A Guide for Grandparents:

Answers to Common Questions & Concerns Relating to Autism Spectrum Disorders



A Resource Provided by the National Autism Association

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION

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What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by social-interaction difficulties, cognitive impairments, communication difficulties, and repetitive behaviors. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, it can range from very mild to very severe and occur in all ethnic, socioeconomic and age groups. In fact, because each individual can vary greatly in symptoms and abilities, there's a popular saying: *If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.* Males are four times more likely to have autism than females. Some children with autism appear to develop typically before age 1 or 2 and then plateau or suddenly regress, losing language or social skills they had previously gained. ASD can sometimes be detected at 18 months or younger. By age 2, a diagnosis by an experienced professional can be considered very reliable.

My grandchild was just diagnosed. What now?

Your adult children will need your support as they navigate their new normal. As they embark on their journey of getting appropriate services/therapies for their child, learning to help their child communicate effectively and addressing any co-occurring medical issues, remember that they are likely feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Being a trusted person they can lean on, talk to without judgment, and offering support caring for their child, will be incredibly helpful.

I'm having difficulty dealing with my grandchild's behaviors and meltdowns.

It is so important to recognize that your grandchild is not choosing to behave poorly. Many children with autism cannot communicate basic needs or wants. For example, if a child is thirsty, hungry, in pain, hot, cold, tired, wants to watch a specific show/movie, etc., they may not be able to tell you. Imagine living in a world where you cannot express yourself effectively. Many children are left feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. They may also have sensory challenges making them especially sensitive to light, sound and touch. A lack of structure or predictability for the individual may also lead to the child engaging in undesirable behavior, including bolting or wandering from the environment. Helping to identify and avoid triggers is key to preventing a child from entering a "fight or flight" mode.

I don't think my grandchild's parents are getting the proper help for him/her.

Speaking openly, with a supportive tone is the best way to find out and understand what decisions your adult children are making for your grandchild. If you think they are unaware of specific rights or interventions you believe may be helpful, or if they are too consumed in getting by day-to-day, doing the research for them and presenting options in an easily-digestible way and offering to help with the logistics can be tremendously helpful. To understand more about evaluations and therapies, please download our First Signs, Next Steps toolkit by visiting: **http://nationalautismassociation.org/-first-signs-next-steps/**

How can I learn more?

For more specific issues, you can access free downloadable lectures by experts on a variety of topics on our website at nationalautism.org under the Autism Atrium WebiNAArs tab. Our website also offers free, downloadable toolkits and other helpful information.

Feeling like you need guidance and support from others? We invite you to join our Facebook support group for grandparents at: https://www.facebook.com/naagrandparents/

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