

# Autism: A Guide for Whānau



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### About Autism New Zealand

# A note on language

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The autistic community overwhelmingly prefers the use of identity-first language ("autistic person") instead of person-first language ("person with autism"). Most autistic people feel that being autistic is an intrinsic part of their identity that cannot and should not be separated from who they are as a person. That said, it is important to use and respect each person's preferred terminology. This guide uses identity-first language to respect the preferences of the majority of autistic people.

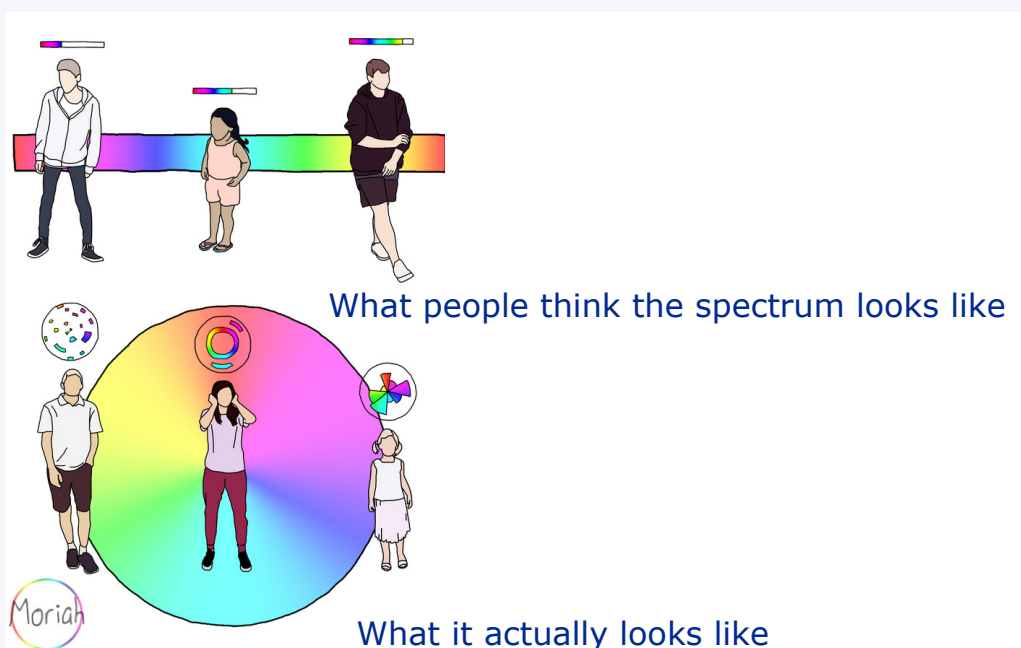
Autism New Zealand does not use terms such as "high-functioning" or "low-functioning". These terms are inaccurate at best and harmful at worst - instead of functioning labels, it is more accurate and respectful to refer to the specific needs and/or traits under discussion (e.g. "non-speaking adults"; "children who need help with toileting"; "people who are very sensitive to noise", etc.).

For more info about talking respectfully about autism and autistic people, Autism New Zealand has a living terminology document that has been developed in collaboration with the autistic community.

You can access this document here: <https://autismnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Autism-Terminology-Resource-April-2022.pdf>

# Understanding autism

An important note about the autism spectrum: the spectrum is a circle, not a line. People are not more or less autistic than each other; they have different autistic traits at different intensities. All autistic people have some level of sensory differences, social and communication differences, and autistic behavioural traits. A particular trait can vary over a person's lifetime, or become more or less intense depending on their stress levels, environment, or emotional state.



For example, one person may have little or no trouble dressing themselves or using the bathroom, while another person may be unable to do these things without help but may be better at communicating. Someone's ability to speak may decrease or disappear entirely under stress or when they're tired; or their motor skills may suffer if their environment is too bright or loud.

Difficulty in one area does not mean a lack of intelligence, or difficulties in all other areas.

# Traits and characteristics

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The most common autistic traits fall under three broad categories: sensory differences, social and communication differences, and behavioural traits.

## Sensory differences

Autistic people experience the world differently. Autistic senses can be more or less intense than non-autistic ones - so autistic people can seem over-sensitive or under-sensitive to various kinds of sensory input.

Your child might avoid bright lights and/or loud sounds. They may get upset or try to escape when in a brightly lit environment, cover their eyes or hide under furniture to get away from lights, cover their ears to block out noise, or yell or bang objects to block out other sounds.

