

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

Balancing the different needs of family members is always a challenge, but if a child in the family has autism, this can be even more demanding. It can be difficult for parents under this kind of pressure to model emotional regulation which in turn impacts on the children and can quickly become a negative cycle. Identifying support networks such as family, friends, or support groups of other parents who have children with autism can be a huge help. Sometimes these can be run by schools, or by charities such as Contact (<https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/listening-ear/>). This week, we offer tips for parents, younger siblings and teenage siblings of children with autism.

1

Tips for parents

Often, conflicts arise through misunderstanding. Position yourself as an observer in your family. Notice the different ways family members show affection or irritation through their body language, facial expressions or actions. Translate these non-verbal cues to your children. Perhaps they don't realise that their sibling is trying to show affection when they barge into his/her room. Maybe they don't notice that their sibling needs space when they start to close down and become very quiet. Also, offer your child some practical coping strategies for when their sibling has a meltdown. Where can they go? Can they watch TV in their room or put headphones in? Reassure them of the steps you take to deal with the situation, as they may not be obvious or visible.

2 Tips for younger children

Offer information and reassurance, such as:

'Sometimes, people with autism might do things that seem strange. They might scream, or rock backwards and forwards, or flap their hands. Or perhaps they do something else that seems different.'

This might be because they are:

- Excited
- Nervous or scared
- There's a lot going on
- They are trying to relax'

Encourage them to ask you when their sibling does something they don't understand. Explore reasons why they might behave like that.

3

Tips for older children

Empathise with them - it can feel hard not to have the same relationship with your sibling that your friends seem to have with their brothers or sisters. Remind them that every relationship is different though, just like every person is different.

Often, people with autism have a special interest - something they're really passionate about. Encourage your teen to try and share in that interest with them or to find another interest that they could share, for example if they both enjoy the same kind of music, or maybe they both love cars or football. Even if it's something they'd never do with their friends, stress that it's worth giving it a go and could broaden their own horizons as well as having something special to share that's just for the two of them.

