

Practicing Optimistic Thinking

Balancing negative and positive thinking

It's okay to also acknowledge the challenges that can come with being a parent, and a parent of a child on the autism spectrum. It's healthy to allow yourself to feel and express "negative" emotions. However, concentrating on negative thoughts and emotions can lead to poor mental health for yourself, and in turn affect your family.

An optimistic mindset can empower you to take care of yourself and your family. Fostering an optimistic mindset is a form of self-care that can improve your own mental health and that of those around you. Here are some skill steps you can practice optimistic thinking:

Identify pessimistic thinking

Practice catching yourself when you're stuck on negative thoughts. You can even ask your friends and family to point it out to you if you're voicing your pessimistic thoughts.

Focus on your child's abilities and strengths

All children are special and different. Focusing on your child's unique strengths and abilities can promote a positive mindset and optimistic thinking. Focus on the successes they have and growth they show.



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Consciously reframe thoughts to be positive

It takes practice and effort, and it can be extremely rewarding to reframe pessimistic thoughts into something positive. Instead of, “that was a complete failure,” try reframing it as an opportunity to learn, like, “Okay, that didn’t go well, and how can we approach this differently next time.”

Acknowledge the negative rather than deny it

Life is not always easy, and ignoring negative thoughts and feelings is not healthy. It’s not good to repress negative emotions because they might all bubble out anyways. It’s okay to admit when you’re sad, stressed, overwhelmed, angry. Acknowledging these feelings will help you identify when to ask for help and when to take a break.

Disrupt your negative thought patterns

When you notice yourself focusing on negative thoughts and emotions, take active steps to refocus your energy by reframing your thoughts, taking a break, and/or asking for help.



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Avoid comparison to others

Every child with autism has different strengths, abilities, and support needs. And, every family has different needs and support systems. Try to avoid comparing yourself to others; it's not a competition. Instead foster relationships that can support you and your families needs.

Acknowledge what you can and cannot control

It is difficult to recognize that you cannot control everything in the environment around you and your family.

Accepting what you cannot control and using what you can, might help you navigate your environment.



Replace “but” with “and”

Part of acknowledging your negative feelings and emotions is knowing that two different truths can exist simultaneously. Work to replace “but” with “and” to let both truths be true at the same time. “And” lets you be solution-oriented because “but” can dismiss part of the truth. Instead of, “That trip to the store actually went really well but only because nothing triggered a tantrum,” try “that trip to the store actually went really well, and I think we can continue to avoid tantrum triggers by...”

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Surround yourself with optimistic thinkers or uplifting media

Look for other optimistic people. Other parents of autistic children might be a great source to discuss the successes of your children together or to help brainstorm ways to support you and your family. Online and in-person support groups and webforms might be a great place to find other parents who might understand your reality. Talk to your existing support systems and let them know you're trying to use optimistic thinking. Ask them to join you on the journey and to keep you accountable if you are expressing negative thoughts.

Find the tools to empower yourself

For some, reading books or educational material about autism is empowering. For others, finding professionals such as therapists, school psychologists, teachers that can help write behavior plans for the home is empowering. Find what makes you feel more confident and prepared to be the best parent you can be.

Take space for YOU

Take time for self-care, whatever that looks like for you. It might be an outside walk, taking a nap, listening to your music, getting a massage, etc. Know when you need a break, communicate that need, and take your space.



“Rest and self care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.” Elenor Brown