They may have an aversion to particular textures or touches - they might want to wear their clothing inside out to avoid labels and seams; they might have a strong disgust reaction to certain foods; or they might become upset or try to escape when asked to touch certain textures.

Your child may bump into things, have difficulty balancing, or miss surfaces when trying to put objects down. This could indicate problems with proprioception, the sense of where your body is in space. Proprioception affects balance, navigation through space, and the ability to know where your body parts are when you're not looking at them. A child with decreased proprioceptive ability may also struggle with tasks that involve touching or pointing to a precise place; and they may stick to the walls and corners of a room, or run their hands around the outside wall or fence of a space.

Your child might not seem to know when they're hungry or thirsty, or when they need to use the toilet. This could indicate difficulties with interoception, the sense of the body's internal states. Young autistic children often have more toileting accidents when there's a lot of other stimulation and input to process. They may also be toilet trained with occasional accidents for a long time.

Your child might get too hot or too cold easily, or they might seek out heat or cold.

## **Behaviours and interests**

Most autistic people have some level of deep fascinations/passions (often called 'special interests'); repetitive physical behaviours and movements (called 'stimming'); need for routine and autonomy; and aversion to change and surprises.

Your child may be intensely interested in a particular subject and want to talk about it constantly. Younger children or children who don't speak may be fascinated by a particular toy, object or texture, and want to look at it or touch it constantly.

They may want to watch the same movie, TV episode, YouTube video, etc. on repeat, and may be able to focus on their particular passion for hours at a time, even at a young age.

Your child might flap their hands, rock back and forth, or move in other repetitive ways. This is called 'stimming', and fulfils a huge range of functions - some of the most common are expressing and/or regulating emotions, coping with and/or interpreting sensory input, and helping to confirm where parts of the body are in relation to each other and the environment.

Your child might become easily upset when their routine changes, or when plans change. The world can seem enormously chaotic and unpredictable to autistic children; routines and plans give them invaluable knowledge about what their world will look like, and what they need to prepare for. Disrupting plans and routines can feel to the child like the entire world they knew has been abruptly pulled away, and they now have no way of knowing what will come next.



Older children will often mentally and emotionally prepare for things they know are going to happen, which makes them better able to cope with new or stressful situations. A child who has advance warning that they're going to the supermarket on Tuesday might be fine, but unexpectedly popping into the supermarket on the way home from school could trigger a meltdown.

Your child might repeatedly ask questions and confirm information that they already know. This is a common behaviour that has a couple of possible explanations: autistic children have a strong need to know what's coming so that they can prepare themselves, and constantly asking the same question/s helps to reassure them that their knowledge and assumptions about the future are correct. Autistic children also often repeat behaviour that led to a positive interaction, because the reasons why some interactions are positive and some are negative are very unclear to them. If they got positive attention the first time they asked a series of questions, they may be repeating the questions because they want the same positive attention and don't know another way to get it.

Your child may line up their toys, or other collected objects (stones, buttons, pegs, etc.). Autistic people commonly find joy in order and categorisation. Your child may not look like they're enjoying themselves, but many autistic adults report that they remember having enormous amounts of fun doing this as children!

Your child might get upset if things in the house are changed or moved around (particularly their things or things that they use frequently). Autistic children can sometimes struggle to remember where things have been moved to, which can be intensely frustrating - imagine that every time you left your kitchen, someone came in and swapped the placement of your cutlery and plates around. Changing where things go in your house can have the same effect on your child, even with very small changes like putting two toys back on the shelf the other way around.

Your child may leave or try to leave places they don't want to be (a classroom, a high chair, the presence of a disliked person, etc.), and they may become unresponsive when asked to do something that they don't want to do, or that they don't know how to do. It's important to remember that your child is not being stubborn or misbehaving when they do this - something about their situation is deeply uncomfortable, unpleasant, or intolerable for them, and they probably don't know how to communicate this. This escape behaviour should decrease as your child gets older and is given more autonomy - they won't need to escape so much once they have more choices over what situations they end up in, and when they have the skills to communicate that there's a problem.

## **Social interaction, language and communication**

Autistic brains are wired differently to non-autistic brains, and this can be most obvious in social settings. Autistic people may have difficulty navigating conversations with non-autistic folks, or working in a non-autistic group, and they may find socialising or being around other people exhausting. This is largely because autistic communication and social interaction is fundamentally different to non-autistic communication, and autistic people (including children) are generally expected to bridge the entire gap themselves - mimicking a non-autistic way of communication and socialising that doesn't come naturally, while suppressing their automatic reactions, feelings, and ways of communicating.

