

"In your lifetime, you will probably know more people and families affected by autism. You can choose to be part of the solution by helping support a friend, family member or neighbor. Take the time to learn not just about autism, but the individual child. Make the decision to accept children with disabilities and teach your children how they can help children with autism by being a friend too. Making the choice to support a family affected by autism is one of the greatest gifts you can give. It is also very likely that your act of kindness may turn out to be one of the greatest gifts you receive back as well."

*Kymerly Grosso, author, blogger, autism mom
www.psychologytoday.com/blog/autism-in-real-life*

Supporting the Child with Autism

Your friend will appreciate that you want to interact with and support her child with autism. Here are some suggestions:

Find out about the interests of the child, and ask him or her about them. Children with autism will be more willing to interact to the best of their ability if you ask them about something that is important to them.

If she is comfortable sharing, ask your friend if there are certain triggers that may upset her child or lead to meltdowns.

Keep your language as simple and concrete as possible, as people with autism are often very literal. But be sure to understand the difference between receptive and expressive language. Many children and adults with autism who may not be able to speak are fully capable of understanding what you are saying.

Figure out where your friend and her family are most comfortable. For some families, it is easier if you go to their houses. Some children with autism are more comfortable in their own homes. Some families may want to visit your home. If this is the case, you may want to ask your friend how you can make the visit the most comfortable for her child.

Provide your children with information about how to best interact with the child with autism. Keep in mind that not all families tell their child about his or her diagnosis. The *Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit* has a helpful section to help peers of children with autism learn to interact with and support their friends.



Stories of Support

“So many friends, so many stories, but one friend in particular stands out, my friend Shani. My son Ryan is 10 years old and was diagnosed with PDD NOS when he was 6. Ryan is a brilliant boy with an amazingly sweet heart, which is evident for those who take the time to get to know him. That is what stands out about my friend Shani - she always takes time for Ryan. Regardless of the times he has ignored her, rebuffed her or yelled at her for getting the wrong type of pizza, for serving him orange juice with pulp or for not putting enough Goldfish crackers in his bowl, Shani “gets” Ryan because she tries. It is easy for people to overlook Ryan. When he fails to say hello, fails to acknowledge your presence, or just completely ignores your question, it is easy for people just to walk away or give up. Not Shani, she engages Ryan one way or another. She has never treated Ryan any differently than she would any other child. There was no secret password, no special trick, no gifts or rewards, just her time, her patience and her sincerity, which kids like Ryan can pick up a lot more readily than one would assume of a child with ASD. Shani will never understand the depth of my gratitude, respect and love I have for all that she is to me, to Ryan and to the rest of my family.”

Kathy, mom of Ryan

“My name is Jessica and I have a beautiful, amazing, sweet, smart, perfect 2-year-old son named Cashius who is autistic. I may not have a lot of support from my son's father or any member family who lives close enough to help, but I have been so blessed to have my best friend Jaymie for the last four years be my sole support. She has been by my side every step of the way from when I started inquiring to my son's doctors ‘Shouldn't he be talking by now?’ or when my family said “Oh, he is a boy, they are just late talkers”. She was there telling me go with MY feelings. She takes my son to therapies and being involved in countless sessions



teaching her own three kids how to work with him. Taking time off of work to go to an ABA conference to better her skills to help Cashius. She let's me have my own meltdowns and is always there to help me up after I'm done. She is always thinking of new ideas for Cashius' meals because of his GFCF diet. Not only does she make me feel so lucky to have found someone who is so loving and supportive and just amazing. But the person who is the luckiest is Cashius to have her in his life!”

Jessica, mom of Cashius

“When my son Matthew was diagnosed with autism, we were lucky enough to get him the many hours of the therapy that he needed. That meant a stream of therapists in and out of our home. Also, it meant that my older son Danny needed to play quietly so that he didn't distract his brother. My good friend Ellen also has a son Danny's age, and they are good friends. Ellen stopped by to drop something off, just as I was explaining to Danny why he couldn't have a friend over while Matthew's therapists were here. Ellen called me later that night, and asked if Danny could have a standing play date at her house every Thursday while Matthew's therapists were here. I could have cried, I was so worried about Danny and my friend Ellen knew just what we needed!”

Jeanine, mom of Matthew