

The Comprehensive Guide to Autism Apps



Introduction

In recent years, there has been some buzz about the potential of iPads in the care of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. They're versatile and mobile tools, and are easy to get started with. Furthermore, iPads are perfectly suited to interface with those with ASDs, iPads being literal and low on emotional involvement, things people with autism spectrum disorders regularly struggle with. There's also a great advantage for caregivers in using the iPad over other tech tools in therapy - the iPad is small, light, durable, cheap, and highly customizable, a combination of advantages that traditional treatment options for autism don't have. (Think the extremely expensive [DynaVox](#)). The iPad form factor, a flat plate of glass, is easy to carry around and with a ruggedized case can stand up to quite a beating. It's portability are helpful for calming and focusing individuals on the go.

Furthermore, because it is easy to transport and work with, the iPad has enormous potential as a communication device, at half or a third of the cost of other augmentative communication devices. Even combined with the cost of an expensive AAC app, the iPad is still enormously cost efficient. This can make the difference between a patient having an AAC device or not.

Another important advantage of an iPad is that an iPad is a mainstream device; a person still in school or looking for work will not look out of place for carrying around an iPad. This makes it easier for people who are not used to the disabled to talk to them, and makes meeting new people and interacting that much easier.

All in all, iPads have an enormous potential for those with disabilities, especially those on the autism spectrum.

But... iPads are still expensive.

Just because you recognize the benefits of an iPad, does not mean you're in any financial position to purchase one. They're expensive tools, and sometimes families don't have the money it takes to purchase one.

First of all, you should know that it doesn't take hundreds or more to buy an iPad. Used iPads can be [as low as \\$200 on eBay](#) - and you needn't fear about quality because of that low price tag. If the iPad you buy isn't exactly the quality advertised, the CEO of eBay has promised you can return it and get all of your money (plus shipping) back, aside from the fact that you're likely to get exactly the product you paid for anyways.

If you don't have the money to pay that out-of-pocket, there are still ways you can get an iPad for someone with autism in your life.

Getting An iPad

Grants

Whether you want to get a used iPad or a brand-new iPad, many organizations have grants and scholarships designed specifically for people with autism to get their own iPad. This way, you can get the purchase of the iPad funded while you don't have to pay out of your thin supply of money.

You apply for the scholarship or grant with the particular organization, and then if you're accepted, you're awarded an iPad. Many times, the only thanks necessary is to take pictures of it in use and send it back to the organization, so they can demonstrate the effectiveness of their grant to whoever is funding it (so that the grants may continue).

Take the time to apply to these grants, because if you're accepted, you've effectively made hundreds of dollars for the hour it took you to apply to the grant. And, it's much easier than earning the money needed to completely outfit the person with autism with all the equipment needed for an iPad.

A lot of these grants give awards out for many different types of autism treatments or financial aid, so this is a list of grants you can keep coming back to in times of financial need. Just remember; many of these grants require you to apply before you have received whatever it is you need financial aid for, as opposed to after the fact.

Tips for Applying to Grants:

Make sure you understand the guidelines before starting your application. Organizations will throw out applications before reading them if they don't adhere to formatting or due date guidelines.

When describing your needs and goals, be as *specific* as possible. Make sure to answer the [5 W's](#) of your request. If you can't adequately convince them you really *need* the iPad, you'll get passed over for someone who can.

Make sure every element of the application is filled out completely, or you've explained why you can't fill it out if you can't. Applications that are incomplete will also be thrown out, because an incomplete application implies that you don't care about receiving the grant or not.

Have someone else double-check your application, to make sure it is concise and clear. Sometimes, when people think they're being clear and obvious, it

turns out that they are not - you don't want to discover that when you've already submitted your application.

Don't be discouraged if you aren't selected - many people are applying for these grants, and sometimes even the most well-written applications don't get accepted. Don't hold it against them, just apply again when next you can. If you'd like, you can write back with your application and ask why you ended up getting rejected, so you can do better next application.

When submitting applications, save all of the writing or text editing you did in a word document. This way, you can re-use content you wrote for one application on other applications, saving you *a lot* of time in the application process. You can also save them for re-use in future years if you are turned down on all applications this year. Also, if you spend a lot of time editing and perfecting this copy, it saves time editing other copies - making sure every submission is a good one.

Available Grants

[ACT \(Autism Care and Treatment\) Grant Program/FAQ](#)

They give preference to low-income families, but high-income families (> \$100,000) will also be considered.

They give out money on a per-item basis, meaning you apply to have the iPad bought for you, as opposed to receiving the money and buying it yourself.

Applications are kept in the system for two consecutive grant cycles, instead of one, so you don't have to apply year after year.

They do not fulfill requests for personal or family needs, so make sure to demonstrate why having the iPad for the person with autism's medical care is important. Using data to demonstrate this will be more effective.

If you have trouble with the application, you can call them at the number on their FAQ.