This mimicking and suppressing is called 'masking', and while it allows autistic people to interact with non-autistic people effectively, it has significant long-term negative effects.

Your child may not seem to know how to start talking to or playing with other children, and they may become upset during interactions with peers for no apparent reason. There are dozens of unspoken 'rules' for social interaction that typically developing children will know automatically and unconsciously. Autistic children don't know any of these rules and have to explicitly, consciously learn them. This leads to a lot of mistakes, and in young children, a lot of frustration when an autistic child thinks they have grasped a rule, and then another child breaks it.



Your child might spend a lot of time alone (and this isn't necessarily a bad thing). There are a few different reasons for autistic children spending a lot of time by themselves. Some just prefer being alone; some like being around peers/adults but find social interaction tiring and need a lot of breaks; and some want to be around other people but can't work out how to be included.

Your child might repeat phrases or sentences from movies or TV shows. They may have no facial expressions, exaggerated facial expressions, or facial expressions that don't seem to match their feelings. They might speak in a monotone or flat tone, in an exaggerated tone, or in a way that sounds rehearsed or performative. These are all signs that your child is masking, or learning to mask - they don't naturally know how to make their face and voice communicate in a non-autistic way, so they're going to get it wrong for a while.

Your child may have delayed speech, or no speech at all. They may be able to speak but prefer to communicate in another way (gestures, sign language, alternate communication technology).

Your child might misinterpret others' emotions, or not seem to know what to do about them (for example, they may not react to another child crying or showing obvious distress). There is a pervasive myth that autistic people lack empathy - this is absolutely false. It is true that autistic people, particularly children, may not react appropriately to others' feelings. An autistic child who sees another child crying may not react because they don't know how to help; they may have been taught to treat other people as they would want to be treated, and know that they would want to be left alone if they were upset; they may be overwhelmed by the noise of the other child crying and unable to process anything else; or there may be a combination of factors going on.

Your child may not seem to want to tell you how their day was. They may not respond to questions like "What did you do at school today?", or respond with answers like "Nothing" or "I don't know." As with most autistic traits and behaviours, there are a few reasons this could be happening. Your child may have used all of their available communication resources on school, and might be finding it difficult to process language or speak. Open-ended questions like this can also be difficult for autistic people - your child may not know what you want from them. More specific questions, like "What did you learn in maths today?" or "Who did you play with at lunchtime?" can be easier for your child to answer.

Your child might not make eye contact, or may make inconsistent eye contact. Many autistic people find direct eye contact uncomfortable, unpleasant, and/or overly intense or intimate. Autistic children are more likely to be able to pay attention and process what's happening when their gaze is directed at their own hands, the floor, or an object.

Your child might have difficulty with turn-taking in conversations - they may interrupt other people, talk in long monologues, change the subject abruptly, or walk away or start a new task while the other person is still speaking. Two non-autistic people having a conversation are automatically processing an enormous amount of non-verbal information, without even being aware of it. It's this information that tells them whose turn it is to speak, whether the other person is taking a breath or is finished speaking, how long they should speak for, whether the other person is interested/bored/upset by what they're saying, and a ton of other information. Autistic people do not pick up on any of this automatically, and have to consciously learn to read these cues. Young autistic children will not have mastered any of this yet (and are almost certainly just as frustrated as their peers that conversations never seem to work out!).

# How Autism New Zealand can help

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The Autism New Zealand website provides further information about autism, our services, links to other supports and services, resources and latest news. See: <https://autismnz.org.nz/>

## Branches and Outreach Coordinators

Our branches provide a range of services, including resources and information for parents, whānau, caregivers and professionals. Our Outreach Coordinators can meet online or in person, and work alongside professionals and families to help ensure the best outcome for autistic children.

Some branches also run support programmes, LEGO programmes, or other activities, or can connect you to other organisations who run these programmes. These differ across New Zealand, so please contact your local Outreach Coordinator to find out what resources are available in your area.

To find your local Outreach Coordinator, head here:  
<https://autismnz.org.nz/support-from-us/>

## Education programmes

Autism New Zealand provides a range of education and training programmes for parents, whānau, caregivers and professionals. All of our programmes are consistent with the New Zealand Autism Guideline, and we engage regularly with families, professionals and autistic adults to ensure our programmes are meeting the needs of our community.

