

You may also want to consider attending a recreational program for children with autism. This may be a good way to meet other parents just like you.

One study from Vanderbilt University, a part of the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network, found that mothers of children with autism benefit significantly from weekly stress-reduction classes led by other mothers. The classes reduced previously high levels of personal stress, anxiety and depression and improved the mom's interactions with their children.

"At my support group I met a group of women who were juggling the same things I was. It felt so good not to feel like I was from another planet!"

You may find a listing of support groups in the Autism Speaks Resource Guide at autismspeaks.org/resource-guide. Another avenue is through the local SEPTA (Special Education Parent Teacher Association) in your school district or online through the Autism Speaks Facebook page at facebook.com/autismspeaks.

My Autism Team, the social network for parents of kids with autism, is another great resource. On this site, parents of children with autism share their experiences, including their reviews of local service providers, to help inform the parents in their communities. Visit the site at myautismteam.com.

Try to take a break.

If you can, allow yourself to take some time away, even if it is only a few minutes to take a walk. If it's possible, getting out to a movie, going shopping or visiting a friend can make a world of difference. If you feel guilty about taking a break, try to remind yourself that this break will help you feel renewed for the things you need to do when you get back. Try to get some rest. If you are getting regular sleep, you will be better prepared to make good decisions, be more patient with your child and more able to deal with the stress in your life.

Consider keeping a journal.

Louise DeSalvo, in *Writing as a Way of Healing*, notes that studies have shown that: "Writing that describes traumatic events and our deepest thoughts and feelings about them is linked with improved immune function, improved emotional and physical health, and positive behavioral changes." Some parents have found a journal to be a helpful tool for keeping track of their child's progress, what is working and what isn't. Be mindful of the time you spend on the internet. The internet will be one of the most important tools you have for learning what you need to know about autism and how to help your child.

Unfortunately, there is more information on the web than any of us have time to read in a lifetime. There may also be a lot of misinformation.

As a parent, always remember to trust your gut.

There are many paths to take, treatment options and opinions. You know your child best. Work with your child's treatment team to find what works best for your child and your family.

Right now, while you are trying to make the most of every minute, keep an eye on the clock and frequently ask yourself these important questions:

Is what I'm reading right now very likely to be relevant to my child?

Is it new information?

Is it helpful?

Is it from a reliable source?

Sometimes, the time you spend on the internet will be incredibly valuable. Other times, it may be better for you and your child if you use that time to take care of yourself.

The internet will be one of the most important tools you have for learning what you need to know about autism and how to help your child.