

MAKE CONNECTION PERSONAL

Our family connection plan

Complete this together. Preferences can change, so keep asking and listening.

Ways our loved one communicates:

Signs they want connection or space:

Things that help them feel safe:

Activities we can enjoy together:

What helps during overwhelm:

Who to ask when we are unsure:

STAY CONNECTED

All Hands in Autism Foundation

allhandsinautismfoundation.com

Info@allhandsinautismfoundation.com

(602) 491-3929

Print double-sided in landscape, flip on the short edge, use actual size, then fold into thirds.

BEFORE TIME TOGETHER

A little planning can lower stress

- Share the plan: who will be there, how long, food, noise and anything unexpected.
- Ask about communication, sensory, medical and safety needs before the visit.
- Offer a quiet space without treating it as punishment or exclusion.
- Welcome AAC, headphones, comfort items, movement and familiar routines.
- Make arrival and leaving flexible. A shorter visit can still be a successful visit.
- Do not require hugs, eye contact, conversation or a performance of gratitude.

ONE USEFUL QUESTION

“What would help our loved one feel comfortable and included today?”

You do not need a perfect plan. Curiosity, flexibility and a calm response are meaningful forms of support.



A GUIDE FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS

Loving, Learning & Connecting

Small changes can create safer, more meaningful connection with a child or adult with autism.

You do not need to be an autism expert. Your patience, flexibility and steady presence can help a loved one feel respected, included and deeply valued.

ALL HANDS IN AUTISM FOUNDATION

UNDERSTAND WITHOUT ASSUMPTIONS

Autism is part of our family story

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability. It may shape communication, sensory processing, routines, movement, attention and social energy. It does not tell you a person's worth, feelings, intelligence or capacity for connection.

Connection may look different

- Sitting nearby, sharing an interest or bringing a favorite item can be meaningful connection.
- Fewer words, slower warm-ups or less eye contact do not equal less care.
- Speech is not the only valid communication. AAC, typing, gestures, scripts, signs and behavior can all communicate.
- A person may need extra time to understand a question and organize a response.

Do not assume someone cannot hear or understand because they do not respond in an expected way. Speak respectfully and include them in conversations about their life.

SUPPORT IN EVERYDAY MOMENTS

What helps

- Ask how the person prefers to communicate, then give enough processing time.
- Use clear, specific language and say what will happen next.
- Ask before touching, hugging, moving belongings or changing a routine.
- Respect “no,” requests for space and sensory tools without taking them personally.
- Celebrate interests, self-advocacy, comfort and progress—not conformity.
- Treat AAC as the person's voice. Keep it available, charged and within reach.

What to avoid

- Do not force eye contact, physical affection, speech or social participation.
- Do not compare them with siblings, cousins or other people with autism.
- Do not label support needs as laziness, rudeness, manipulation or bad parenting.
- Do not remove communication or regulation tools as punishment.

WHEN THE WORLD FEELS LIKE TOO MUCH

Support regulation before conversation

Overwhelm can lead to a meltdown, a shutdown, reduced speech, repeated movement, withdrawal or an urgent need to leave. These are not moral failures. Respond to the need first.

- Lower your voice, lights, questions and expectations.
- Use fewer words and allow silence.
- Offer space, an exit, headphones, water or a familiar regulation tool.
- Follow the person's or caregiver's safety plan. Do not crowd, restrain or touch unless immediate safety requires trained intervention.
- Discuss what helped later—never demand an explanation during overload.

Be a safe person

Be patient when connection is quiet. Be curious instead of judgmental. Be flexible when plans change. Be present without pressure. Consistency helps trust grow.

Educational resource only. Every person has individual preferences and support needs. Ask the person directly whenever possible and follow individualized medical or safety guidance. AHIAF is not providing medical or legal advice.