



## Happiness in Every Step: How to Thrive as a Parent of an Autistic Child

### Description

Navigating the journey of raising an autistic child involves embracing profound insights from *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama to foster a nurturing and resilient environment. This article guides new parents in redefining happiness, practicing self-compassion, and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth. It emphasizes the importance of building strong family bonds, incorporating mindfulness, and simplifying routines to support both the child and family. By focusing on gratitude and celebrating progress, parents can create a joyful and supportive atmosphere, while fostering their child's resilience and independence through practical tools and strategies. Ultimately, the journey is about finding joy in every step and cultivating a compassionate, empowering home environment.



## Introduction

### *Nurturing Happiness as New Parents of Autistic Children: Lessons from The Art of Happiness*

Raising a child with autism is a journey that brings a unique set of challenges and joys. For new parents, navigating this path can be overwhelming as they face a reality that differs from typical parenting experiences. While it is easy to become consumed by the complexities of the diagnosis, it is also an opportunity to grow, adapt, and find deeper,

more meaningful ways of connecting with their child. In this journey, the principles outlined in *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama can serve as a valuable guide. Through compassion, mindfulness, resilience, and a shift in perspective, parents can foster a sense of joy and fulfillment in their roles while nurturing their child's development.

### Intended Audience:

This article is specifically crafted for new parents of autistic children who are looking for practical guidance on how to approach parenting with compassion, resilience, and a sense of peace. These parents may be feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, or emotionally drained, and are seeking ways to build a nurturing and happy environment for both themselves and their children.

### Purpose:

The aim of this article is to adapt key insights from *The Art of Happiness* to the realities of raising a child on the autism spectrum. By blending Buddhist wisdom with actionable strategies, the goal is to provide parents with a roadmap for fostering happiness, emotional well-being, and resilience. This advice is not just about parenting techniques, but about cultivating inner strength and self-compassion, so parents can be emotionally equipped to support their child's unique needs.

### Overview of Key Themes:

- 1. Redefining Happiness:** For many parents, the initial diagnosis of autism can be emotionally jarring. It often brings feelings of confusion, fear, or loss as they struggle to reconcile their expectations with their child's developmental path. The key to happiness, as taught by the Dalai Lama, is understanding that true contentment comes from within. By shifting their focus from external milestones to internal growth, parents can learn to find happiness in their child's progress, no matter how unconventional that progress may be.
- 2. Compassion:** Compassion is essential not only for the child but also for the parent. Parents of autistic children are often tasked with navigating a complex web of therapies, behaviors, and societal pressures. Compassion for the child involves recognizing their unique strengths and challenges without judgment, while self-compassion involves setting realistic goals and maintaining emotional balance. By acknowledging their limitations and practicing forgiveness toward themselves, parents can avoid burnout and foster a more sustainable caregiving approach.

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3. **Challenges as Growth Opportunities:** The journey of raising an autistic child is full of ups and downs. However, as *The Art of Happiness* teaches, challenges are not just obstacles—they are opportunities for growth. Parents are encouraged to adopt a mindset that embraces challenges as moments for learning and personal development. Keeping a journal to reflect on personal growth, emotional resilience, and insights gained during tough moments can help parents see their own progress over time.
  4. **Family Bonds:** While much attention is given to the parent-child relationship, the role of siblings and extended family members is equally important. Building strong family bonds helps create a supportive network that benefits both the child with autism and the rest of the family. Open communication, shared caregiving responsibilities, and family involvement are key in ensuring a harmonious household where every family member feels valued and supported.
  5. **Mindfulness:** Parenting a child with autism often requires being fully present in the moment, especially when dealing with unpredictable situations. Mindfulness practices can help parents stay grounded and calm, improving their ability to respond rather than react to challenges. Simple exercises like mindful breathing or grounding techniques can be beneficial for both parents and children, creating moments of peace amidst daily chaos.
  6. **Progress and Milestones:** Autism often means that traditional developmental milestones don't apply in the same way. Parents may find themselves comparing their child to neurotypical peers, leading to frustration or sadness. However, reframing expectations and celebrating small victories—whether it's mastering a new skill or managing a sensory overload situation—helps shift the focus from what is lacking to what is achieved. Every step forward is progress, no matter how small.
  7. **Gratitude and Simplicity:** The Dalai Lama teaches that happiness often lies in simplicity. For parents of autistic children, simplifying routines and focusing on the essentials can reduce stress for both the child and the family. Establishing structured environments, minimizing unnecessary distractions, and practicing gratitude for the little things can help create a sense of calm and contentment.
  8. **Resilience:** Emotional resilience is a key factor in navigating the unpredictability of raising a child with autism. Parents need to model calmness and patience, as their emotional responses directly influence their child's behavior and emotional well-being. Introducing visual aids, emotional regulation tools, and sensory activities can help children develop resilience and coping mechanisms, making daily life more manageable.

This article will explore these themes in depth, providing new parents with actionable strategies to apply the wisdom of *The Art of Happiness* to their lives. Through these practices, parents can cultivate a nurturing and happy environment for both themselves and their children, embracing the journey of parenting with love, patience, and compassion.



## Section 1: Redefining Happiness as a Parent of an Autistic Child

Parenting an autistic child brings with it a profound emotional journey that often reshapes conventional notions of success, development, and happiness. For new parents, the initial autism diagnosis can feel overwhelming and lead to feelings of fear, confusion, or loss. It's common to grieve the future they had envisioned for their child, as they grapple with what the diagnosis might mean for their family's life. However, as *The Art of Happiness* emphasizes, true happiness is an internal state, not dependent on external circumstances or outcomes. The challenge for parents is to redefine happiness in this new context, finding joy in the present moment and shifting away from societal expectations.

### Happiness as an Internal State

The Dalai Lama teaches that happiness is cultivated from within. It is a state of mind that can be achieved regardless of external events, through compassion, mindfulness, and perspective. For parents of an autistic child, this concept can serve as a foundation for emotional resilience. It encourages them to look beyond developmental comparisons and

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instead celebrate their child's unique journey.

