



We're In This Together

Parent Well-Being After an Autism Diagnosis



ADAPT Manitoba
Association for Developmental Autism Programs and Therapies





Learn About Autism

Wait lists for therapy and supports can be long, but you can begin to build a toolbox of understanding and strategies for both yourself and your child while you wait. One of the best places to start is by learning from the experiences and insight offered by autistic adults. They can show you that despite the challenges, their lives are fulfilling, productive and meaningful. There are also many helpful books and online courses that can teach you strategies for supporting your child's growth.

Use the internet with caution. Not everything online is factual, and it can be confusing to try to sift through the diverse perspectives and opinions. ADAPT Manitoba's website lists a selection of blogs, many helpful books, videos, websites and online courses.

Learn About Yourself

Grieving is normal, and everyone goes through the stages of grief at their own pace. Remember that you have not lost your child — you are adjusting your understanding of who your child really is. Thinking about your definition of a good life will help you through this process. Find someone to talk to — whether a professional or a friend.

As you learn about autism, think about how you process emotions and sensory input, and how you feel most comfortable interacting with others. You may have more in common with your child than you realize. Research has shown that many relatives of people with autism share characteristics of autistic people.

Connect With Your Child

Learning of your child's diagnosis is a great opportunity to deepen your connection with your child. Knowing more about autism might explain some things that puzzled you, and remove some of the frustrations of parenting.

For example, maybe your child moves in certain ways to comfort themselves. This is called stimming, and stims are okay. Your child has found his own ways to cope with emotions. Perhaps your child repeats sentences they have heard from you or from TV shows. It's important to know that echolalia can be a way of learning language. By responding to all their communication, including echolalia, you will help your child to communicate better over time.

Special interests are great too. Dive in. Help your child do what they love — other skills will emerge, and these interests will be a way for your child to connect with people. Share your own interests with them, and in time they will figure out how to join in with you.



Connect With Your Community

Look for people who accept your child and see how wonderful they are. They will celebrate every milestone with you, and will become your community. You may find them in your faith or cultural community, your extended family, recreational groups, or your child's school. There are many local support groups where parents of children with autism can meet and encourage one another. Parents are just as diverse as their children — if one group doesn't suit you, try another.

Also make sure you help your child build their own connections as they grow, in a way that works for your family. Some people arrange playdates, others join clubs or groups, either disability-specific or inclusive. Whatever works for your family is a good choice.

In the long run, that support network will help you over the rough times and celebrate successes with you.

Expect growth. You and your child will set goals, and will achieve them. And there will be lovely surprises.

Make time to laugh and have fun. A good life is about finding joy in beautiful moments. Teach your child to celebrate those moments too.

“

The truth of your journey from diagnosis to acceptance is that unless you acknowledge your own vulnerability and develop your ability for self-compassion, your growth as a parent will not fully be complete. Guilt and self-blame are heavy stones in your boat as you row down this river. Compassion for yourself is wind in your sails.

— Rita Eichenstein,
*Not What I Expected: Help and Hope
for Parents of Atypical Children*



You're Not Alone

Take a breath. Process. You have time. A diagnosis of autism may feel scary or overwhelming, but the diagnosis does not change who your child is. Try to think of it as a gateway to understanding.

Your child will grow and develop. Your job as a parent is to learn about what autism means for your child. People with autism are diverse and no two children — or families — have the same needs. What we all have in common is a desire to understand our children's strengths and needs so that we can help them to thrive.

**Our sincere thanks to
Community Living Manitoba
for their support and
contributions on this project,
and for the work they do
to support the inclusion,
self-determination and
empowerment of people
with intellectual disabilities
in Manitoba.**

**This project was funded by
the Government of Canada,
Employment and Social
Development Canada under
the Social Development
Projects for People with
Disabilities program.**



Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada



For more information on parenting
a child with autism, please visit:

ADAPTMANITOBA.CA