Eligibility:

- That the family have at least one autistic child

[HollyRod Foundation](#) / [Apply Here](#)

Only mothers, fathers or legal guardians of the autistic person may apply for this grant. Caretakers may not apply on behalf of the autistic person, and it seems the autistic individual may not apply themselves.

Eligibility:

- The person with autism in question must be low or non verbal, and use the iPad for communication.

[Hannah's Helping Hands](#)

The grant can be used for a wide variety of things related to the autistic individual, as long as they fall under the category of support. If you make a compelling case for why you need the iPad, it is eligible under this grant.

Eligibility:

- Families with individuals with developmental disabilities in Indiana, the Michiana area, New York, Rhode Island, Florida, Kansas and the Kansas City area.
- Autistic person in question may be a child *or* an adult.
- Family is low or middle income.

[Autism Cares](#)

This is less of a grant to receive an iPad and more of a grant to receive financial aid in the event of a disaster. While not directly related to getting an iPad, it is a good link to know exists.

Eligibility: families who have a child (children) medically diagnosed with ASD and have experienced at least one of the following qualifying event in the last 90 days:

- Natural disaster: fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, severe storm or earthquake
- Death or critical illness in the immediate family
- Loss of home through foreclosure, eviction or natural disaster
- Termination of employment for the primary income-earner

[Babies with iPads / Grant](#)

Eligibility:

- Reside in US
- Child between the ages of 6 months and 8 years old.
- Child must have multiple medical and/or developmental issues (physical and/or cognitive impairments) that impact his or her ability to play and communicate.
- Access to a computer with an iTunes account.
- Currently cannot afford to purchase an iPad (no income verification required).
- Ability to provide pictures, videos and/or updates to Babies with iPad to use as needed.

[Parker's Purpose](#)

Parker's Purpose provides purely monetary assistance to families of minors with autism. This means that money is awarded directly to you, instead of buying the iPad and then shipping it to you.

They award up to \$1000, and you can only receive it once in a two-year time span.

The Parker's Purpose Executive Committee makes decisions based on the financial and emotional needs of each applicant. The foundation reviews a completed application and awards grants on an as-needed basis, contingent on funds being available

Eligibility:

- Any family who has a minor (18 and under) with a life altering illness or disability that is in an immediate financial crisis due to unforeseen medical expenses.
 - Families who live in Ohio will be first priority in providing assistance but will extend outside the state if deemed necessary.

[First Hand](#)

Eligibility:

- The child must be 18 years of age or younger (a person 19–21 may be considered if they are in a child-like mental state)
- The child must be under the care of a pediatrician
- The case must involve a child with a specific healthcare need
 - In our case, that would be an iPad.

- The request must be clinically relevant to the health of the child
 - You can demonstrate that it is relevant to the health of the child by making a list of the apps you'll purchase for it, and present a plan for using those apps in therapy - a plan which you would have had to make anyways.
- There must be no existing insurance coverage for the requested expenses
- One request per year, per child for a maximum of three times in a child's lifetime

[Gia Foundation](#)

To apply for this grant, all you need to do is demonstrate how the iPad will enhance the daily life of the child with autism.

Eligibility

- Must be awarded to the family of the special needs individual.

[The Maggie Welby Foundation](#)

"The Maggie Welby Foundation offers grants for children and families that have a financial need for a particular purpose. Grants may ex-

tend to children and families in need of help with bills, athletic opportunities, medical needs, or an opportunity that a child would not otherwise have."

Eligibility:

- No eligibility is listed on the website.

[Danny's Wish](#) / [Apply Here](#)

Danny's Wish is a fund that is directly and only committed to giving iPads to families with Autism. This means that this is an excellent grant to apply to.

Eligibility:

- It is open to any child with autism.

[Small Steps In Speech](#)

You can not use this grant to apply for an iPad itself, but you can use this grant to apply for iPad apps. Here are the requirements from the website for applications for apps:

- "A formal Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Evaluation from a qualified service provider must be included stating that different pieces of technology have been trialed and what you are requesting is the best fit for a means of communication."

Eligibility:

- Must be a resident of the USA
 - Grants are awarded from birth until 22 years old
 - Grants can only be used for future services, not past services.

[Zane's Foundation](#)

You can only apply once per calendar year, and for only one child.

They ask you to describe what you are going to be using the money for in your application, so name the iPad and the apps you are going to be using it for. Indicate you have really financially gone over what it takes to get the iPad, case, and apps you want.

What does Zane's Foundation consider special needs?

"Special needs is used to describe a life-long disability attributed to developmental and/or intellectual impairments. An individual who has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Plan (ISP) is also included. These disabilities affect daily functioning in the following areas: capacity for independent living, economic self-sufficiency, learning, mobility, social skills, receptive and expressive language, self-care, and self-direction."

Eligibility:

- Must live in Northeast Ohio

- Fit the description of special needs above.

