

Creating A Care Package For The Individual With Autism

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As research in the autism field continues, the neurological and sensory needs of the individuals with autism becomes more validated. And while there is plenty of documentation out there on what those needs are, there is precious little on how those same needs can be met and dealt with in a safe and appropriate manner. Many of us watch our little ones struggle with the world on a daily basis, wishing there was something we could do to make it even a little more comfortable for them. And many times, when we do come up with ideas, it seems to have an effect which is opposite of what we had anticipated! What, then, can be done to ease the suffering and to help them out of the shell? Below are several ideas various people have come up with over the years - some obvious - some not so obvious - that should help. Please keep in mind that every child is different, and that what works for one may not work for another.

AUDITORY:

It has been estimated that at least 40 percent of all people with autism have some form of auditory hypersensitivity. Unfortunately, outside of auditory training, there is not much that can be done about it. Some of what can be done is included here.

EAR PLUGS:

One obvious way to cut down on the sound is to wear ear plugs. Assuming your child is able to wear them, there are several different kinds to choose from and all are fairly inexpensive.

HEADPHONES:

If the ear plugs are uncomfortable, you can try sound suppressing headphones. These are normally used for people on the firing range to protect their ears from the gunshots. They have a rating of about 30db and you can buy them at any gun shop. The one problem with these is that they are a bit too obvious. One may question the social appropriateness of wearing these monsters in certain situations.

MODIFIED TELEPHONE:

For some who are verbal, talking on the telephone may be a problem. In that case, you may want to try an electronic modification. By installing a simple audio taper potentiometer, you can add an effective volume control to the headset of the phone. While this is a fairly easy project, it should be done only by someone who has had experience with electronics. I will be putting a schematic on this site soon.

GUSTATORY:

Many problems with the gustatory sense have been reported in children with autism, sometimes resulting in malnutrition. The problems are not only with the taste of the food, but also with the texture.

RUBBER TUBING:

You can get this from an occupational therapist. It is said that by chewing on (a certain type of) rubber tubing, you can acclimate the gustatory sense to respond more appropriately. Consult O.T. for other details.

BLAND/NON-TEXTURED FOOD:

If over stimulation is a problem, you may want to try non textured, bland tasting foods. Things like yogurt, pasta, and jello are a hit with many children with autism.

LIQUID NUTRITION:

This is a somewhat expensive nutritional supplement that comes in 8 oz. cans. The good news is that in addition to all the vitamins and minerals, you also get the fat, protein and carbohydrates. This is easily digestible and some is even tasty. With all the flavors it comes in, there must be one or more that your child will drink.

TACTILE/PROPRIOCEPTIVE:

This is a hard one to pin down. The tactile and proprioceptive needs vary with each individual. Some may be tactile defensive while others may crave touch. Some may need pressure while others are better without it. Here are some ideas that will hopefully fit the majority.

BODY SHAMPOO:

This is a workable alternative to standard bar soap. If your child has a tactile defensiveness and/or dislikes having a bath, you may want to try this. Liquid soap is poured into a dual texture sponge. The dual texture of the sponge has been shown to be more tolerable than the standard bar soap. The instant lather makes it quick and easy and the moisturizers leave skin not feeling dry after the bath. This product can be purchased at any pharmacy or grocery store.

PRESSURE BRACELETS:

The idea for this came directly from Dr. Grandin's much publicized squeeze machine. Although specialized pressure bracelets do exist, it would be easier to use a watch to apply a gentle (or not so gentle) pressure to the wrist, thus providing a calming sensation to the individual. It is important not to make it too tight, or you could injure the person wearing it. If possible, try to adjust the links in a "twist-o-flex" watchband.

WEIGHTED BRACELETS:

These work in a way similar to ones above. You can get these at any exercise shop or sporting goods department. They are made for both wrists and ankles and come in various weights, some of which are adjustable.

BEARS:

Pillows, bears, and other stuffed animals can provide proprioceptive feedback to the individual. These are especially helpful at night when one is trying to sleep, but can be used during the day as well.

FACILITATED COMMUNICATION:

There can be little (if any) doubt that this is the most controversial issue in the autism field. And this is not without reason. Many letter and picture boards can be used at little or no cost, however some parents or professionals may want a more permanent record of what was said or done. If you believe Facilitated Communication is working for you, then you may want to consider the following.

TRS-80 MODEL 100:

It has been said this is the first laptop computer ever made. It came on the scene in 1982 with a proprietary operating system written by Bill Gates of Microsoft. It has a few built-in programs on ROM chips, with the word processor being the only one which is really usable. But it is perfect for F/C.

This little computer operates on an 80C85 processor at a slow 2.4 MHz. This is one reason it is ideal. It has a screen with large characters which is 40 across and 8 down. Also has many graphic characters you can use. It is easily portable, as the dimensions are 11 4/5" (L) x 8 4/9" (D) x 2" (W). It operates on 4 AA batteries which are said to last 20 hours. It has both a serial and a parallel port, meaning you can save typing to disk or print it out. The keyboard has a very nice feel and letters are spaced far enough apart that most should be able to type on it. One other nice feature is the built-in BASIC programming language, which allows you to write your own custom programs. Look around at garage sales or for sale or trade magazines to find one of these. Alternately, any organizer will work if your child doesn't have a problem finding the right keys.

CONCLUSION:

Only two things are necessary to create a care package appropriate for autism. Knowledge of autism and a little common sense. The rest takes care of itself.