The autism diagnosis may mean letting go of certain expectations—whether that be hitting milestones in the same way as neurotypical children or conforming to societal norms. But this does not mean that happiness and fulfillment are out of reach. In fact, by accepting and embracing their child's uniqueness, parents can experience deep joy and contentment in watching their child develop at their own pace. The ability to find meaning and satisfaction in the present is a core teaching of Buddhist philosophy and is essential in transforming the parenting experience.

### Emotional Adjustment Period

Coming to terms with an autism diagnosis requires a significant emotional adjustment. It is natural for parents to experience a range of emotions—from denial and frustration to acceptance and hope. Acknowledging this emotional journey is vital. It's not a process that happens overnight, and it's important for parents to give themselves the time and space to grieve their old expectations while opening up to a new, unexpected path.

Many parents initially feel pressure from societal norms, comparing their child's progress to other children's. This comparison can lead to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. But as parents learn to redefine happiness, they begin to appreciate the beauty in their child's small but significant accomplishments—whether it's learning a new word, making eye contact, or showing affection in their unique way. Each of these moments becomes a source of joy and pride, replacing traditional markers of success with a more personal and meaningful understanding of progress.

### Actionable Tip: Daily Affirmations to Celebrate Small Victories

One practical way parents can begin to shift their mindset is by incorporating daily affirmations into their routine. These affirmations help reinforce a positive, accepting attitude toward their child's development and nurture a sense of gratitude and celebration for every small victory.

Here's how parents can engage in this practice:

1. **Set aside a quiet moment each day:** This could be in the morning or at night before bed. Choose a time when you can reflect without distractions.
2. **Reflect on the day's progress:** Think about any small steps forward your child has made, no matter how minor they may seem. Did your child try a new food? Did



they attempt to communicate in a new way? Celebrate these moments.

3. **Speak or write a positive affirmation:** This could be something as simple as, "I am proud of my child for the progress they made today," or "My child's journey is unique and I embrace every step forward." Over time, these affirmations help reshape traditional views of success, turning small victories into meaningful achievements.
4. **Involve your partner or support network:** Share these affirmations with your partner or a trusted loved one. Acknowledging these wins together strengthens family bonds and builds a positive, supportive environment.

By engaging in daily affirmations, parents can steadily shift their focus from what their child might not be doing to what they *are* doing, creating a more joyful, supportive parenting experience. This approach helps parents redefine their understanding of happiness, aligning it with their child's individual path.

### Key Takeaways:

- Happiness is not dependent on hitting conventional milestones but on embracing the present and celebrating small victories.
- The emotional adjustment period is an important part of accepting an autism diagnosis. Parents should give themselves time and space to grieve and adjust.
- Daily affirmations can help parents focus on their child's progress, reinforcing a sense of joy and accomplishment in their unique development.

By redefining happiness in this way, parents of autistic children can find peace, joy, and fulfillment in their parenting journey, while also nurturing their emotional resilience.



## Section 2: Compassion for Your Child and Yourself

Compassion is one of the most powerful tools a parent can cultivate, especially when raising a child with autism. Compassion goes beyond kindness; it is about deeply understanding your child's needs and limitations, while offering unconditional love and patience. But equally important is extending that compassion toward yourself. Parenting a child with autism can be an emotionally and physically demanding journey, often filled with uncertainty, stress, and frustration. Without self-compassion, parents risk burning out, feeling inadequate, or succumbing to guilt.

As *The Art of Happiness* teaches, compassion is not just for others—it is essential for one's own well-being. Parents need to understand that while their love and care for



their child is boundless, their own resources—emotional, physical, and mental—are not. Balancing compassion for your child with compassion for yourself is the key to fostering both a healthy relationship and maintaining personal well-being.

## Parenting with Compassion

Compassion for your child begins with the recognition that their needs, behaviors, and way of communicating may differ significantly from other children. Autism manifests in diverse ways, and every child's experience is unique. As a parent, your compassion involves the willingness to meet your child where they are, without judgment or frustration.

Understanding their sensory sensitivities, difficulty with verbal or non-verbal communication, and the routines they rely on can help you build a nurturing environment. When your child has a meltdown or struggles to communicate, compassion allows you to pause and consider the underlying reasons for their behavior, rather than responding with frustration.

Compassionate parenting is about recognizing that behaviors often labeled as "challenging" or "difficult" are, for your child, forms of coping or communicating in a world that can feel overwhelming. By viewing their actions through a compassionate lens, you help to reduce both their stress and yours, making it easier to create a more positive, supportive dynamic.

## Self-Compassion

While practicing compassion for your child, it's essential not to neglect yourself. The demands of parenting an autistic child are intense, and it is easy to fall into patterns of self-criticism or guilt when things don't go as planned. Many parents place unrealistic expectations on themselves, believing they must be perfect or that they are somehow failing if their child faces difficulties.

Self-compassion is the antidote to these feelings. It requires you to recognize that parenting is inherently complex, and raising a child with autism adds layers of unpredictability and challenges that cannot be controlled. By allowing yourself to accept that mistakes will happen and perfection is unattainable, you release yourself from the burden of guilt.

Instead of constantly striving to "fix" everything, embrace the imperfections of the journey. This includes recognizing your limits, asking for help when needed, and

understanding that prioritizing your own emotional and physical health is not selfish—it's necessary. When you care for yourself, you are better equipped to care for your child.

## Setting Realistic Goals and Boundaries

Another crucial aspect of self-compassion is setting realistic goals and boundaries. Parenting a child with autism often requires a reevaluation of what "success" looks like in both your child's life and your own. Unrealistic goals—whether for therapy, behavioral progress, or your own daily tasks—can lead to exhaustion and disappointment.

By setting realistic goals, you allow yourself and your child to experience progress at a comfortable pace, reducing the pressure on both of you. This might mean celebrating small wins, like your child successfully using a new communication tool or completing a daily routine independently. It also means acknowledging that not every day will be perfect, and that setbacks are a natural part of growth.

Boundaries are equally important in maintaining emotional balance. It's easy to lose yourself in the role of caregiver, but it's vital to create space for yourself as an individual. This might mean setting limits on the time you spend managing therapies or tasks, or allowing yourself breaks when feeling overwhelmed. Clear boundaries ensure that you are preserving your mental and emotional energy, which benefits both you and your child.

