



Recognizing an Autistic Child's Vulnerabilities is Key to Their Social and Academic Growth

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), each child on the autism disorder spectrum exhibits a unique behavioral pattern and level of severity. Severity can be difficult to ascertain due to the unique combination of symptoms exhibited by each child. There are a number of tactics that can help parents manage negative behavior responses to anxiety and different forms of sensory stimuli. Once parents understand their child's [triggers](#), these strategies can make a considerable difference in how well they communicate, interact socially and learn in a formal classroom setting.

Common triggers

[Anxiety](#) may be triggered in autistic school children when they're engaged in activities with no structure and no specific rules that establish boundaries and set expectations. Recess, lunch time, riding the school bus, and sudden or unexpected physical or topical transitions during the day can be overwhelming. Confusion over classroom assignments - specifically, not understanding what to do - can be extremely upsetting, and may elicit an overtly negative response.

An overload of [sensory stimuli](#) also tends to cause autistic children to react negatively. Crowded scenes on the playground, at a school assembly, field trips or being in a large space that's excessively bright and loud, and sudden loud noises (such as a fire drill alarm) may also be upsetting and hit autistic children in a place where they're especially vulnerable - their difficulty in processing visual, aural or olfactory stimuli. In some cases, unfamiliar food or clothing that's too constricting or otherwise uncomfortable are distracting and upsetting.

The importance of sleep

Autistic children need every advantage in dealing with anxiety-producing social situations and exposure to disruptive sensory stimuli. One of the best ways to help a child is to ensure they get a [restful night's sleep](#) and wake up feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. Healthful sleep produces optimism, boosts motivation and helps self-confidence. Initiate a set routine each night, including a consistent bedtime and pre-bed activities that are conducive to sleep, like a warm bath or reading a favorite story with a parent.

Don't overlook the importance of a good mattress. If sleep is a problem, your child's mattress could be a [major factor](#), especially if it's between seven and 10 years old. Be discriminating in selecting a new one, which should be right for your child's sleep style.

If these measures prove ineffective, you may want to talk to your doctor about adding a natural supplement that promotes sleep to your child's nighttime routine. One tried and true option is [melatonin](#), which has been used to help children with ASD fall asleep faster, sleep longer, and wake less often. A newer alternative is cannabidiol oil (CBD), which may help reduce anxiety and pain, in addition to improving sleep. With CBD, it's important to look for a manufacturer that [tests their product](#), shares results and testimonials, and acknowledges that you should talk to a doctor before adding CBD products to your routine.

Sensory-based strategies

Any of a child's five senses may elicit a negative response. Fortunately, there are many practical solutions that are known to be effective in alleviating the severity of a child's reaction when environmental stimuli gets to be too much. [Noise-cancelling headphones](#) can be a viable option when a child just needs to block out loud noise at school during unstructured periods or at home when there are a lot of people around.

Night-time noises, like a loud stereo from a passing car or barking dogs, can be mitigated with a [white noise machine](#) (sometimes a fan turned on low will work). Excess visual stimuli is disorienting for many autistic children, a situation that can be addressed by reducing the amount of clutter in the classroom and in the bedroom. Consider replacing [fluorescent lighting](#) with a softer, less-intrusive alternative. If your child has difficulty differentiating between objects, it might be necessary to use picture labels to ease identification.

For children who are sensitive to touch, a stress ball or a soft, handheld item can help improve classroom concentration and performance. A [weighted blanket](#) provides a soothing touch stimulus, and selecting clothing made of material that's calming to the touch, such as cotton or silk, helps in any setting.

Children on the autism disorder spectrum have very specific vulnerabilities that can make it difficult for them to progress socially and academically. Finding practical solutions that help calm a child, and help them overcome their vulnerabilities and their triggers is key to managing your child's condition.

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