

# FOSTER CARER

## FACT SHEET: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder which affects social and communication skills and, to a greater or lesser degree, motor and language skills. It is such a broad diagnosis that it can include people with high or low IQ's. People with Autism can be chatty or silent, affectionate or cold, methodical or disorganised.

#### Ways to make a child with Autism more at ease in your home

As the saying goes "if you have met one child with Autism, you have met one child with Autism".



Every child is different but there are some behaviours that you are more likely to see with a child on the Autism spectrum and knowledge will help you prepare your family and the child to get your relationship off to a good start.

If possible before a child comes to stay, see if you can find out from their parents or carers if they have any particular sensitivities.

Does the child have any particular sensory challenges that get in the way of them enjoying ordinary life experiences? For example bright lights, smells, noises, loud music or public places. Wherever possible try and avoid those things that could bring on distress unnecessarily.

What are the child's interests? Repetition and perseveration is a common feature of Autism. Following the same routines, watching the same movies or talking about the same subject can be a feature but also a comfort for the child in your care. Finding a comforting subject (for example Thomas the Tank Engine) or toy that the child is interested in can be calming and may diffuse or prevent a difficult situation escalating.

Understanding hidden meanings, reading body language or facial cues in every day social communication can be so difficult for people with Autism. Taking things literally is often part and parcel of being a child with Autism, so you may have to rework some of your statements or questions so that they literally “do make sense”.

Sending non-verbal messages, making eye contact, taking in what the other person is saying and making socially appropriate responses can be very difficult. It may not be that the child is not interested, they just might not know how to show it or maybe concentrating so hard on listening and making sense of it that they cannot also manage to look at you at the same time. This can be read as disinterest when it may not be.

Processing questions and answers can be hard work, so give the child more time than usual to listen and respond. Keep it to one statement or

question at a time so you don't overload them with information.

Offering too many choices can be overwhelming to a child with Autism. A food court, a supermarket shelf can present too many options. Simple routines and choices help you all manage until you know the child in your care better.

### **Why provide care for a child with Autism?**

Looking after a child with Autism can be challenging so families deserve a break. It is easy for families to get over stressed as they deal with other children, medical and therapy appointments and manage work and other responsibilities. Research shows that respite support can make a significant positive difference in wellbeing of families.

**Remember Autism is just an aspect of the child in your care. It does not define them, they are a child with Autism, not an “autistic child”.**

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### **Need More Help?**

Your case manager will be able to assist you to access information and support services that may be available particular to the child in your care.

### **Online Support**

Based in Bayswater, spectrum journeys have newsletters, events, resources and an app to make life easier caring for children with Autism.

[www.spectrumjourneys.org.au](http://www.spectrumjourneys.org.au)

**Information on Autism and connections to a wide range of further local and international resources:** [www.amaze.org.au](http://www.amaze.org.au)

**Sue Larkey:** [www.suelarkey.com.au/](http://www.suelarkey.com.au/)

**Facebook Sites:** Resources for Special Needs – Australia,  
The Autism Discussion Page, Sugar Aunts