

They are first a child

What every child with autism wants you to know

Sounds, sights and textures may be normal to you, but can be painful for them
They are not ignoring you – they don't understand you
Give them enough time to understand the information you are sharing and allow time for a response
They prefer routines because they know what to expect
They are special in their own way
It is hard for them to tell you what they need because they don't yet know the words
Be patient and consistent
Everyone is different and has different needs
Focus on what they can do rather than what they can't do
There is no single presentation of autism
They can be amazingly perceptive
Repetitive behaviours might be a coping mechanism and therefore should be respected
To connect you don't need to talk or even touch, you can communicate by the way you look, tone of voice and body language

Supporting the child through play:

Children may find it difficult to choose what to do, be patient
They may prefer repetitive play focused on their interest
They may prefer to play by themselves rather than with other children
They may want to play with other children but do not know how
They may play with objects differently – for example spinning the wheels of a toy car, rather than pushing the car around on the floor
Speak clearly and use simple language
Be aware of what may trigger a meltdown

"I now realise that even the smallest tension can become a big issue since B struggles to work through the feeling of rejection and I've realised that I need to know about all these "happenings" so that I understand if we have resulting behaviour. I can support her through and hopefully resolve the problem. She doesn't really discuss these feelings at all and will just look normal or maybe tired. I recently finished B's portfolio. 20 photos were taken in the same timeline and I printed and used them all. There was one particular one that I showed what was really going on inside for her. For me and her dad it's obvious (he spotted it straight away too), but it's not an obvious display of emotions."

Anon

Specific behaviour

Underlying reasons

Reduced understanding of social rules
Developing communication skills
Unaware of others' feelings
Oversensitive to noise and tone
Oversensitive to activity
Anxiety to crowds
Anxiety to change
Developing social interaction skills
Overloaded sensory stimuli
Challenges with social interaction

How can we support our whānau on session:

Ask their parent/carer what support they might need as a parent/carer
Active listening requires an open mind. You can't help someone if deep in your mind you are judging their emotions and behaviours
Asking questions without interrupting can help you (and the other parent/carer) better understand the challenges
Find out the child's sensory sensitivities

"Judgement is an issue – there's no look to autism, so when a child is screaming at Playcentre because he can't see me at clean up time, other parents who know nothing may think he's naughty and needs discipline or something - in his mind he's freaking out that I've gone and left him behind because time is very hard for him to understand."

Tracey