



## **Advice and information for professionals working with parents on the autism spectrum**

NB: We alternate between “autistic parents” and “parents on the autism spectrum” within this document, in keeping with the autistic community’s general preference for identity-first language.

### **Introduction**

Despite the deep-set cultural stigma they encounter, parents on the autism spectrum are fully able to take care of their children successfully. The key to this success is identifying parents’ strengths and weaknesses and ensuring that they and their families are connected to robust support networks that will help them create effective mental frameworks for approaching parenting, improve their self-efficacy, and advocate for their children in professional settings.

While there is scant academic literature about the specific needs of parents on the autism spectrum, self-advocates have worked with advocacy groups and media outlets to describe the benefits, difficulties, and support needs connected with being an autistic parent.

### **Useful hints**

- Help your clients **create routines** that help them make sense of their parenting duties. Many autistic people benefit from having clearly defined frameworks for carrying out tasks, especially if those tasks are complex and may require significant executive-functioning skills. You can work with your clients to record these routines using a number of different strategies, including mobile apps, dry-erase calendars and

boards, paper planners, Post-it notes, and legal pads, or a combination of all these methods.

- Encourage your client to **connect with other parents on the autism spectrum**. Being around people with similar experiences who can offer advice and support is crucial to helping build a positive self-identity as an autistic parent. Mothers on the autism spectrum are more likely to develop pre- and postpartum depression. Having a strong support network will mitigate these effects. Parents on the spectrum can connect to their peers through social media, online forums, in-person meet-ups, and formal support or therapy groups.
- Help provide **autistic parents with good parenting models**, whether these models are on the autism spectrum or not. Again, autistic parents may benefit from receiving help to create a system by which they can develop a way to raise their children the best way possible. Some methods to do this include mentoring and coaching.
- **Support parents who need to advocate for their children in professional settings**, including schools, doctors' offices, social services, and other areas. Sometimes this kind of advocacy can be daunting for people on the autism spectrum, since it requires a combination of skills that many autistic people struggle with: the type and volume of social interaction, executive functioning (the ability to plan, organize, prioritize, and arrange information necessary for daily living), and rules set by agencies and schools. Having a helpful guide to navigate these processes will prove beneficial for both autistic parents and their children.
- Take into account people's **different communication styles**. Some people prefer to communicate by email or online chat than they do on the phone or in person. Some people, conversely, may actually prefer

talking in person, using video chat, or using the phone. Everyone is unique and will benefit from different methods.

### **References**

- Autism Spectrum Australia (2017). Factsheet: Being a parent on the autism spectrum. Retrieved from [https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet\\_Being%20a%20parent%20on%20the%20autism%20spectrum\\_20170307.pdf](https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet_Being%20a%20parent%20on%20the%20autism%20spectrum_20170307.pdf)
- Kim, C. (2014). Motherhood: autistic parenting. *Autism Women's and Nonbinary Network*, 2014 January 22. Retrieved from <https://autismwomensnetwork.org/motherhood-autistic-parenting/>
- Spectrum News (2017). The joys and challenges of being a parent with autism. *The Atlantic*, May 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/05/autism-parenting/526989/>