

5 tips for grandparents and extended family members

1. Family members have a lot to offer. Each family member is able to offer the things he or she learned to do best over time. Ask how you can be helpful to your family. Your efforts will be appreciated whether it means taking care of the child so that the parents can go out to dinner or raising money for the special school that helps the child. Organize a lunch, a theatre benefit, a carnival or a card game. It will warm your family's hearts to know that you are pitching in to create support and closeness.

2. Seek out your own support. If you find yourself having a difficult time accepting and dealing with the fact that your loved one has autism, seek out your own support. Your family may not be able to provide you with that kind of support, so you must be considerate and look elsewhere. In this way you can be stronger for them, helping with the many challenges they face. Be open and honest about the disorder. The more you talk about the matter, the better you will feel. Your friends and family can become your support system. But only if you share your thoughts with them. It may be hard to talk about it at first, but as time goes on, it will be easier. In the end, your experience with autism will end up teaching you and your family profound life lessons.

3. Put judgment aside. Consider your family's feelings and be supportive. Respect the decisions they make for their child with autism. They are working very hard to explore and research all options and are typically coming to well thought out conclusions. Try not to compare children. (This goes for typically developing kids as well.) Children with autism can be brought up to achieve their personal best.

4. Learn more about autism. It affects people of all social and economic statuses. There is promising research, with many possibilities for the future. Share that sense of hope with your family, while educating yourself about the best ways to help manage this disorder.



5. Carve out special time for each child. You can enjoy special moments with both typically developing family members and the family member with autism. Yes, they may be different, but all of the children look forward to spending time with you. Children with autism thrive on routines, so find one thing that you can do together that is structured, even if it is simply going to a park for 15 minutes. If you go to the same park every week chances are over time that activity will become easier and easier... it just takes time and patience. If you are having a difficult time trying to determine what you can do, ask your family. They will sincerely appreciate the effort that you are making.

There are also specialized tool kits for specific people in your life. To access them visit:
autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/family-support-tool-kits.

"Talking to other grandparents helped me to feel part of a bigger community and to learn more about my granddaughter. I am now able to help my family the best I can and spend quality time with each of my grandchildren."