Our programmes are a mix of one and two-day seminars or workshops, early support programmes, individual/whānau consultations and coaching, and two-hour online workshops. We also work with organisations to develop custom training programmes to meet their specific requirements.

## **Framework for Autism in New Zealand (FANZ)**

A two-day introductory programme about autism that enables participants to create a framework for understanding and supporting an autistic person. FANZ is specifically designed to be flexible for family/whānau/caregivers, educators, health or other professionals, or anyone else involved with an autistic person of any age. You will receive further understanding about autism and practical strategies for support.

### **Way to Play**

A one-day introduction to playing with autistic children (approximately 0-8 years old). Playing with autistic children can be challenging, so Way to Play offers simple, easy-to-use strategies to begin playing joyously together. This programme is designed not just for parents of autistic children, but also for professionals who interact with young children or want to support parents to do so.

### **Tilting the Seesaw for Teams**

For teams of family and professionals, working together to support autistic tamariki aged 5-12 years. Teams may include parents, caregivers, other family/whānau, primary school teachers, teacher aides, learning assistants, SENCOs, or RTLBs.

Tilting the Seesaw for Teams is a combination of strengths-based, practical strategies to support the everyday inclusion of autistic children across the full primary school and home settings. Teachers will complete simple preparatory work prior to attending the two-day workshop which will intensify the focus for their new learning. After the workshop teachers will complete an action plan and meet with other participants 2-3 months later to identify the impact of the workshop.

**For more information about our education programmes see: <https://autism.org.nz/programmes/>**

## Helping others understand

Not everyone understands how to react around autistic people, but one of the best ways to help people is to encourage and guide them to be flexible around the way they interact. Where appropriate you may want to share this resource and other resources with your family and community or attend our education programmes together.

# How you can help your child

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Every autistic person is unique, so there is no strategy or accommodation that works for everyone; however, there are some guiding principles that can be helpful.

## Expectations

Your child learns at their own pace. Some skills and milestones will turn up faster than you expect, some will be slower. Usually they will catch up to their peers in their own time, but if you can tell they're frustrated by not being able to do something like talk or walk, consider getting professional help.

Your child will communicate differently. A common misconception about autistic children is that they don't communicate, or are stuck in their own world. In reality, their natural communication and body language is just different. They'll learn how to communicate in a way you understand, and you'll need to work on understanding them, and communicating on their level.

Your autistic child will find joy in unexpected places. Many autistic children have some sort of special interest - sometimes a skill like computer programming or music; sometimes a specific topic like aircraft, politics, or Star Wars; sometimes collecting items like coins, dolls, or stones. Encouraging and getting involved with a special interest like this is a great way to connect with your child.

Your child may never be able to do some things that most people can do - and that's ok! Some autistic adults can't talk, some can't go to the supermarket without having a meltdown, some can't use the toilet. That's what alternative communication, grocery delivery, and adult diapers are for. The most important skills your child can learn are how to know where their strengths and difficulties lie, and how to work around the difficulties.



## Making things easier for your child

Meltdowns may occur when an autistic person's surroundings are so uncomfortable or unpleasant that they can no longer handle being in that environment.

Here are some questions to ask yourself about situations your child may be in:

- What does your child like? Could this be used to calm them or make the situation more tolerable?
- What does your child dislike? Can this be removed or reduced?
- Is there too much sensory input happening? Your child may not be able to communicate the specifics of why they are uncomfortable, or they may not even realise what the problem is.

There are some common sensory triggers that you can try to mitigate before a meltdown happens:

- Visual overstimulation: bright lights, lots of bright colours or patterns, visually busy environments with lots of different objects to process
- Noise levels: background noise or hard-to-process noise (like overlapping speech or unfamiliar sounds)
- Smells: cleaning products, perfumes and deodorants, food smells
- Textures: unfamiliar clothing, extra items of clothing like hats or gloves, unfamiliar sensations like clothing being wet, wearing face paint or costumes

The best way to avoid discomfort and meltdowns is to prevent them through preparation.

