

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The COVID-19 outbreak led to a serious pandemic which caused more than physical health issues. This highly contagious pandemic required an immediate, albeit unexpected change in how society socialized in everyday life. One group hardest impacted was children with autism.

Autism is a disorder that impacts ones ability to engage in social interaction, so you can only imagine the confusion for a child who can no longer see their teachers, family, therapists and classmates in person. This abrupt change in routine is dramatic for autistic children as a strict daily routine is extremely important to their well-being.

Fortunately parents were not alone. There are a plethora of resources available including therapists, teachers, online resources and other parents. One article focused on a five step socialization process to create a new routine while the world was required to quarantine. The five recommendations were:

- 1) Become social - Reach out to neighbors, classmates and others, to collaborate on new ways to socialize.
- 2) Play games - Introduce new games to play one-on-one, with simple rules to follow, including turn-taking. A great way for parents and siblings to socialize with their autistic child.
- 3) Virtually connect with others - Parents are not alone and small steps, such as interacting virtually, beginning with short periods of time, playing games like Freeze Dance, can be a great mental and physical outlet.

- 4) Plan social-distancing playdates - There are many ways to this and a beneficial way to get fresh air, get exercise and enjoy the beauty of nature, including biking, hiking and outdoor fun.
- 5) Use your resources - The key is to remember that parents and caretakers are not alone. Quarantining and social-distancing have created an unexpected lifestyle change for everyone.

Parents, siblings and caretakers of autistic children have to view socialization from two different lenses, theirs and how it is for their autistic child. The pandemic shifted socialization for everyone, requiring us all to find new ways to satisfy our innate need for human contact and a feeling of connectedness. Family routines and home life also changed as children had to homeschool and parents moved to working virtually. I liked the positive, proactive approach recommended in this article as it focused on the autistic child, and ways to develop new routines, which included their family members as well. The most important advise reminding caretakers not to be too hard on yourself, as this is a new way of living for everyone.

*Article:*

<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/safe-socialization-during-covid-19/>

What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that affects an individual's ability to communicate (e.g., the ability to use language to express one's needs) and the ability to engage in social interaction (e.g., the ability to read social cues).