## Actionable Tip: Develop a Weekly Self-Care Routine

Self-compassion should be practiced not only in your thoughts but also in your actions. One practical way to incorporate self-compassion into your life is to develop a regular self-care routine. While it may seem difficult to carve out time for yourself, especially when managing a busy family schedule, even small pockets of time dedicated to self-care can make a profound difference in your emotional and mental health.

Here are steps to help you establish a self-care routine:

1. **Start Small:** Self-care doesn't have to be elaborate. It could be as simple as 10 minutes of deep breathing, a short walk, or reading a chapter from a book you enjoy.
2. **Schedule It:** Like any important task, self-care should be planned. Choose a time in the week—whether early in the morning or during your child's downtime—when you can regularly engage in an activity that helps you relax and recharge.

3. **Try Different Activities:** Find activities that truly help you unwind. This could range from mindfulness exercises, meditation, a hobby like gardening, journaling, or even listening to your favorite music. The key is to focus on something that makes you feel good and centered.
4. **Involve a Support System:** Don't be afraid to ask your partner, family, or friends to help you carve out this time. Let them know that a small break helps you be a better caregiver, and work together to create opportunities for you to have that time.
5. **Commit to Consistency:** Self-care only works if it becomes a habit. Make this time non-negotiable, and remind yourself that it is not indulgent—it's necessary for your overall well-being.

### Key Takeaways:

- Compassion for your child means recognizing their unique needs and responding with patience and love.
- Self-compassion is vital for avoiding guilt and burnout. Allow yourself to be imperfect and embrace the reality that parenting, especially when autism is involved, is a learning process.
- Setting realistic goals and clear boundaries helps preserve emotional balance, ensuring that both you and your child can thrive.
- A regular self-care routine, no matter how small, is essential in maintaining your emotional health and resilience.

Practicing compassion for both your child and yourself creates a nurturing and emotionally balanced environment, allowing you to parent with a fuller heart and clearer mind.



### Section 3: Embracing Challenges as Growth Opportunities

Raising a child with autism is undoubtedly filled with challenges—whether it's dealing with communication difficulties, managing meltdowns, or navigating the often-overwhelming world of therapies and education plans. These challenges can feel relentless and exhausting, leaving parents wondering if they are doing enough or handling the situation well. However, one of the core teachings from *The Art of Happiness* is that suffering and difficulties are an inevitable part of life, but they also hold the potential for immense personal growth.

For parents, this shift in perspective is powerful: rather than viewing each struggle as a setback or source of frustration, it becomes an opportunity for deepening their understanding of unconditional love, patience, and resilience. Every challenge offers a chance to learn, grow, and connect with their child in ways that may not have been possible under easier circumstances. Embracing these challenges with an open heart can lead to profound emotional growth and a stronger sense of purpose in parenting.

#### Finding Meaning in Difficulties

The Dalai Lama teaches that suffering is an inherent part of the human experience. It is something that we cannot avoid, but we can choose how to respond to it. For parents of

autistic children, this suffering often takes the form of emotional strain, uncertainty, and physical exhaustion. Yet, it is within these very difficulties that parents can find meaning and growth.

Rather than resisting the challenges that arise, parents are encouraged to lean into them. This doesn't mean accepting every hardship passively, but rather seeing each struggle as an opportunity to build resilience and strengthen the bond with their child. For example, a difficult moment, such as a public meltdown, may initially feel overwhelming and frustrating, but it can also be a moment where a parent learns to better understand their child's triggers and coping mechanisms. Over time, these moments of insight help create a more compassionate and effective parenting approach.

When parents learn to embrace difficulties as part of their journey, they develop a deeper sense of empathy for their child and for themselves. Rather than seeing challenges as obstacles to be avoided, they become stepping stones toward greater understanding, patience, and love.

## Leaning Into Challenges for Growth

Leaning into challenges means fully acknowledging and accepting that difficulties are part of the parenting experience. It's easy to wish for things to be easier, or to hope that certain behaviors or struggles will disappear. However, growth happens when parents allow themselves to sit with these moments of discomfort, observing what they teach about themselves, their child, and the world around them.

One of the greatest lessons parents learn through this process is the depth of their own resilience. Every time they face a challenge—whether it's navigating a school system that doesn't fully accommodate their child's needs, managing a tantrum, or advocating for services—they are developing their own emotional strength. By leaning into these challenges rather than avoiding them, parents can develop greater patience, problem-solving skills, and a heightened sense of empathy.

Importantly, leaning into challenges also models resilience for the child. When children observe their parents calmly navigating difficult situations, they learn by example how to face their own struggles. Parents who accept challenges with a growth mindset teach their children that difficulties are not something to fear or avoid, but opportunities for learning and personal development.

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## Actionable Tip: Start a Growth Reflection Journal

One powerful way for parents to track and celebrate their growth during challenging times is by keeping a journal dedicated to reflecting on personal development. This practice can help parents shift their perspective on difficult moments and provide a sense of progress even when things feel overwhelming. By consistently recording their experiences, parents can begin to notice patterns of growth and strength, turning what may feel like insurmountable difficulties into meaningful lessons.

Here's how parents can start this journaling practice:

1. **Set a Regular Journaling Time:** Choose a time when you can reflect, whether it's daily or weekly. Find a quiet moment where you can gather your thoughts without distractions.
2. **Reflect on Recent Challenges:** Write down one or two challenges you faced during the day or week. Focus on both the event itself and how you responded to it. This helps create a sense of awareness around your emotional reactions and coping mechanisms.
3. **Highlight Lessons Learned:** For each challenge, reflect on what you learned from it. Did you learn something new about your child's needs or triggers? Did you discover a new strategy that worked better than before? By framing the experience as a learning opportunity, you can reframe difficult moments as valuable growth opportunities.
4. **Practice Gratitude:** End each journal entry by writing down one or two things you are grateful for, even if it's something small. Gratitude shifts your focus away from stress and helps highlight the positive aspects of your journey.
5. **Track Personal Growth Over Time:** Over weeks or months, look back at previous entries to notice patterns in your growth. Are you more patient than you were a few months ago? Have you developed new techniques for managing stress? Acknowledging this progress can reinforce your sense of resilience and boost your confidence as a parent.