Some more tips to think about:

- Make notes for yourself as you notice things your child seems to find uncomfortable or upsetting. If you can't see any obvious source for your child's distress or discomfort, try writing down all the environmental factors you notice, and a pattern may emerge.
- Tell others what to expect. You will need to help those around your child to understand their needs.
- Encourage other people to be gentle with your child, and to understand that your child is under a higher amount of pressure than other children.
- Establish a routine. Make your child's day as predictable as possible.
- When sudden changes occur, make sure your child has space to work through their feelings (or if this isn't possible, try giving your child access to a favourite toy, video, etc. while working through the change).

## School

It is always a good idea to meet with the staff at your child's school to discuss their needs, and to maintain a relationship with your child's teacher and any other professionals (teacher aides, RTLBs, etc.) who regularly work with your child.

The Ministry of Education can provide extra support for some children - you can find more information on what they offer here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/special-education/>

Your local Autism New Zealand Outreach Coordinator can also help you navigate the school system.

## After school

The expectations you and your child have for their future will depend on their abilities, their needs, and what they want to do.

It's important that your child's path through life is one that they choose. They should be involved in their own life planning from the earliest age possible - being involved in school discussions, sitting in on IEP meetings, etc. It's a good idea to start talking to your child about their transition to adulthood when they are in their first couple of years of high school.

Some questions to ask once your child is around high school age:

- Will your child need extra time at school?
- Does your child have career goals, or an idea of what sort of job they might want? What further training will they need to get where they want? What sort of accommodations might they need to attend tertiary education, or to be an apprentice, or to enter the workforce?
- What accommodations does your child need in their home? How will these work in a shared living space like a flat?
- What changes to your child's life plans may need to be made if they cannot learn to drive? (Many autistic people struggle with driving, for multiple reasons - your child may find learning to drive easy, or they may be able to drive but find it intensely stressful and not want to do it unless necessary, or they may not be able to drive at all.) You may want to think about jobs that don't involve travelling, or living somewhere with a good public transport network.
- Will your child be able to work full-time? Will they need help navigating Work and Income, or other support services?
- Will they need guardianship as an adult, or will they need you to continue to advocate for them in a legally protected way?

Your child should be heavily involved in these discussions - nothing should be decided without your child's agreement.

## **Autism New Zealand services**

Autism New Zealand offers a range of employment and transition services in our Wellington and Auckland branches. Our employment service focusses on pre-employment coaching and in-work support for employees and employers, and is specifically designed to find employment that is suitable, meaningful, and long-term, allowing opportunities for further development. Our transition service is designed to help autistic young adults in their last year of school prepare and move into the next stage of their lives.

You can find more information about Autism New Zealand's employment and transition services here: <https://autismnz.org.nz/employment-transition-service/>

## Expressions of distress

Autistic people may behave in ways that are unexpected, uncomfortable or challenging for the people around them. This can include running away, screaming, biting, hitting or kicking, socially unacceptable habits, or making embarrassing remarks. Some autistic children will find it difficult or impossible to speak, use the toilet, go to the supermarket, or wear uncomfortable clothing. Some will have restricted diets.

It's important to remember that your child is not doing any of this to annoy or upset you. An autistic child who tries to run away, or who becomes aggressive (towards themselves or others) is a child who is in enormous distress. They are not misbehaving; they are so overwhelmed that they can no longer reason through what's happening or regulate their emotions, and just need to escape the situation by any means necessary.

Autistic children often have difficulty communicating their emotions to adults. There are a variety of reasons for this - some autistic children cannot speak and rely on alternative communication methods; some have difficulty identifying their feelings (emotions and/or physical sensations) until they become urgent or overwhelming. Many autistic adults report not being believed as children when they tried to tell adults they were unwell, in pain, upset, or overwhelmed - autistic people do not communicate using facial expression and tone of voice in the same way as non-autistic people, and particularly when in distress or pain, they may forget or just not have the available energy to produce the 'correct' expression and voice tone to communicate their feelings. This often leads to adults assuming that an autistic child is lying when they say they're in distress.

