

15 Tips for Your Family

As a result of her work with many families who deal so gracefully with the challenges of autism, family therapist Kathryn Smerling, Ph.D., offers five tips for parents, five for siblings and five for extended family members:

5 tips for parents

1. Learn to be the best advocate you can be for your child. Be informed. Take advantage of all the services that are available to you in your community. You will meet practitioners and providers who can educate you and help you. You will gather great strength from the people you meet.

2. Don't push your feelings away. Talk about them. You may feel both ambivalent and angry. Those are emotions to be expected. It's okay to feel conflicting emotions.

3. Try to direct your anger towards the disorder and not towards your loved ones. When you find yourself arguing with your spouse over an autism related issue, try to remember that this topic is painful for both of you; and be careful not to get mad at each other when it really is the autism that has you so upset and angry. Try to have some semblance of an adult life. Be careful to not let autism consume every waking hour of your life. Spend quality time with your typically developing children and your spouse and refrain from constantly talking about autism. Everyone in your family needs support and to be happy despite the circumstances.

4. Appreciate the small victories your child may achieve. Love your child and take great pride in each small accomplishment. Focus on what he or she can do instead of making comparisons with a typically developing child. Love your child for who he or she is.

5. Get involved with the autism community. Don't underestimate the power of "community". You may be the captain of your team, but you can't do everything



yourself. Make friends with other parents who have children with autism. By meeting other parents you will have the support of families who understand your day to day challenges. Getting involved with autism advocacy is empowering and productive. You will be doing something for yourself as well as your child by being proactive.

"Learning more about my child's unique needs and abilities along with reaching out for support has enabled my husband and me to be better parents to our son and better partners for each other on this journey."