have very restricted diets and problems eating most foods (like gagging)
 - Analytical Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy
 - Mental health services – therapy and/or psychiatry

- Social skills groups/classes
- Medications – Can be helpful when kids have significant aggression, impulsivity, agitation, or if diagnosed with another condition like ADHD, anxiety, or depression

What is ABA (Analytical Behavioral Analysis)? Is ABA therapy a good fit for my child?

- ABA is a type of behavioral therapy that is one of the most commonly used types of treatments for autism. It isn't the only type of behavioral therapies for kids with autism, but it is the one that is most available here in California. In the SHARK clinic, we typically suggest ABA therapy when children with moderate to severe autism are having communication or behavioral challenges that are preventing them from participating in social settings (like home or school), building positive relationships. We also tend to refer kids to ABA therapy when they have significantly challenging behaviors like aggression or unawareness of personal safety so they can build more awareness and better learn how to stay safe and keep others safe.
- ABA therapy has the goal of reinforcing positive behaviors while decreasing harmful and inappropriate behaviors through tactics like positive reinforcement and developing communication and social skills.
- ABA therapy is generally a big time-commitment – Typical therapy schedules are 4-5 days a week for a couple hours a day. Most of the time ABA therapists come to a family's house, but sometimes therapists can also attend school with a child.

How to I get ABA therapy for my child?

- If you think that your child could benefit from ABA, talk to your child's medical provider about putting in a referral for ABA. The exact steps differ slightly based on different insurance types, but the most common process is that, after the insurance company approves the therapy referral, they (the insurance company) will provide families with a list of approved ABA therapy providers. After this, it is the family's responsibility to call the providers on the list to get their child on waitlists to be evaluated for therapy. We recommend casting a wide net and calling multiple, if not all, the providers on the list so that you can find the therapy providers with the shortest waitlists. **Even the shortest waitlists are several months long since there is an overall shortage of ABA providers, and it is very common that the process of setting up ABA can take 3-6 months.**

What should I know about ABA therapy if my child is referred?

- Like every type of therapy, some therapists may be a better fit for your child than others. If you feel like your child does not have a good relationship with their ABA therapist, it's okay to request a change in therapist.
- It is sometimes helpful to think of ABA therapy as helping your child with "emotional regulation" because most challenging behaviors for autistic kids comes from not being able to cope with a strong emotional reaction to a situation or event. You can also ask your child's therapist to help create routines or troubleshoot particularly difficult activities or times in the day (for example, dinnertime or getting ready to leave the house)
- ABA therapy is controversial, and there are convincing arguments on both sides. In our experience, ABA can be helpful for autistic children and, but the goal of therapy should never be about trying to make a child "seem less autistic".

The goal of therapy should be helping your child engage with the world and people around them in comfortable and satisfying ways and should be centered about your child and your goals for therapy.

- Before starting ABA therapy, we recommend making an “ABA Checklist” to share with your therapist. Here is a template: [create downloadable document]