[iHelp for Special Needs](#)

This grant allows both schools and families to apply to have their own iPads; organizations without iPads would do well to apply to this grant.

[Apps 4 Children With Special Needs](#)

This website gives away iPads to families with special needs. You need to follow [the facebook page](#), and indicate interest in their giveaways there.

Eligibility

- Any family with a special needs child.

[Children for Hope Network](#)

They don't have an explicit application process, but you can email them and inquire about what it would take to get their assistance. Explain your situation with the same meticulousness that you would use to apply, and ask them what can be done. Make sure to not *ask them explicitly* to help, but give them a chance to offer their assistance. If they can't, they'll surely refer you to someone who can.

Your School District

iPads are available for some people through their IEPs. Contact your school psychologist and ask what it would take to get an iPad through the school programs - it varies for every school district.

Fundraising

Another way of getting an iPad if you are not eligible or do not receive any of the grants in the last chapter is by holding a fundraiser to get your iPad. This can be done through a myriad of different websites, but the procedure for actually running the raise is the same for every website.

Running a fundraiser requires a lot of preparation beforehand, and a lot of commitment to spreading the word - although we wish it was this way, people don't just miraculously find your page and donate money to your campaign. Fundraises are successful because the person running the fundraiser didn't stop working until the raise was successful.

Below are the steps you need to take to run a successful fundraiser - do these things before the fundraiser starts, so you are prepared and it is effective:

1. Make a list of everyone you know who would be interested in contributing.

Get their contact information and write them all down. If you're not sure about someone, just ask them and give them the chance to say no. Reach out to friends, family, coworkers, parents of your child's friends, anyone you can think of who may be marginally interested. You could even mass message all of your facebook friends.

For efficiency, organize the people by method of contact:

- **Email:** make a big excel spreadsheet of their emails and first name. You want to do this so you can use [Mailchimp](#) to send everyone emails at once, but use mergetags to customize the emails with their first name.
- **Facebook:** Make a list of people to message so you can group message them to save time. You could even make a list of every facebook friend you have. Here's how:
 1. Click on Friends at the top of the screen
 2. Click on Make a New List to the right of the friend list that appears.
 3. Name the list whatever you'd like and click OK.
 4. Click on the link to Select Multiple Friends.
 5. Select every friend that you have, then click Save List.
 6. Now, go to Compose Message.
 7. In the To: field, enter the name of your list.
 8. Enter the subject and message and click Send.
- **Phone Calls:** Organize people by where they live, and then schedule the calls so you know you're calling at a time when

they're available and not at work. If they don't pick up, give them a call again around three days later, but at a slightly different time.

2. Contact Autism Bloggers.

People who run blogs about autism may be willing to post about your fundraiser to get an iPad so that their audience could contribute to your fundraiser. Perhaps even ask the blog author to make multiple social media posts about your fundraiser.

You want to contact as many blogs as possible, since the audiences of most blogs will not contribute to your fundraiser.

[Here is a downloadable list](#) of 40 autism blogs you can contact; upload the list to [Mailchimp](#) and send them an email about your iPad fundraiser. Just mention that Pufferfish Software told you to contact them about your campaign.

3. Decide on rewards for pledges.

For some of the fundraiser websites below, it is customary to give people rewards for the pledges they can choose to give. If you select one of those websites, choosing compelling rewards is critical to the success of your fundraiser.

Some guidelines for picking rewards are:

- Set a limited edition reward; e.g. "The first 10 people who back get [blank!](#)" Make this reward better than the normal reward at that pledge level. This encourages people to contribute now, rather than later.
- Since your fundraiser is highly personal, homey, handmade rewards will work best. Base rewards off of any skills you have. If you're crafty, make one of the higher rewards a handmade necklace or bracelet for them. If you're good at singing, send a recording of you singing some sort of thank-you song - silly rewards like this can work well, since they pull at people's heartstrings.
- Definitely send a thank you note to everyone who campaigns, and take a photograph of you and the person with autism with the iPad.
- Maybe you can have a party at your house for everyone who contributed after you've got the iPad in use, so they can see what their hard earned money went towards.

4. Social Media Posts

Schedule some posts to all your social media accounts using [Buffer](#). Buffer allows you to write social media posts, publish them to every social media account you have, and even schedule them for the future.

Set the queue to post twice a day to every account, and then queue up two posts every day for the duration of your fundraiser. Always provide a link to the fundraiser, but make sure to not sound repetitive in every post.

For instance, one post could ask what apps they recommend you buy for your new iPad; another could ask if they have an iPad, and what tips or tricks they recommend with it. Don't be worried about repeating if the posts are more than a day or two apart; because of the new algorithms of social media, less than 1/4 of your posts will be seen by most of your friends/followers (which is why we recommend you post so much). Also, frequent posts communicates to your friends that this is extremely important to you.

