



A guide for parents

For when your child has just been diagnosed as autistic, or you think they might be. Read it at your own pace. There is no rush, and you are not alone.

Five things to know first

1. **Your child is the same child.** A diagnosis doesn't change who they are. It gives you a better map for understanding them.
2. **Autism is a difference, not an illness.** It is lifelong, and it is not caused by parenting, diet or vaccines.
3. **Every autistic person is different.** Strengths and needs vary, and can change from day to day.
4. **Support can start now.** You don't need to wait for a diagnosis to adapt your home or ask the school for help.
5. **Be wary of "cures".** Autism cannot be cured, and some products sold as cures are dangerous. Check any therapy with a trusted health professional.

Things you may notice

Every child is different, but parents often notice some of these:

- Talking later, or communicating in other ways
- Less eye contact, or not responding to their name
- Strong reactions to sounds, lights, textures or smells
- Deep, focused interests
- Needing routines and finding change hard
- Repeated movements such as hand-flapping or rocking (stimming)
- Finding play or friendships with others confusing

Where to start

- **Suspect autism?** Write down what you notice, then talk to your family doctor, paediatrician or health visitor and ask for a referral for an autism assessment.
- **Just diagnosed?** Ask for the full written report, read it, and share it with the school and anyone who supports your child.
- **Waiting?** Ask how long the wait is, and what support is available meanwhile.

Get help straight away if

your child loses skills they had (such as words or play), stops eating or drinking, is hurting themselves, or you are worried about their safety. Contact your doctor, or emergency services if it is urgent.



Your first steps checklist

Tick each step when you are ready.

- ☐ **Take a breath.** It is normal to feel relief, worry, grief, or all of these at once.
- ☐ **Write down what you notice** at home and at school (page 4 helps).
- ☐ **Ask for a referral** for an autism assessment, and how long the wait is.
- ☐ **Start helping now:** calm spaces, clear routines, visual timetables.
- ☐ **Get the written report** after the assessment, and keep copies.
- ☐ **Meet the school** and agree a support plan together.
- ☐ **Ask about your rights** to education support and financial help where you live (page 3).
- ☐ **Learn from autistic people:** books, videos and blogs by autistic adults.
- ☐ **Find your local support:** an autism organisation or parent group near you.
- ☐ **Look after yourself too.** Accept help, rest, and talk to other parents.

Questions to ask at appointments

- What did the assessment find, and what are my child's strengths?
- What support do you recommend at home and at school?
- Are there speech and language, occupational therapy or sensory assessments my child should have?
- Who is my main contact, and how do I reach them?
- How long are the waiting lists, and what can we do while we wait?
- Are there parent courses or support groups you recommend?
- What should I do if things get harder?

Take with you

- Your notes and this guide
- Reports from nursery or school
- Short videos of behaviour that worries you (they help professionals see what you see)
- Your child's comfort item or snack, for long waits



Support and your rights

Rules differ in each country and change over time. These are starting points. Always check the latest guidance where you live.

United Kingdom

- Ask your GP or health visitor for a referral for assessment.
- Schools must support your child's needs, with or without a diagnosis. Ask the school's SENCo about SEN Support.
- In England, children with greater needs can be assessed for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- National Autistic Society (autism.org.uk), Contact (contact.org.uk) and IPSEA (ipsea.org.uk) give advice.

United States

- Talk to your paediatrician.
- Children under 3 can get free or low-cost Early Intervention services through their state.
- From age 3, ask your school district for a special education evaluation.
- The Autism Society (autismsociety.org) runs a national helpline.

United Arab Emirates

- Start with your child's paediatrician for a developmental assessment.
- Schools are expected to include students of determination. In Dubai, ask the inclusion team about an individual education plan.
- Dubai Autism Center (dubaiautismcenter.ae) offers assessment, therapy and family support.

Brazil

- Start at your local health unit (UBS). The SUS screens children aged 16 to 30 months with the M-CHAT questionnaire.
- The Berenice Piana Law (Lei 12.764/2012) protects autistic people's rights, including inclusive education.
- The CIPTEA card (Lei 13.977/2020) helps access priority services.

Portugal

- Start with your family doctor or paediatrician in the SNS. SNS 24: 808 24 24 24.
- At school, ask for the multidisciplinary team (EMAEI) and an individual education plan (PEI), under Decreto-Lei 54/2018.
- APPDA Lisboa (appda-lisboa.org.pt) supports families.

Everywhere

- Keep copies of every report and letter.
- Put requests to schools and services in writing.
- Ask about financial support for families of disabled children where you live.
- You can ask for a second opinion.



About my child

Fill this in and share it with teachers, doctors and anyone new in your child's life.

My child loves

Things that help my child feel calm

Things that can upset or overwhelm

How my child communicates

What I notice: a simple log

Date	What happened	What came before it	What helped



Contacts and looking after yourself

Important contacts

Who	Name	Phone / email
Family doctor / paediatrician		
School contact (SENCo / inclusion lead)		
Speech and language therapist		
Occupational therapist		
Local autism organisation		

Appointments

Date	With	What was agreed / next step

Looking after yourself

- You don't have to learn everything at once. One step at a time is enough.
- Connect with other parents who understand. Local and online groups can be a lifeline.
- Accept help from family and friends, and ask for it.
- Make time for rest, even short moments.
- If you feel low or overwhelmed, talk to your own doctor. Caring for yourself is part of caring for your child.

Brick's Foundation for Autism Inclusion was created in loving memory of Lucca Lacerda Tavares, known as Brick. Lucca was autistic, brilliant, funny, and loved chess, coding and swimming. Visit bricksfoundation.co.uk for support near you, family stories, and our free family app.