This journaling practice not only helps parents see their own growth but also creates a space for processing emotions and relieving stress. It can serve as a reminder that, even in the face of difficulties, growth is constant and valuable.

## Key Takeaways:



- Difficulties are inevitable, but by leaning into them, parents can find growth, resilience, and deeper connections with their child.
- Challenges offer opportunities for learning about their child, about themselves, and about the world around them.
- Embracing difficulties with a growth mindset teaches children resilience and helps parents model how to handle adversity.
- Journaling can be a powerful tool to reflect on personal growth, turning stressful situations into opportunities for reflection, learning, and gratitude.

By embracing challenges as growth opportunities, parents of autistic children can transform their parenting experience from one of frustration to one of continuous learning, empathy, and personal development. Every challenge, no matter how difficult, can be a stepping stone toward greater love, patience, and resilience.

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## Section 4: Building Strong Family Relationships and Support Systems

Raising a child with autism is not a journey that parents have to take alone. The strength of the family unit plays a vital role in providing the love, support, and resilience needed to navigate the challenges of autism together. When the entire family is engaged, understanding, and supportive, it creates a nurturing environment where the child can thrive, and where parents can find emotional balance. Strengthening family bonds through open communication, emotional support, and shared responsibilities is essential to maintaining a healthy, harmonious home.

While parenting an autistic child can be all-encompassing, it is crucial that the emotional needs of the entire family—including siblings—are addressed. Each family member's involvement contributes to a balanced support system that benefits both the child with autism and the family as a whole.

## Strengthening Family Bonds

A child with autism often requires additional attention and support, which can sometimes strain family relationships if not managed carefully. Building strong family bonds involves creating an atmosphere where every member feels heard, valued, and involved. Open communication is at the heart of this effort. Parents must create regular opportunities to talk openly about both the challenges and victories that come with raising a child with autism. This fosters a sense of unity and ensures that no one feels left out of the process.

Sharing responsibilities is another key aspect. Parents should distribute caregiving tasks in a way that doesn't overwhelm one person. This allows for emotional balance and reduces the risk of burnout. Moreover, it gives every family member a sense of participation and contribution, which strengthens relationships and creates a shared sense of accomplishment.

## Including and Educating Siblings

Siblings play a crucial role in supporting a child with autism. However, it's common for them to feel confused or left out if they are not actively included in the caregiving process. By educating siblings about autism and involving them in their brother's or sister's care, parents can help foster a sense of unity and empathy within the family.

Siblings may face unique emotional challenges. They might feel overlooked if much of the parental attention is focused on the autistic child, or they might not fully understand their sibling's behaviors. When siblings are educated about autism in age-appropriate ways, they are more likely to feel compassionate and understanding, rather than frustrated or confused. This not only strengthens the sibling bond but also helps create a more supportive environment for the autistic child.

Involving siblings in caregiving doesn't mean burdening them with responsibilities beyond their age or capacity. Instead, it's about giving them small, meaningful roles such as helping with routines, playing, or simply spending quality time together. These roles help siblings feel involved and contribute to the overall family dynamic, which can

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alleviate any feelings of exclusion or resentment.

### Actionable Tip: Hold Regular Family Meetings

A practical way to strengthen family relationships and ensure that everyone's needs are being met is by holding regular family meetings. These meetings provide a safe space for every family member—parents, the child with autism, and siblings—to voice their thoughts, share their feelings, and celebrate progress together.

Here are steps to help establish successful family meetings:

1. **Set a Regular Time:** Choose a time once a week or bi-weekly when everyone can gather without distractions. Consistency is key to making this a valuable routine.
2. **Encourage Open Communication:** Create an environment where everyone feels safe to express their emotions, concerns, or thoughts. Encourage siblings to share how they're feeling about their role and their relationship with their autistic sibling. Let parents share what they are experiencing, both emotionally and practically.
3. **Celebrate Victories:** Start each meeting by acknowledging positive moments or achievements from the past week. This could be something as small as a good day at school or successful use of a new communication tool. Celebrating small wins reinforces a positive family atmosphere.
4. **Discuss Challenges:** After celebrating victories, transition to discussing any challenges the family faced. This could be a moment where the child with autism had a meltdown or a time when a sibling felt left out. The purpose is to ensure that no one's feelings or concerns are left unaddressed.
5. **Involve Siblings in the Care Process:** Assign small roles to siblings that are appropriate for their age and ability. For example, they might help with preparing the child's sensory-friendly play area or take part in a calming activity with their autistic sibling. Let them know their involvement is valued.
6. **Check on Emotional Well-Being:** Regularly take time to check in on each family member's emotional well-being. Ask how they're feeling about their roles, the support they're getting, and any frustrations they might have. Open dialogue helps prevent issues from building up and promotes mutual understanding.

By holding these family meetings, families can maintain a consistent space for reflection, support, and celebration. It's a way of ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and that the emotional health of each family member is a priority.

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## Building a Broader Support System

In addition to strengthening family bonds, parents should actively build external support systems. This includes reaching out to extended family, close friends, or even local autism support groups. External support can provide invaluable emotional relief for parents and siblings alike.

Creating a network of trusted individuals who understand the family's situation allows parents to take needed breaks and offers siblings additional avenues of support. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, or friends who take time to engage with both the child and their siblings help reduce feelings of isolation within the family. Support groups, both in-person and online, offer parents a community of individuals who share similar experiences, providing a safe space for sharing advice and encouragement.

### Key Takeaways:

- Strong family bonds are essential in raising a child with autism, and open communication, emotional support, and shared responsibilities help make the journey smoother.
- Including and educating siblings fosters unity, empathy, and a stronger support system within the family. Age-appropriate involvement in caregiving can help siblings feel valued and included.
- Regular family meetings offer a space for open communication, reflection, and emotional support, helping to ensure that the needs of every family member are addressed.
- Building a broader support system, including extended family and autism support groups, can provide emotional relief and reduce the isolation that often accompanies autism caregiving.