Your Fundraising Listing

The ideal fundraiser will not just have a three sentence description of the child in need and a photo - for successful fundraisers, care and hard work has to be put into the fundraising page. We'll go over each element of the fundraiser and what is best to do for it:

Description

Your description should be just that - descriptive. Just as with grant applications, when describing your needs and goals, be as *specific* as possible. Make sure to answer the [5 W's](#) of your request in as much detail as possible.

There are people who put up fundraisers which are entirely personal or that mooch off of people, and so donors are always on their guard for people who are stretching the truth and lying to get money. Convince them that you are not that person by explaining in detail what the iPad is going to be used for, and how the actual costs of your fundraiser are going to be spread out (how much is the iPad, the case, apps, other accessories, e.t.c.)

Also, include a paragraph about the person with autism. What are their likes, what are their dislikes? How old are they? How is school? Donors like to know about the person they're helping, and it emotionally hits closer to home if you make the person very real to them.

Explain your situation, and why you're unable to purchase your own iPad. Again, donors want to make sure their money is going where it is needed the most, so actually explain to donors why you are unable to purchase your own iPad. (Notice the use of the word *unable*, not just "do not want to.")

Photograph / Video

A video is much more highly recommended than a photograph in this section of the fundraiser, but not everyone has home video editing skills. If you do any have computer literacy, take some videos of the person with autism and make them into a video. Alternatively, you could use good photographs and made a slideshow for the campaign.

If you are not that computer literate, just get a great photograph of the person with autism for the fundraiser. Make sure it is high quality, so it isn't fuzzy, blurry or pixelated on other screens.

This is the photograph or video which catches donor attention from the home screen and sets the entire impression of the fundraiser, so make sure you and your family/clinic are putting their best foot forward with this element of the fundraiser.

Websites to Fundraise With:

[Fundly](#) *Recommeneded*

Pros:

- This website is beautiful, and your fundraiser is going to look great on this website - never undervalue a first impression.

- Free mobile app to go along with the fundraiser, so you can manage it from anywhere (meaning you can post updates or check progress from anywhere).
- The fundraiser will look good on mobile browsers, which is good, because according to urban legend, 20% of all internet usage comes from mobile devices these days.
- Includes the ability for donors to promote your fundraiser on social networks as well.

[GoFundMe](#) *Reccomended*

Pros:

- This is the *first* funding website (founded even before kickstarter) and they're very well established.
- It's not all-or-nothing, so if you don't quite make your goal you can keep what you did raise.

Cons:

- Success fee of 5% and payment processing fee of 3% (depending on country)

[Shareagift](#)

Pros:

- This is a website dedicated to exactly the type of campaign you're running - raising money for a personal device, with a very high personal support and community aspect.

Cons:

- There is no public directory of projects - they can't be searched by people on the website. This means if they don't have a direct link, they can't contribute. This closes off contributions from friendly strangers on the website, and from people who try and search for your campaign without a direct link.

[YouCaring](#)

Pros:

- No success fee. You keep all the money you make. (Unfortunately, there are still 3% credit card processing fees).
- It's free to get started.

[CauseWish](#)

Pros:

- Specifically for medical crowdfunding
- Extremely easy to set up - you can get going in 5 minutes
- You get a personal fundraising coach - *huge* plus

- Donor management tools such as automatic thank you emails and follow-ups

Cons:

- Combined average fees of 6.9%, 4% for Causewish and 2.9% for credit card processing.

[DonorsChoose](#) *For Teachers*

We wanted to include a special note for school teachers about the website DonorsChoose. This is a fundraising website, but you are fundraising on behalf of students - many socially concious people get on this website to help fund education all over the world. If you are a teacher, this is the ideal location for your fundraiser.

Places To Find Apps For Autism

As the producers of this guide, we implore you to check out [our apps for autism](#). We make them with love for anyone on the autism spectrum, and hope they go a long way in treating people's autism.

Phew! Now that that's out of the way, there are several wonderful resources on the internet where you can find lists of apps for autism.

A quick iTunes search for 'autism' returns hundreds of apps, tailored specifically for autistic children. These apps range from \$1-\$200 dollars, but some of the most useful and simple apps can be found for under \$5. With indefinitely useful, customizable tools available so cheaply, the iPad becomes a far more attractive tool in treating autism.

This is a lot easier and better than sifting through the listings on iTunes, which can often be biased or don't return the search results you're looking for. The app store is flooded by all kinds of different apps, and these locations to look for apps reduces it to just apps for autistic children.

