



Build Meaningful Connections: How to Interact with Your Loved One with Autism

While this list isn't all-inclusive and we know that every child is different, here are some general ideas regarding how to interact with your child. Check out our templates as well, especially for visual supports.

Set Up Their Environment For Success

Think of yourself as a detective when observing your child or loved one's behavior. Look for patterns, like certain behaviors happening at specific times or places. Once you understand when and where the behaviors are likely to happen, you can change the environment to prevent those behaviors or create chances to learn new skills. If you can, try to change or avoid situations that lead to challenging behaviors. This will help create a positive space for growth and learning.

Things to Consider for a Successful Environment

Organize and Provide Structure: Use clear visual schedules, calendars and routines. This helps your child or loved one know what to expect next.

Create Routines: Understand that changes can be very upsetting, especially if they happen suddenly. Use schedules, countdown timers and warnings about upcoming changes to help you child or loved one prepare.

Designate Quiet Spaces: Create areas that are calm and free from loud noises, bright lights and other distractions.

Maintain Consistency: Try to keep routines, expectations and rules the same across different caregivers and settings. Consistency is important for creating a structured home environment, especially for individuals with autism.

Support Language Development: Encourage conversations about your child or loved one's interests. Talk about what's happening around them and focus on their strengths and hobbies.

Establish a Routine & Use Visual Supports

Setting up a routine can be tough, but it really helps your child or loved one know what to expect each day. Think about how you remind yourself of daily tasks, like using calendars, alarms, or planners. Just like we earn fun things for completing our tasks, we can adapt this idea for those with autism too.

[More on Next Page](#)



Build Meaningful Connections: How to Interact with Your Loved One with Autism

Visual Schedule: Create a list of daily tasks using pictures or words. Over time, this can help them transition to using a planner if they can read.

First/Then: Use apps to show simple “first/then” scenarios. This helps them see what they need to do first to get to their favorite activity or item.

Timer: A timer can signal when it’s time to switch activities, making transitions easier. Having a countdown allows your loved one to get used to the idea of an upcoming transition.

Model Behavior You Want to See

To teach the behaviors you want, show them! Demonstrate how to do something appropriately. This helps your child or loved one learn the right way to achieve their goals.

Example 1: If your child or loved one is drawing on the wall, encourage them to draw on paper instead, and join in the activity with them.

Example 2: If your child or loved one is reaching for a cup but it is up too high, model how to ask for the cup.

Use Prompting

Gently guide them through how to complete tasks, whether through physical assistance, verbal cues or modeling. Work closely with a BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst) to find the best prompting strategies.

Catch Them Being Good

When kids are struggling, it’s easy to miss the good things they do. Look for small positive behaviors, like saying “sorry” without being asked or helping their sibling. Always acknowledge and reward these good actions!

No matter what our kids are doing, there is always something worth mentioning, so be on the lookout and reward them for the behavior you want to see.

Use Reinforcement

Reinforcement means giving praise, a small item or access to a fun activity after a good behavior to encourage that behavior to happen more often. It’s important to give reinforcement right after the behavior occurs.

Reinforcers don’t have to be expensive. They can be:

Attention: Spending time together watching TV or doing crafts.

Time/Privileges: Extra time for a favorite activity or letting them choose dinner.

Breaks: Helping clean up toys after they do a good job.

Tangibles: Small toys, snacks or fun activities.

Be Present & Get on Their Level

The best gift you can give your child is your time. To make that time meaningful, try these tips:

Get physically close instead of yelling from another room.

Use gentle touch, like high-fives or hugs – if your child enjoys this.

Keep a calm voice and body language.

Build Meaningful Connections: How to Interact with Your Loved One with Autism

Ask open-ended questions instead of ones that can be answered with just “yes” or “no.”

Use empathy statements to show you understand how they feel.

Listen closely. Minimize distractions and fully focus on your child.

Don't sweat the little things. Spend time listening to what your child wants to share with you and keep criticisms at a minimum.

Meet Them Where They Are

As a caregiver, you are often faced with decisions about what's best for your child. If they're developing at a different pace, it can be tricky to know when to push them or go at their speed. There is a delicate balance between teaching necessary skills and allowing your child to develop his or her own personality. Here are some tips to help you choose goals that will help your child succeed.

Use developmental milestones as a guide to set appropriate goals.

Aim for goals that are slightly above what they can currently do.

Celebrate small successes and keep working on skills, no matter their age.

Don't rush progress. Slow progress is still progress.

Always keep learning goals in place—learning should never stop!

Take Advantage of Natural Teaching Moments

Each day is full of opportunities to learn new things. Look for situations that occur naturally, such as introducing a new food when your child wants a snack or introducing a new social skill when other children are around. Find a way to incorporate these lessons in activities that your child already enjoys.

Timing: Make sure you have enough time for a lesson, rather than having to stop in the middle. If mornings are hectic, save lessons for later in the day or the weekend.

Emotions: Teach when everyone is calm. Avoid lessons when your child is upset or angry.

Follow-Through: Pick a moment when you know your child will be able to complete the lesson. When you ask them to complete a task, make sure that they have time and opportunity to do it.

Preferences: Pay attention to what your child enjoys and use that to make the lesson fun. For example, if your child loves dinosaurs, use dinosaur toys to teach counting.

To learn more about supporting young children with autism, watch these videos by [Toddler Tracks](#).

Reviewed by Senior Director – Clinical Strategy, Research & Autism, LCSW, BCBA, CCM

◆ Let's connect you to mental health care, today.

Lucet's team of behavioral health professionals are here to help you navigate your mental health journey with confidence. Whether you are looking for immediate care or do not know where to start, we will guide you through every step.

For more resources:

lucethealth.com/autismchampions | lucethealth.com/autism-resource-center



Scan to learn more at
[LucetHealth.com](https://lucethealth.com)