By focusing on the strength of the family unit and actively involving all members, parents can create a nurturing, emotionally balanced environment that supports not only the child with autism but the entire family.



## Section 5: The Role of Mindfulness in Parenting

Mindfulness, the practice of being fully present in the moment, has long been recognized as a powerful tool for reducing stress and increasing emotional well-being. For parents of children with autism, mindfulness becomes even more crucial due to the unpredictable nature of daily challenges, whether it's dealing with sensory sensitivities, meltdowns, or navigating complex routines. By cultivating mindfulness, parents can remain calm, centered, and engaged, even during difficult moments. This helps not only in managing stress but also in fostering deeper emotional connections with their child.

Being fully present enables parents to respond with compassion and clarity rather than reacting impulsively to stressful situations. For children with autism, who may struggle with emotional regulation or unexpected changes, a calm and mindful parent offers stability and reassurance, creating a more peaceful environment for growth.

### Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about intentionally paying attention to the present moment, without judgment. It involves focusing on what is happening right now, rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past. For parents of children with autism, this approach is especially beneficial, as it shifts focus away from potential anxieties (such as upcoming appointments or behavior challenges) and toward what can be addressed in the here and



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now.

Practicing mindfulness can help parents handle stressful situations more effectively. Whether it's during a meltdown or when juggling the many responsibilities of caring for an autistic child, mindfulness provides a moment of pause that allows for more thoughtful and calm responses. This pause is invaluable in preventing emotional burnout and enhancing the overall quality of the parenting experience.

## Sharing Mindfulness with Your Child

Mindfulness is not only a tool for parents but also something that can be shared with the child. Children with autism often face challenges with emotional regulation, and mindfulness practices can help them develop self-soothing techniques and build greater awareness of their emotions. By introducing mindfulness exercises that are simple and approachable, parents can help their children cultivate a sense of calm and emotional stability.

Some mindfulness practices that can benefit both parents and children include:

- **Mindful Breathing:** This simple exercise involves paying attention to the breath, which helps calm the nervous system and promotes relaxation. Parents and children can practice this together during moments of stress. For example, when a meltdown is brewing, parents can guide their child through deep breaths, counting each breath in and out, to help reduce anxiety.
- **Grounding Techniques:** Grounding exercises focus on the present moment by using the five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell). When a child feels overwhelmed, parents can guide them through a grounding exercise, such as naming five things they can see, four things they can hear, three things they can touch, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste. This technique can also help parents stay centered during challenging times.
- **Body Scans:** A body scan involves paying attention to each part of the body, from head to toe, noticing any sensations without judgment. This helps children become more aware of their physical state and can help with relaxation, especially before bedtime.

By practicing these mindfulness techniques together, parents and children can create moments of calm connection. These shared practices not only help soothe the child during stressful situations but also provide parents with tools to regulate their own emotions.

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## Actionable Tip: Mindfulness During Overwhelm

One of the most practical ways to incorporate mindfulness into parenting is by using it as a tool whenever feelings of overwhelm arise. For parents of children with autism, feelings of stress and frustration can build quickly, especially during unpredictable or difficult moments. Having a simple mindful activity on hand can make all the difference in de-escalating these emotions.

Here is an easy mindful activity that parents can use to calm themselves and, when appropriate, involve their child:

### 1. Deep Breathing Exercise:

- When you feel overwhelmed, stop whatever you're doing and take a few slow, deep breaths. Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of six. Repeat this for several breaths until you feel more grounded.
- If your child is experiencing a meltdown or sensory overload, you can guide them through the same breathing exercise. Encourage them to focus on their breath, counting out loud if it helps them stay engaged. This practice not only calms the body but also creates a moment of connection between parent and child.

### 2. Sensory Mindfulness Walk:

- If you and your child are both feeling overwhelmed, take a short walk together, paying attention to the sights, sounds, and sensations around you. For example, notice how the air feels on your skin, listen to the sounds of nature or the city, or observe different colors in your surroundings. This simple sensory engagement helps ground both you and your child, offering a break from the intensity of emotions.

### 3. Five-Finger Breathing:

- This is a tactile breathing exercise that can be shared with children. Have your child hold out their hand with fingers spread wide. As they trace the outline of each finger with the index finger of the other hand, they should breathe in as they move up the side of a finger and breathe out as they move down the other side. Repeat for each finger. This combines mindful breathing with a physical,

calming action that can help a child feel more in control during moments of stress.

## Incorporating Mindfulness into Daily Routines

Mindfulness doesn't have to be limited to moments of overwhelm. It can be woven into the fabric of daily routines, creating a more peaceful and centered household. Here are some simple ways to incorporate mindfulness into everyday life:

- **Morning Mindfulness:** Start the day with a brief mindful moment. Whether it's a minute of deep breathing or a moment of gratitude, this helps set a calm tone for the day ahead.
- **Mindful Eating:** During meals, practice mindful eating by paying attention to the flavors, textures, and smells of the food. Encourage your child to take slow, thoughtful bites, focusing on the experience of eating. This practice can reduce stress around mealtimes and encourage a more relaxed atmosphere.
- **Mindful Transitions:** Transitions, such as moving from playtime to bedtime or from home to school, can be stressful for children with autism. Incorporate a short mindfulness practice, like deep breathing or a grounding exercise, during these transitions to ease anxiety and help your child feel more settled.

## Key Takeaways:

- Mindfulness helps parents remain calm and present, especially when faced with the unpredictable challenges of raising a child with autism.
- Sharing mindfulness practices with your child can create moments of calm and help them develop emotional regulation skills.
- Simple mindful activities, such as deep breathing or sensory grounding techniques, can be used to reduce stress during overwhelming moments.
- Incorporating mindfulness into daily routines helps create a more peaceful, centered household, benefiting both parents and children.

By practicing mindfulness, parents not only equip themselves with tools for managing stress but also create opportunities to model emotional regulation for their child. Mindfulness becomes a shared journey, fostering calm, connection, and resilience in the face of life's challenges.