- [Autism Speak's Database](#)
 - A comprehensive database that lists apps based on many characteristics, including whether or not there is clinical evidence of the app's effectiveness, price, and category within therapy/treatment.
- [Apps 4 Children with Special Needs](#)
 - A4CWSN is a website that is dedicated to cataloging all of the different apps available for children with special needs. They describe the apps, have clinician reviews, and have video demonstrations of most of the apps on their library.
 - They also have a [YouTube channel](#) where they publish their app videos.
- [Autism Apps](#)
 - Autism Apps is an app to help you find apps for autism! Just download the app, and browse their comprehensive library.
 - [Touch Autism](#) is the company behind this app, and have their own broad selection of apps designed for autism treatment.
- [iPads In Schools](#)
- [Jane Farrall's Website](#)

- Jane Farrall's website has multiple lists of AAC apps. All of these apps are rated by her, describing how they're used & how they're programmed, so you can make the best AAC app choice.
- [Symbol & Picture Apps](#) / [Symbol & Text Apps](#) / [Text Based Apps](#)
- [The App Store Special Education Section](#)
 - The App Store has a section for special education, but they don't do the best job collecting all of the special education apps into that section - perhaps less than a fourth of all the special education apps make it into this section of the App Store.
 - That said, you should still pop on it by opening iTunes, going to App Store, then Education, and then Special Education in the righthand menu on your computer to take a look.
- [YouTube](#)
 - This is less of a place to look and more of a place to check out what you already have found before you buy. You can see an app in action and see reviews before you make that purchase
- [Bridging Apps](#)

- [iPad & Autism App Recommendations](#)
- Recommendations from Teachers & Therapists You Know
 - They might have apps they like to use and are familiar with, and it may be best to use these apps instead of making both therapist and patient learn a new app.
- [The IQ Journals](#)
 - The author of this website reviews apps of all types that are appropriate for their autistic child. This means that apps from a wide variety of genres are on IQJournals.com.

Finding the Right Apps

Once you've found some places to look for apps for autism, you still need to sort out which apps will be good for the person you're shopping for. There are some steps you can take to narrow apps down quickly.

1. Ask doctors and therapists working with the patient what kind of apps would be good for them. They will usually provide categories of apps or age ranges you should look for.
 - If you're looking for an AAC app, definitely talk with a speech therapist as well.

After this, you should be able to search the above websites and make a list of apps which might be good.

1. Search each app on this list on the App Store. Look up the average ratings, and get rid of any apps which have ratings or reviews that are poorer than you want.
2. Look up each app on YouTube. App publishers will often make videos of their app in use, and this way you can make sure the app works the way you want before you buy it.

Refunds

No matter how thorough you are picking apps, you might still buy an app that ends up not working for you or the person with autism, and when that comes you'll need to return it.

Apple says that apps cannot be returned when you purchase them, but this isn't strictly true. If you contact Apple's support lines and request that the app be returned, explaining that you were careful in your search and that it didn't work anyways, they will do so. [Here is their iPad support link](#), and you can email them directly by choosing "The topic is not listed" from their dropdown menu under "Using iPad with iTunes."

Types of Apps

There are several different types of apps for autism, and we're going to go over each of them in detail.

AAC Apps

AAC Apps are what started the rush to the iPads in autism care. Before, AAC apps were actually AAC devices, which were larger than an iPad, heavier than an iPad, more expensive than an iPad, and only had that one piece of software on them.

The iPad has brought a version of those devices to the autistic which is easy to use, and widely available. You can purchase an AAC app for the iPad, and get all of the support and the functionality of an iPad while having the appropriate AAC app on your iPad.

Caretakers must learn how to implement these apps into the care of the person with autism so that the AAC app enhances their speech development, instead of replaces it. The person with autism will use the AAC app to supple-

ment their verbal speech, and then will learn to model speech off of their AAC app - eventually leading to them not needing the AAC app anymore.

Children develop communication skills in a series of stages, first through unintentional imitation of their repeated exposure, and then developing symbolic communication skills afterwards.

AAC apps are beneficial for the autistic because they can reduce frustration caused by being unable to communicate. By taking the burden off of them to verbally communicate, they are free to communicate nonverbally while using the app, and are also able to become more social and less isolated.

Remember to take every opportunity to let the person with autism communicate with the AAC device. Lots of communication opportunities are lost because the caretaker knows what the person is going to say, or they communicate in other ways than the AAC app. This does not reinforce learning to use the AAC app. Build a precedent of expecting the person to use the AAC app at every opportunity to communicate, so that they can effectively use it in all circumstances. Doing this may be difficult for the person, so remember to encourage it wherever possible - if they refuse to communicate or are unable to, assist them in the use of the AAC app and build up to independent use.

Remember to pause and wait on the person to use the AAC app. Prompt the person to use the AAC app, and then give them a full ten seconds to do so -

many autistic people can use the AAC app to communicate effectively, but need to be given enough time to do so. Being quick to guide or prompt the person eliminates an opportunity where they could have done it themselves. It makes the person feel like they are not fast enough, and that if they do not people will do it for them. The quiet space can even be a prompt in and of itself, letting the person know you expect them to communicate.

