



Family Stress and Wellbeing

It is common for families who care for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to experience high levels of stress. Every family's journey is different, and it is normal to feel a range of emotions. Whatever your feelings, it's important to recognise and acknowledge them.

Common causes of Family Stress

You can feel stressed because:

- > you feel isolated and lonely
- > it is difficult to come to terms with the diagnosis
- > you experience greater care giving challenges
- > your child's behaviour is difficult, e.g. sleeping patterns, fussy eating, the way your child interacts with others
- > it is difficult to figure out the maze of services and support

Stress itself is not negative. Some stress in our lives can be motivating. It is the day-to-day stresses, which take a toll on our physical and mental health because of the cumulative effects. Too much stress can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion.

Physical Signs of Stress

- > lowered immune system
- > breathing difficulties
- > fatigue
- > sleep disturbance
- > muscular tension

You may also find yourself:

- > feeling out of touch with reality
- > forgetful
- > not looking after yourself
- > crying easily
- > not eating properly

If you are experiencing physical signs of stress please get help from your GP, counseling services, respite care, or support groups.

What can help?

Management strategies such as:

- > seeking information about autism and your child
- > getting to know your child's triggers – social and/or environmental
- > being prepared for situations that cause stress (e.g. giving your child advance notice of changes, have a plan for when meltdowns occur)
- > positive coping (e.g. looking for something good in a situation, using humour)
- > being kind to yourself
- > finding respite opportunities
- > maintaining your own interests
- > focusing on the strengths of family members
- > talking with someone – a trusted friend, family member, support group, or mental health professional
- > social supports (e.g. extended family, support groups, online communities)
- > accessing different supports for each family member because each person responds differently to ASD
- > accepting that there will be ups and downs in your family, and this is perfectly normal

For further information, search:

Respite Australia

Raising Children Network

Autism Connect

MyTime Australia

To find a psychologist, head to the **Australian Psychological Society**

Look into becoming a member at a men's shed (which have a special interest in supporting fathers and male supporters of people with autism)