## Section 6: Reframing Expectations and Celebrating Progress

One of the most challenging aspects for parents of children with autism is managing expectations about their child's development. It's common for parents to feel an emotional burden when their child's progress doesn't align with neurotypical developmental milestones. However, by reframing these expectations and celebrating each child's unique journey, parents can foster a more positive, nurturing environment for both themselves and their child. Rather than focusing on what society deems as "normal" or "successful," parents can shift their perspective to appreciate and celebrate the progress their child is making on their own terms.

### Letting Go of Comparisons

It is natural for parents to compare their child's achievements to those of other children, especially in environments where developmental milestones are often discussed—whether that's on social media, in schools, or within extended families. However, children with autism often develop at their own pace, and comparing their progress to that of neurotypical peers can lead to unnecessary frustration, sadness, or anxiety. Instead of viewing these differences as deficits, parents can reframe their approach to focus on their child's unique strengths and personal growth.

Letting go of comparisons requires parents to redefine what success looks like. Rather than focusing on external benchmarks, parents can create an individualized framework that honors their child's progress no matter how small it may seem in the eyes of the world. Shifting the focus from what a child should be doing to what they *are* doing can open the door to finding joy and pride in each small step forward.

Parents must remember that developmental timelines are not linear, especially for children on the autism spectrum. Celebrating incremental progress fosters a mindset of positivity and resilience, helping both parents and children feel more empowered in their unique journey.

## Reframing Success

To support emotional well-being, it's crucial for parents to reframe traditional ideas of success and achievement. Success does not need to be measured by academic scores, social milestones, or external validation. Instead, success can be seen in the moments of growth that are meaningful to the child's individual development. This could be something as simple as successfully engaging in a sensory-friendly activity, showing signs of communication, or becoming more independent in daily routines.

By reframing success, parents create space for gratitude and positivity in their daily lives. They can release themselves from the societal pressures of 'keeping up' with others, allowing room for personal reflection and deeper connection with their child.

## Actionable Tip: Maintaining a 'Success Journal'

One powerful way to implement this shift in perspective is by creating and maintaining a 'Success Journal'. This journal serves as a dedicated space where parents can document their child's progress, no matter how big or small the steps may be. By recording these moments, parents can reflect on the growth their child is experiencing and celebrate milestones that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Here's how to start and maintain a Success Journal:

- Create a Special Journal:** Choose a journal that feels personal and inviting. You can use a simple notebook, or you can make it more creative by adding photos or drawings of your child's achievements.
- Document Progress Daily or Weekly:** Set aside time each day or week to record your child's small victories. For example, did they successfully transition between

activities? Did they use a new word, or show progress in using a communication device? Did they make eye contact or try a new food? No achievement is too small to note.

3. **Involve the Whole Family:** The Success Journal can be a family-wide effort. Encourage siblings or even extended family members to contribute by writing notes of encouragement or adding observations about the child's progress. This helps foster a sense of shared celebration and support.
4. **Reflect on Progress Over Time:** Periodically, take time to read through the entries in the Success Journal. This reflection can be incredibly uplifting, especially during challenging times. Seeing how much progress has been made, even over the course of months or years, provides a tangible reminder of your child's growth and resilience.
5. **Celebrate Victories Together:** Don't let the victories stay on paper—celebrate them as a family! Whether it's having a special meal, sharing an encouraging word, or simply acknowledging the success during family conversations, these celebrations help reinforce the idea that progress is valued and appreciated.

## Why This Matters

Maintaining a Success Journal not only helps parents reframe what success looks like, but it also fosters a sense of gratitude and mindfulness. By focusing on the progress their child is making, rather than the challenges they face, parents can shift their emotional landscape from one of anxiety and comparison to one of joy and appreciation. The process of writing down these moments of success helps parents stay connected to the present, offering an antidote to the future-focused worries that can often cloud their judgment.

Moreover, the Success Journal can serve as a motivational tool during difficult times. When progress feels slow or setbacks occur, looking back on the accumulated victories helps provide perspective and strength. It's a reminder that progress, even when small, is still meaningful.

This practice also has the added benefit of creating a positive family culture. When the entire family—parents, siblings, and extended members—contribute to celebrating the child's victories, it fosters an atmosphere of acceptance and shared love. This supportive environment plays a critical role in the child's emotional development and sense of belonging.

## Key Takeaways:



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- Parents of autistic children should move away from comparing their child's progress to neurotypical peers and instead focus on their child's unique path and growth.
  - Reframing traditional ideas of success allows parents to find joy in small victories, helping to maintain emotional balance and positivity.
  - A "Success Journal" is a practical tool for documenting and celebrating small achievements, fostering gratitude and resilience in both parents and children.
  - Celebrating progress as a family creates a nurturing environment where the child feels supported, and parents feel empowered by their child's journey.

By letting go of societal comparisons and focusing on individual progress, parents can cultivate a deeper sense of happiness, pride, and connection in their parenting journey. Small victories, when acknowledged and celebrated, become the building blocks of resilience and joy for both the child and the family.



## Section 7: Gratitude and Simplicity in Parenting

In the demanding journey of parenting a child with autism, focusing on gratitude and simplicity can create profound positive changes. By cultivating a mindset of gratitude, parents can enhance their overall well-being and find joy in everyday moments. Simplicity in daily routines not only reduces stress but also provides a sense of structure and security for both parents and children. Together, these practices foster a nurturing environment where both the child and the family can thrive.

### Gratitude in Everyday Moments

Gratitude is more than just a feeling; it's a powerful practice that can shift focus from stress and challenges to appreciation and joy. When parents adopt a mindset of gratitude, they can better appreciate the small, positive moments that occur throughout the day, even amidst the difficulties. This shift in perspective helps parents find calm and contentment, allowing them to connect more deeply with their child and enjoy the present moment.

Incorporating gratitude into daily life involves recognizing and valuing the positive aspects of parenting and your child's unique qualities. This practice helps balance out the stress and challenges by highlighting the joyful and rewarding experiences that come with raising a child with autism.

## Simplicity and Routine

Simplicity in daily routines plays a critical role in reducing stress and creating a manageable lifestyle for both parents and children. For children with autism, who may thrive on predictability and structure, a simplified and consistent routine can provide a sense of security and stability. Predictable routines help minimize anxiety by offering a clear framework for daily activities and transitions.