One good way to encourage communication is to control access to things the person with autism wants or needs. If they are able to access everything they want without asking, they will never have a need to communicate or ask. Withholding access to these items will make the person with autism have to ask to get them. If they've always had access before, it's likely that you will be met with resistance when you try and take these items away. During these situations, remember to keep focus on what *your child* wants to say, not what *you* want your child to say.

One way to help the person with autism pick up using the AAC app is to model using the AAC app, by using it to communicate with them. When you use the AAC app, it demonstrates that it's okay to use the AAC app.

Another way to help them learn to use the AAC app is to model activities; for instance, have someone model typing "wash your hands" on the AAC device, and then go model washing your hands for the person with autism.

If the person with autism is using the AAC app is having trouble finding a word, help them express themselves out loud by saying "where is the word?" or "you'll find the word soon." This helps them know it's okay that they can't find a word, and to take their time.

Using the AAC app helps the person with autism learn to communicate, but it in and of itself can not expand vocabulary.

Remember to provide meaningful feedback, beyond an anecdotal "Good job." Providing feedback can be an opportunity for the person with autism to learn more language.

Choice Boards

Choice boards are an excellent tool for anyone on the developmental spectrum, but can be especially effective for the low-functioning end of the spectrum, because it provides a framework for the autistic person to focus on just one, small thing, the choice in front of them.

Take the time to determine the format that will be best for the autistic child to understand. Some would prefer short-form text choices, and others will rely

heavily on photograph or audio prompts. This choice is based entirely on what will be best for the student.

A good way to teach the choice is to have two snacks visible, and to make a choice board between the two snacks; give the child the snack they selected, and withhold the snack they did not choose. It is very important that you follow through with the choice, and do not give them the other snack if you are met with resistance.

It's important that the choices on the choice board always be consistent with what's available - so if they ask for something you don't have, they aren't upset when they don't get what they asked for, and you are not in a situation where you can't reward the person for their use of a choice board.

Having the choice board on an app is an excellent decision, because it can be taken with the person everywhere, and is not strange, bulky or unusual in a social setting - making it easier for the autistic person to advocate for themselves.

Visual Schedules

Individuals with an ASD sometimes have difficulties with sequential processing (i.e., learning the order of events). Individuals with ASD, when they are not informed of what is about to happen, can become overwhelmed and overstimulated by the sudden and often surprising events for them.

Without any tools, additional stimulation in the form of vocal prompting can further increase distress on the autistic individual's part. The vocal or visual prompting does not help them understand the sequence of events, but further exacerbates the child's upsetness.

Visual schedules are a key tool for overcoming sequential processing issues in people with autism. Those with an ASD are usually highly receptive to effective, comprehensive visual communication, and visual schedules allow sequence of events to be communicated much more clearly to the person with autism than visual or vocal prompts.

This results in less upsets for everyone, and much more independence for the person with an ASD. They can even become less dependent on routine in general, since having a visual schedule prepared will allow them to deal with the change much more effectively, since they understand when and where the

change is occurring.

There is a wealth of statistical evidence in favor of the use of visual schedules, (e.g., Mesibov, et al, 2002; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Bryan & Gast, 2000) as well as anecdotal experiences all over the internet advocating for their use.

Visual schedules are not a treatment from which the autistic individual should be weaned over time like PECS might be; instead, they are a permanent assistive technique. It is easiest to think of a visual schedule like a schedule is for an adult, except with large pictures.

An adult using a to-do list is not deficient or unable; in fact, their schedule makes them even more able to complete tasks and handle their life. Busy executives and people with many hobbies or many priorities rely heavily on schedules to frame their life; the most successful executives plan out their days to more detail than some autistic people do. So too it is with visual schedules; they enhance someone's ability to work within life when they have autism.

Visual schedules are highly personalized treatment options for the autistic, and each autistic person should have their own visual schedule adapted to their

needs; one 'classroom' or group schedule might not be enough.

An example of this is a group activity, and the autistic individual becomes distressed and has trouble with the activity. The classroom schedule says that a worksheet is up immediately next, while the autistic individual may need a break due to overstimulation. However, they rely on the schedule, and they become even more distressed at the thought of having to go through more overstimulation before receiving a break.

This is why it's important each child has one made especially for their needs. Each autistic person has different wants or needs, and the visual schedule needs to be able to accommodate them as an individual - not as a member of a classroom.

Building a Visual Schedule:

Setting up a visual schedule may seem like a daunting task, especially when you stop to consider the professional visual schedules many autism clinics have. However, there are solutions that make creating a visual schedule easier than ever. Investing the time it takes to make a good schedule will easily pay itself back in tantrums saved and emotions kept in check.

Use the [Visual Routine](#) app to easily create visual schedules on the iPad, that the autistic person can take anywhere.