## Some potential reasons for extreme distress

- Being overwhelmed by sensory input
- Too many expectations being placed on the child
- Not knowing what they are expected to do, or what is going to happen next
- Frustration at not being able to communicate
- Feeling unwell, being overtired, hungry, or thirsty (often paired with not being able to communicate this, or not being listened to)

## Tips for preventing extreme distress

- Provide your child with as much autonomy as possible (taking their age and abilities into account). This can look like unstructured time that they can spend doing whatever they want; being given choices around what to eat, where to go, what tasks to do etc.; and listening to your child when they communicate that they want to leave a particular place or situation.
- Make sure your child knows what is going to happen - if there's a change to their routine coming, let them know as soon as possible, and remind them often. Give your child images of what's going to happen (ideally photos), and go through the plan step by step.
- When you have control over the environment, make it as sensory-friendly as possible.
- Have things your child likes on hand - a favourite toy or fidget, a tablet with a favourite TV show, etc.
- Give your child lots of breaks. If possible, have a quiet space set up in your house that your child can retreat to when they need to. If you're out and about, let your child wait in the car, hide in the bathroom, or take a break in another quiet space when necessary.
- Provide an escape route. A lot of expressions of distress, particularly eloping and lashing out physically, come from a need to escape something about the child's current situation, and not knowing how to communicate this. Whenever possible, make sure there is a way for your child to get out of any situation - and you may find that just knowing they can escape if they need to makes your child calmer and more likely to be able to tolerate the situation.

## An example of planning for a change in routine

Alex's class is going on a trip to the museum in three weeks. Alex's parents put the school notice about the trip up on the fridge, along with photos of the inside of the museum that they found online, and a timetable for the day of the trip. Every couple of days the week before the trip, and every day the week of the trip, Alex's parents go over what the trip will be like - what will happen when, what sort of things Alex will see at the museum, when Alex will do important things like eat lunch and go to the toilet, and what Alex can do if the museum gets too overwhelming. Alex can ask questions (sometimes the same question over and over again), and get reassuring answers.

On the day of the trip, Alex knows what's going to happen when, what sorts of new experiences are coming, and how to cope if things get too much.

This doesn't guarantee that Alex will get through the whole day without any episodes of distress - but it does significantly reduce the chances.

## Tips for managing distress in the moment

- Keep calm (as much as possible). Managing your own emotions when your child is kicking, screaming, or showing other signs of extreme distress is incredibly difficult, but if you can appear calm it can help to calm your child as well.
- If you can immediately identify the source of the problem, either remove the problem or remove your child from the situation (whichever is easier).
- If your child is young enough to be carried, remove them from the situation and get them to a calm, quiet space.
- If your child is too old or resists being carried, remove all demands on the child. Don't ask or tell them to do anything, remove as much sensory stimulation as possible, and wait it out. As your child starts to calm down, try giving them the option of leaving the situation and go with whatever your child wants to do.
- This level of distress is exhausting for your child (and for you!). When it's over, let your child rest until they have recovered. This could mean being in a dark, quiet space; or it could mean playing together with something your child loves; or it could mean watching a show or movie your child loves. Your child may want comfort and company after a distressing episode, or they may want to be left alone - it's important to respect your child's needs either way.



# Play

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Autistic children may play in ways that are different to what you expect, or that don't necessarily make sense to you. No matter the toy or the game, what's really important is the value of play in a child's daily life.

## Physical play

Physical activities and games that don't require talking can be helpful for autistic children, particularly if your child finds speaking and/or processing language difficult. These games can be a good idea for the end of the day, as many autistic children find speaking and listening harder when they're tired or have already had to process a lot of language and other sensory input that day.

If your child doesn't seem interested in mainstream games or doesn't seem to understand them, consider making up your own!

## Games to play with others

Autism New Zealand has a programme called Way to Play which offers some simple, easy-to-use strategies to begin playing with your child in a way that makes sense to both of you. You can find more information and sign up for the Way to Play programme at <https://autismnz.org.nz/programmes/>

Board games can be a good opportunity for your child to learn about turn-taking, and practice winning and losing. Most board games have very specific rules and structure, which many autistic children enjoy.

## Technology

Many autistic children find screen time calming, and use devices to regulate their emotions. Screens and headphones provide control over sensory input, and can help to block out distressing sensory experiences. Access to their devices can be very important to autistic children, and they may quickly become distressed if this access is taken away. If you do need to set limits on screen time, it's important to make sure your child understands how long they will be allowed access to their device. Some children will find a visual timer or a spoken five or ten-minute warning before switching activities helpful; however, these methods can increase anxiety in some children.

For older children, the internet can also provide a form of community that is easier to navigate than socialising with peers in person, as well as access to information and discussions around children's particular special interests and passions.

# Where to go for more help

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There are a variety of services and supports available in New Zealand for parents and caregivers of autistic children. Your local Autism New Zealand Outreach Coordinator will have information about what organisations and professionals are in your area. You can find a list of our Outreach Coordinators on our website.