By creating a structured environment, parents can reduce the number of surprises and disruptions that might lead to stress or behavioral challenges. Simple, consistent routines help the child understand what to expect and make transitions smoother, ultimately contributing to a more peaceful home environment.

## Creating a Calm, Structured Environment

A calm, structured environment is essential for the emotional and behavioral well-being of a child with autism. Consistent routines and a predictable schedule help the child feel more secure and less overwhelmed. This structure can be particularly beneficial during transitions between activities or when introducing new experiences.

Here's how to create and maintain a structured environment:

- **Establish Daily Routines:** Set clear, consistent routines for daily activities such as meals, schoolwork, playtime, and bedtime. Use visual schedules or charts to help the child understand and follow these routines. Visual aids can also assist with transitions between activities, providing a sense of predictability.

- **Create a Calm Space:** Designate a quiet, soothing area in the home where the child can retreat when feeling overwhelmed. This space should be free from distractions and equipped with calming sensory tools or activities that help the child relax.
- **Simplify Choices:** Reduce decision-making stress by offering limited choices. For example, if the child is choosing between activities or snacks, present only a few options at a time. This approach helps minimize anxiety and makes decision-making more manageable.
- **Consistency in Rules and Expectations:** Maintain consistent rules and expectations across different settings (home, school, and social environments). Consistency helps the child understand boundaries and expectations, contributing to a more stable emotional environment.

### Actionable Tip: Gratitude Practice

Incorporating a gratitude practice into your daily routine can enhance your overall emotional well-being and strengthen your bond with your child. This practice can be as simple as starting or ending the day by reflecting on positive aspects of your parenting experience.

Here are steps to implement a daily gratitude practice:

#### 1. Morning Gratitude:

- Start the day with a moment of reflection. Before beginning your daily activities, take a few minutes to think about or write down three things you appreciate about your child or moments from the previous day that brought you joy. This could include small milestones, pleasant interactions, or simply qualities you value in your child.

#### 2. Evening Reflection:

- At the end of the day, revisit your gratitude practice. Reflect on three positive moments or achievements from the day, no matter how small. Share these reflections with your child, if appropriate, or keep them in a journal. This practice helps end the day on a positive note and reinforces a focus on the good moments.

#### 3. Gratitude Jar:

- Create a Gratitude Jar where family members can write down and add notes about things they are grateful for throughout the week. Read and discuss these notes during family gatherings or special occasions to celebrate the positive aspects of your life together.

#### 4. Gratitude Rituals:

- Develop small gratitude rituals that can be integrated into daily routines. For instance, during mealtimes, each family member can share something they are thankful for before starting the meal. This practice helps cultivate a culture of appreciation within the family.

#### Key Takeaways:

- Adopting a mindset of gratitude helps parents find joy in everyday moments, enhancing overall well-being and emotional balance.
- Simplifying daily routines reduces stress and provides structure, which is particularly beneficial for children with autism.
- Creating a calm, structured environment helps children feel secure and manage transitions more smoothly.
- Daily gratitude practices, such as morning reflections and evening reflections, strengthen family bonds and cultivate a positive outlook.

By integrating gratitude and simplicity into daily parenting practices, parents can foster a more peaceful, supportive environment. These practices not only benefit the child but also contribute to the emotional health and satisfaction of the entire family. Embracing gratitude and simplicity helps create a nurturing atmosphere where both parents and children can thrive.



## Section 8: Fostering Resilience and Independence in Your Child

Fostering resilience and independence in a child with autism involves nurturing their ability to handle challenges, adapt to changes, and develop problem-solving skills. According to *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama, inner strength is key to enduring hardships and overcoming adversity. For children with autism, building this resilience starts with modeling calmness and patience, providing tools for emotional regulation, and encouraging independence through structured, supportive strategies. By integrating these practices into daily life, parents can help their child develop the confidence and skills necessary to navigate their unique challenges effectively.

### Building Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and adapt to challenging situations. For children with autism, this resilience is crucial, as they often face situations that can be overwhelming or confusing. Parents play a significant role in teaching resilience by demonstrating calmness and patience in their own emotional responses. When parents model these behaviors, they provide a template for their child to learn how to handle stress and frustration.



Resilience-building begins with creating an environment where the child feels safe and supported. Children who feel secure are more likely to develop the inner strength needed to face difficulties. Parents can also encourage resilience by giving their child opportunities to confront manageable challenges and learn from them.

## Tools for Teaching Emotional Regulation

Teaching emotional regulation involves helping the child understand and manage their emotions in a healthy way. For children with autism, visual aids and sensory activities can be particularly effective in supporting this learning process. These tools can make abstract concepts like emotions and coping strategies more concrete and accessible.

### Visual Aids:

- **Emotion Cards:** Create or purchase cards that depict different emotions (e.g., happy, sad, angry, anxious). Use these cards to help your child identify and label their feelings. Regularly discuss various emotions and scenarios where these feelings might occur.
- **Stress Scales:** Develop a visual stress scale or thermometer that illustrates different levels of stress or anxiety. This tool helps the child recognize their emotional state and understand when they may need to use coping strategies.

### Sensory Activities:

- **Calming Sensory Tools:** Provide sensory tools such as fidget toys, stress balls, or calming jars. These items can help the child manage their emotions and reduce stress.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Introduce activities like deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided imagery. These techniques can be integrated into daily routines to help the child self-soothe during stressful moments.

## Encouraging Independence Through Small Challenges

Encouraging independence involves giving the child opportunities to tackle small challenges and solve problems on their own. This helps build their confidence and problem-solving skills, which are essential for long-term resilience.

### Incorporating Small Challenges:

- **Daily Routines:** Integrate manageable challenges into daily routines. For instance, involve your child in simple chores or tasks, such as setting the table or organizing their toys. Gradually increase the complexity of these tasks as they become more comfortable and capable.
- **Problem-Solving Opportunities:** Present age-appropriate problems for your child to solve, such as figuring out how to fix a toy or decide what to wear for the day. Offer guidance and support, but allow them to take the lead in finding solutions.