Here are the steps involved in making a visual schedule on the iPad:

- Break the individual's day into small steps.
 - Be conscious of even the smallest steps, and prepare for every change.
- Incorporate appropriate social interactions
 - ex: greeting a teacher when the individual walks into a classroom.
- Identify chances for choices in activity, and make sure to record them.
- Alternate desirable and undesirable activities as well.
 - ex: A student might be more motivated to complete their english program if they know they have a break right after.
- Be sure to record breaks and free time as well
- Some individuals might need larger steps than others.
 - ex: one autistic individual needs very small steps, because they feel overwhelmed when one item on the schedule takes so long to do. However, another individual gets anxious when they

see so many items on the schedule, and having larger chunks makes them more comfortable with the perceived workload.

- Determine the best visual format based on the skills of the child (motor, reading, attention to detail, developmental level, distractibility, e.t.c.)
- Determine how the schedule will be used
 - Think about how the child will transition to and from the schedule.
- Pick your prompt for using the schedule, e.g. "Check your schedule."

How to Use Your Visual Schedule

- Use your standard prompt selected, e.g. "Check your schedule."
- Prompt the child from behind to go to the schedule
- Prompt them to look at or point to the first activity, and the next activity.
- When the activity is finished, have them check it off 'complete.'
- Repeat this after every activity.

Using this visual schedule will require teaching, as with any ABA program. One effective way to teach the schedule to the autistic person is to model the use of the schedule. Read off the steps in the schedule, and then perform them in order. This is good for short schedules, such as visual schedules for using the bathroom or cleaning up a room.

Fade out prompts as the user becomes more independent with the schedule. This allows to develop a more adult self-sufficiency, and eventually they will be able to rely on the schedule without any prompting.

A minimum of two scheduled items should be shown at a time, since visual schedules are meant to help the individual understand items in a sequential manner, not in isolation. Less items should be shown for people who are low-functioning, but 6-10 items may be better for someone who is more competent with the schedule.

Types of Schedules

- Picture-Based Schedules
 - Picture-based schedules are schedules that rely primarily on pictures or icons to communicate the idea to the special needs individual.
- Audio-Based Schedules

- Audio-based schedules are schedules created which mostly rely on the in-app audio prompts for the visual schedule.
- Word-Based Schedules
 - These schedules are most suited for readers, or those with stronger reading abilities. As a child learns to read, fading in word schedules and fading out picture-based or audio-based ones will help them develop into capable individuals, able to read and find that information instead of relying on visuals.

Schedule Location

The location of the visual schedule's use can affect the composition of the visual schedule.

- Stationary
 - The schedule will always remain in the same location, and the user will walk back to the physical location of the schedule after each activity. This helps the less developed transition from one activity to the next, and gives them a sense of routine.

- Typically, this will be used if the iPad always remains in the same place as well, such as in the classroom. If the iPad travels with the student, this will not be as appropriate.
- Mobile
 - For those who are older or more developed, a mobile schedule style might be more appropriate. The individual would carry the schedule from one activity to the next, bringing it with them for reference.
 - In each space, the schedule should have its own defined location, where it can be referenced easily.
 - For instance, in the bathroom, the iPad will always be leaning against the mirror, whereas in the classroom, it is always on the righthand side of their desk.

Assessing the Schedule

As the individual gets used to the new visual schedule, be sure to pay close attention to how it is working out.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to assess the effectiveness of the visual schedule:

- Are there any steps they get regularly stuck on, and need made longer or shorter?
- Are there any things they see in their schedule which they dread and get afraid of, or on the other hand love and get too excited to be able to be productive?

Remember, the schedule will need to change and grow with the individual, so right out of the gate you will need to remember to monitor the visual schedule's performance to make appropriate changes.

Social Stories Apps

Social Stories are a tool developed by former consultant Carol Gray, designed to provide autistic and special needs individuals with the information they need to deal with social situations.

Information in social stories is shared in story format, and the autistic person reads the story to understand how they can act in a social situation well. They can be used to direct inappropriate responses into appropriate ones:

- instead of yelling when you are visually overstimulated, you can ask to leave the room and then do so.

Social stories can be thought of as 'instruction manuals' for social situations. These stories are written with an emphasis on social cues, perspectives, and common responses to social situations. They're written from the individual's point of view, so they are in their own shoes when reading the story and need not do any perspective transfer of their own. They are short and to-the-point, not wasting time on any storytelling details that are unnecessary. This allows the individual to focus on what is important. They are frequently paired with illustrations, for the benefit of the less developed individuals with ASD.

They are designed less as a program in and of themselves, but more as a resource for the autistic person to call on in a situation they feel overwhelmed by. You can think of this as an instruction manual you can reference for social situations; you don't always need it or even need it often, but it's there for when you really need it.

You can create social stories using the [Social Story](#) app for the iPad or iPhone.

How to Write a Social Story

Writing a social story can be easy if you follow easy steps when beginning to write the story.

