

# *6 sun safety tips for autistic children*



As summer approaches, keeping children safe in the sun is a priority for every parent and carer. Protection from harmful UV rays and sunburn is vital for everyone, and below are some tips for approaching sun safety with autistic children.

Children are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of exposure to the sun, as their skin is much more sensitive than adults. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may have difficulty understanding the importance of protecting themselves from the sun, while parents and carers face specific challenges in keeping them safe.



## **Summer sensory challenges**

People with ASD often process sensory information differently, including tactile hyper- or hypo-sensitivities. This means that common sun safety advice can prove problematic. In fact, each part of the famous Australian sun safety campaign "Slip, Slop, Slap" (slipping on a t-shirt, slopping on sunscreen and slapping on a hat) can be challenging.

However, there are ways to help keep children safe in the sun, while also taking their sensory needs into consideration.

### ***1. Use sensory-friendly sunscreen***

Rather than traditional pump or squeeze sunscreen, spray or roll-on applicators may be preferable, especially for children who are averse to touch. Rubbing sunscreen on yourself and encouraging your child to mimic the action on themselves may also be a helpful method.

### ***2. Find comfortable clothing***

Sensory sensitivities can make it difficult for children with ASD to wear certain fabrics or types of clothing, such as hats, sunglasses and straps. To combat the heat and

ensure both comfort and protection, lightweight garments are ideal. Involving children in the shopping process can help them “buy in” to the wardrobe choices.

### ***3. Seek (or create) shade***

If the above tips prove difficult, finding areas of shade out of the sun’s glare is even more important. A lightweight pop-up tent is an excellent addition for the beach, campsite or park, and a parasol can help keep them out of the sun while walking around or playing.

### ***4. Keep them cool***

Overheating is a common issue in the summer months, with some children with ASD being especially sensitive to the heat, and others being under-sensitive to temperature change. Avoiding the hottest parts of the day is key, as is drinking plenty of cold water. Frozen fruit, ice lollies, cool pads and filling hot water bottles with cold water to use as cushions are all useful ideas for keeping cool.



## **5.Create a routine**

Involving children early on and talking about the importance of sun safety can help them feel more comfortable and establish a good routine even before the hot weather arrives. Checking forecasts together, practising putting on sunscreen and hats, as well as discussing the reasons for staying protected can all help with the transition to summer.

## **6.Use visual aids**

Children with ASD often respond well to visual aids, such as posters or diagrams. You can use these to help them understand the importance of sun safety and how to protect themselves. Some sunscreens come in different colours, which can make application more fun, while showing unprotected areas.

Of course, not all autistic children will want to be outside for extended periods. Fresh air and exercise are important, but indoor interests should also be encouraged. That way, you can make the most of the time you do share outdoors.