### **Building Problem-Solving Abilities:**

- **Decision-Making Skills:** Offer choices and encourage your child to make decisions. Start with simple options and gradually introduce more complex choices. This practice helps them learn to evaluate options and make decisions independently.
- **Encourage Perseverance:** Praise efforts and perseverance, not just outcomes. Recognize and celebrate when your child persists through challenges or tries different strategies to solve a problem.

### **Actionable Tip: Using Visual Cues and Integrating Challenges**

To effectively integrate the tools and strategies mentioned, consider these actionable steps:

#### **1. Create a Visual Emotion Chart:**

- Design or purchase an emotion chart with images and labels for different feelings. Place it in a visible location where your child can easily refer to it. Use it during conversations about their feelings or when discussing specific situations.

#### **2. Introduce a Stress Scale:**

- Develop a simple stress scale or thermometer that your child can use to rate their level of stress. Use it during moments of tension to help them identify their feelings and choose appropriate coping strategies.

#### **3. Implement a Daily Challenge Routine:**

- Incorporate a daily or weekly routine where your child faces a small, manageable challenge. This could be a new task, a problem to solve, or a choice to make. Offer encouragement and celebrate their efforts to foster confidence and independence.

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#### 4. Utilize Sensory Activities:

- Set aside time each day for sensory activities that help with emotional regulation. Create a sensory toolkit with items like stress balls or calming jars and encourage your child to use them when needed.

#### 5. Practice Decision-Making:

- During daily activities, provide opportunities for your child to make decisions. For example, let them choose between two snack options or decide which book to read at bedtime. Support their choices and discuss the outcomes to reinforce decision-making skills.

#### Key Takeaways:

- Modeling calmness and patience helps children with autism develop emotional resilience and coping skills.
- Visual aids and sensory activities are effective tools for teaching emotional regulation and helping children manage stress.
- Encouraging independence through small challenges and problem-solving opportunities builds confidence and problem-solving abilities.
- Integrating visual cues and sensory activities into daily routines supports emotional regulation and fosters resilience.

By fostering resilience and independence, parents help their child build the skills necessary to handle life's challenges and thrive. These practices not only support the child's growth but also contribute to a more harmonious and empowered family dynamic.



## Conclusion: Embracing the Journey with Love and Patience

Raising a child with autism is indeed a profound journey, marked by unique challenges, transformative growth, and deep, unconditional love. As parents navigate this path, the insights from *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama offer valuable guidance. Embracing these principles can profoundly impact how parents approach their role, fostering a nurturing environment that supports both their well-being and their child's development.

### Final Thoughts:

Parenting an autistic child presents its own set of joys and difficulties. It requires patience, resilience, and a deep reservoir of compassion. By adopting the principles of happiness highlighted by the Dalai Lama—such as focusing on internal states of joy, practicing self-compassion, embracing challenges as growth opportunities, and maintaining gratitude and simplicity—parents can create a loving and supportive environment that benefits everyone in the family.

Recognizing that happiness and success come in many forms allows parents to find joy in the everyday moments, celebrate progress in its own right, and build resilience in both themselves and their child. The journey, while demanding, is also filled with opportunities for growth, connection, and profound personal fulfillment.

The [MEDA Foundation](#) is dedicated to empowering autistic individuals and their families by creating self-sustaining ecosystems that promote happiness, self-sufficiency, and resource accessibility. Your support plays a crucial role in continuing our mission to make a positive impact in the lives of those we serve.

We invite you to contribute to our cause through donations and participation. Your generosity helps us provide essential resources, create employment opportunities, and foster environments that enable individuals to thrive. Visit [MEDA Foundation](#) to learn more about how you can get involved and make a difference.

## Book Reading References

### 1. The Art of Happiness

*Authors:* Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler

*Description:* This seminal work explores the concept of happiness from a Buddhist perspective, emphasizing the importance of inner peace and compassion. It offers practical advice for overcoming difficulties and achieving a lasting sense of joy and contentment.

### 2. The Art of Happiness at Work

*Authors:* Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler

*Description:* An extension of the original book, this volume focuses on finding happiness and fulfillment in one's professional life. It provides insights into balancing work pressures with personal satisfaction and offers strategies for cultivating a positive work environment.

### 3. The Dalai Lama's Book of Wisdom

*Authors:* Dalai Lama

*Description:* This collection of teachings and reflections from the Dalai Lama offers practical advice on living a life of compassion and wisdom. It provides valuable insights into maintaining inner peace and resilience in the face of life's challenges.

### 4. The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World

*Authors:* Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu

*Description:* Co-authored by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, this book explores the nature of joy and how it can be cultivated even amidst adversity. It

blends personal anecdotes with profound wisdom to offer practical guidance on achieving lasting happiness.

#### 5. **Raising a Sensory Smart Child**

*Authors:* Lindsey Biel and Nancy Peske

*Description:* This book provides practical strategies and insights for parents of children with sensory processing issues, which can be especially relevant for those raising autistic children. It offers actionable advice on managing sensory challenges and supporting your child's development.

#### 6. **The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind**

*Authors:* Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

*Description:* This book offers neuroscience-based strategies for understanding and guiding your child's emotional and cognitive development. It provides practical tools for fostering resilience, emotional regulation, and effective parenting.

#### 7. **Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity**

*Author:* Steve Silberman

*Description:* An in-depth exploration of the history and future of autism, this book provides valuable context for understanding autism spectrum disorders and promoting a more inclusive approach to neurodiversity.

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1. Autism Parenting
2. Autism Parenting
3. Parenting Advice

### POST TAG

1. #autismparenting
2. #AutisticChild
3. #BuildingResilience
4. #CelebratingProgress
5. #CompassionateParenting
6. #DailyRoutines
7. #EmotionalRegulation
8. #EmotionalResilience
9. #FamilySupport

10. #Gratitude
11. #Happiness
12. #Independence
13. #MEDA
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15. #Mindfulness
16. #Neurodiversity
17. #ParentingChallenges
18. #ParentingWisdom
19. #SelfCompassion
20. #SensoryActivities
21. #Simplicity
22. #SupportAutism
23. #VisualAids

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amitmeda

*MEDA Foundation*