The Ministry of Health contracts with Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) agencies throughout New Zealand. Your local NASC service can help you work out what supports you and your child need, and how to access them. Use [www.nznasca.co.nz/regions](http://www.nznasca.co.nz/regions) to find your closest NASC service.

The Ministry of Health also provides other support services for autistic people who meet their eligibility criteria - contact the Ministry on 0800 855 066 or [info@health.govt.nz](mailto:info@health.govt.nz), or check their website at [www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz) for more information on these services.

## Tips for talking to service providers

Talking to any organisation or service provider about your child can feel overwhelming - here are a few things that can make meetings with service providers easier.

- Take a support person with you.
- Take notes - it can be hard to remember everything from a meeting with a service provider, particularly if they've given you a lot of information and/or it's been an emotional experience.
- Write down questions or things you want to bring up before you go.
- Don't be afraid to insist on answers to your questions - service providers are here to make your life and your child's life easier.
- If you are bringing your child to an appointment, bring toys, books, or other distractions for them. Health services often have long wait times, so be prepared to entertain your child for some time while you're waiting for your appointment.
- Remember that you can always get a second opinion. If a particular service provider isn't meeting your needs, talk to your NASC or one of our Outreach Coordinators about other options. You are the expert on your child; if anything a service provider does isn't working or makes you uncomfortable, you should always feel able to ask them to change their methods, or to find a new provider.

## Financial help

There are different types of financial help available, depending on your specific situation. Work and Income can help if your situation meets their eligibility criteria - contact them on 0800 559 009 or check your eligibility at [www.workandincome.govt.nz](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz).

## Educational help

If your child has education needs related to their disability, help may be available from the Ministry of Education. All Ministry services are free of charge if your child is eligible to receive them. Ministry of Education staff or service providers work with children with moderate to severe learning and behavioural needs in kindergartens, early childhood education and care centres, and Kohanga Reo, as well as children in home education.

Most children with specific learning needs receive support and services from their school. If eligible, schools can arrange for specialist teachers to provide services or make a referral to the Ministry of Education. An assessment may be needed to determine your child's needs.

You can discuss this with your school, get guidance from our Outreach Coordinators, or find out more directly from the Ministry of Education at [www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz). You can also contact the Ministry of Education at [learning.supportmailbox@education.govt.nz](mailto:learning.supportmailbox@education.govt.nz) or on 0800 622 222.

## Other organisations

### Spectrum Care

Provides respite and clinical services for disabled people of all ages.  
Autism New Zealand works closely with Spectrum Care.

[www.spectrumcare.org.nz](http://www.spectrumcare.org.nz)

[info@spectrumcare.org.nz](mailto:info@spectrumcare.org.nz)

09 634 3790

### Altogether Autism

Provides information and research on autism.

<https://altogetherautism.org.nz>

0800 273 463

### IHC and Idea Services

Advocate for the rights, inclusion, and welfare of all people with intellectual disabilities, and support them to live meaningful and satisfying lives in the community.

[www.idea.org.nz](http://www.idea.org.nz)

0800 442 442

### Parent to Parent

A support organisation for parents of children with disabilities and/or health impairments.

[www.parent2parent.org.nz](http://www.parent2parent.org.nz)

0508 236 236

### CCS Disability Action

Provide support so that disabled people are included in their families and communities.

[www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz](http://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz)

[info@ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz](mailto:info@ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz)

0800 227 200



## About Autism New Zealand

Autism New Zealand is a national registered not-for-profit organisation with sixteen branches around New Zealand. Our main purpose is to provide support, resources, and educational training and information on autism to autistic people, their family/whānau, and the carers and professionals who work with them.

### Our purpose

Taking every step together, our vision is to empower the autistic and wider autism communities in New Zealand.

We work in a respectful way, honouring the dignity of autistic people and those who support and work with them. We strive to ensure the best possible quality of life for autistic people and the wider autism community.

### Contact Autism New Zealand

General

[www.autismnz.org.nz](http://www.autismnz.org.nz)  
[info@autismnz.org.nz](mailto:info@autismnz.org.nz)

Local branches

[www.autismnz.org.nz/support-from-us/](http://www.autismnz.org.nz/support-from-us/)

Education

[www.autismnz.org.nz/programmes/](http://www.autismnz.org.nz/programmes/)

National office and autism resource centre  
20 Sydney Street  
Petone  
Lower Hutt  
Wellington 5012  
04 803 3501