

Autism Parenting Magazine

Issue 153



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Are either or both of these strategies harmful to children on the spectrum? Read on to find out

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Autism and the Father Factor

By Angela WEST, MS, BCBA, LBA

WHILE THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES ON THE FATHER'S ROLE, IT'S PARAMOUNT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IN ANY FAMILY, REGARDLESS OF ITS COMPOSITION, EACH PARENT OR CAREGIVER PLAYS A DISTINCT AND MEANINGFUL ROLE.

P sychology research indicates that mothers and fathers each play a unique role in a child's development. Although specific studies about a father's impact on a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are limited, we can assert that *The Father Factor* is critical for a child's well-being and the family as a whole.

Fathers may have a different approach to parenting than mothers, which can offer a fresh perspective on supporting a child with ASD. Fathers can

offer pivotal emotional and practical assistance to their children affected by autism.

Moreover, research has also shown that fathers of children impacted by autism are often more involved in caregiving than fathers in families unaffected by autism. They may provide more hands-on care including bathing, dressing, and feeding their child. The father can complement the other parent's approach and give the child a more well-rounded support system.



● Building Emotional Development & Modeling Social Behavior:

By engaging in social activities and modeling positive social interactions, fathers can help their child affected by autism to learn critical social skills. Fathers can also support their child's emotional development by engaging in their child's activities and facilitating opportunities for peer socialization. They can also help their child develop coping skills and emotional resilience, which are essential for managing the challenges associated with autism.

● Encouraging Independence:

By encouraging taking on tasks and responsibilities, such as household chores or managing their own schedule, fathers can help their child to develop independence, which can help to build the child's self-esteem and sense of competence.

● Advocating for Their Child:

A father can offer a unique perspective when communicating with teachers or other professionals to discuss their child's progress. Advocating for their child's needs, particularly in school or community settings, is another critical way fathers can impact their child and the entire family.

● Providing Emotional Support:

Fathers can provide emotional support to their child with ASD by being a consistent and supportive presence in their life. Spending time together, listening to their child's concerns, and providing

“ A father involved in the care of their child also contributes to the family's cohesion, which enhances relationships between family members. ”



reassurance and encouragement helps build a significant foundation of emotional support for their child, as well as the family.

● Reduced Caregiver Burden:

An involved father can help reduce the burden on the other parent/caregiver who may, at times, act as the primary caregiver, which can help to reduce stress and improve the mental well-being of both parents.

● Increased Family Cohesion:

A father involved in the care of their child also contributes to the family's cohesion, which enhances relationships between family members. Enhanced familial bonds help to create a more positive and supportive family environment.

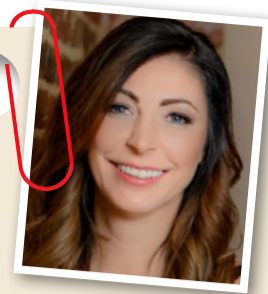
● Improved Mental Health For The Child:

Research has shown that fathers engaged in their child's care can positively impact the child's mental health outcomes, possibly due to the increased social support and positive parenting practices provided by involved fathers.

With all this being said about *The Father Factor*, it is fundamental to point out that every family is unique in its composition; not one family unit looks the same as another. Whatever your family structure, each person in the parental role is essential to the child's well-being.


“Fathers can provide emotional support to their child with ASD by being a consistent and supportive presence in their life.”

If you have two parental parts, then working as a team is the best thing you can do to benefit your child and yourselves. If you are a one-parent household, it's helpful to seek additional support from family, friends, or professional organizations to assist you in managing the stress of caring for your child impacted by autism. Collaborating with the other parent or additional support systems can help reduce stress levels, positively impacting both you and your child.



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Licensed as a behavior analyst in Virginia and Maryland. With over 15 years of mental health and ABA experience, Angela has diverse programming and behavior management knowledge. Angela has a long history of developing and expanding ABA programs in both Maryland and Northern Virginia. Her career has been devoted to maintaining and restoring ABA programs with strong leadership and research-based programming coupled with compassionate care. Her devotion further led her to meet with key local and state government stakeholders and lobby on behalf of ABA Medicaid funders to ensure ABA treatment reaches all families.

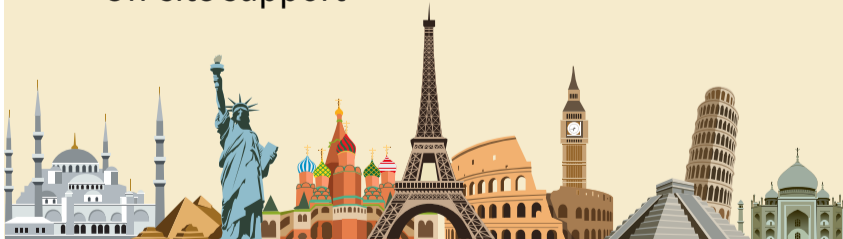
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