1. Identify the Behaviors You Want to Change
 - A social story begins with the social behaviors you want to change in an autistic person. These behaviors are usually rooted in a lack of comprehension or ability to deal with the situation at hand, and so the way to change them is through education.
 - Identify specifically what behavior is causing problems with the autistic person, and identify where the breakdown is.
 - Are they not being told what is going on in the situation?
 - Even if they're being told, do they understand?
 - Or do they just not know how to deal with what is going on?
 - Part of identifying the problem behavior is identifying the solution behavior you'd like to replace it with. Keep that in mind while forming the rest of the story.
2. Outline Your Story
 - First of all, a writer needs to plan out their social story before beginning to write. This involves answering some basic questions about the story:

- What will this story be about?
- What is the skill or behavior you want to establish?
- What do you want to be able to do?
- Answering a question along these lines is setting a goal for the individual, and for the story. Keep this goal in mind while composing the social story, and make sure every sentence or page relates back to this goal.

3. Create a Profile of the Individual

- The second step to writing the social story is creating a profile of who it's for. This involves assessing their vocabulary or level of understanding, so that the story is most effective for them personally. Ascertain the following things about the individual:
 - What is the individual's reading comprehension?
 - How wide is their vocabulary?
 - What language patterns do they use?
 - i.e. if the individual likes to use the word

'eats' instead of 'food,'
it may be easier for
them to understand if
that word is substitut-
ed.

- A common mistake for writers to make is to over-estimate the comprehension of the individual for whom the social story is for.

4. Planning the Story

- The next part of writing a social story is planning it out. This involves taking the goal of the story and making it into several different sections. For instance, if the goal is to teach a child to sit calmly on the bus when overstimulated, you could break it into the following steps:
 - Describing getting on the bus
 - Describing the bus
 - Describing feeling overstimulated
 - Suggesting the appropriate reaction
 - Describing how the solution worked well
- Each section can make one or more pages of the story, depending on the individual's needs and requirements for the story linguistically. This is

also an opportune time to plan out any visual or aural prompts for the story as well, and decide where in the story they will be used.

Writing a Social Story

Now, you have everything you need to start actually writing down your social story, so we need to look at the specific styles with which a social story is written.

Social stories use specific types of sentences, in specific proportions in the stories. Knowing the sentence types helps the writer create a to-the-point and effective social story for the individual.

The recommended ratio by The Gray Center is 2-5 descriptive/prescriptive sentences for each directive sentence, and does not include the other sentence types. This sets the focus on the world as it is for the individual, helping them perceive the social situation around them.

Studies have shown that stories which follow the sentence ratio do work, but studies have not shown that stories that do not, do not work either, so change

up the sentence ratio if you feel it is appropriate. Don't get hung up about the exact ratio, and instead focus on writing a good story.

Social stories are written from the first person point of view, and written in the present tense. This style is easiest for the autistic child to identify with, as they are directly in the shoes of the autistic person in the story.

The writer should avoid conclusive words like 'always' and 'never,' so that the story allows for change in the individual's life. This makes the story last longer and applicable to a broader range of situations, as well as being less rigid and possibly upsetting for the autistic person.

Lastly, the writer should always provide more information about the social situation than the individual necessarily needs. Being as descriptive as possible will equip the autistic person with knowledge about their situation that they can use to keep themselves calm.

Sentence Types:

- Descriptive
 - Descriptive sentences provide information about something or someone, and describe what the individual would sense.

- ex: I go to the cafeteria for lunch every school day.
- Perspective
 - They describe the emotions or feelings of others. People with ASD's often have a hard time perceiving what others feel, and these sentences will clearly let them know how they are doing.
 - ex: Other students do not like it when I touch their food.
- Directive
 - These are the sentences that actually guide the individual to the desired behavior. They provide the individual with information about what they should do in the situation.
 - ex: I should only eat my own food at lunch.

Selecting Images for Your Social Story

Images are a large component of a social story, as they will take up the most screen real-estate on the iPad. Pick the images you use carefully, and make sure they are good, appropriate images for the story.

Whenever possible, take real pictures of the environment the autistic person will be in. For instance, if it's a story about their school classroom, take a pic-

ture of the actual classroom they use - don't just use a stock classroom photo from the internet.

If you can't take real pictures of their environment, it might be better for you to use clip art, or artistic renderings - this is less realistic, and the autistic person may not try and ascribe the scenario to one particular room or setting.

This is based largely on what the individual needs - some individuals struggle with applying clip-art to the real-life counterpart, so for them, a real photograph (even if it's not the *right* photograph) is a better choice.

Introducing the Social Story

Introducing the social story into the autistic person's routine as an available tool is a critical part of the social story process.

Here are a couple useful tips for introducing a social story to someone:

- Find a quiet place for you and the individual with the least possible distractions.
- Plan a timetable for reviewing the story.
- Present the story to the child
 - i.e. Read the story to the individual

- i.e. Have the individual read it out loud
- i.e. Have other people read the story to the individual.
- Make sure to always have the story accessible for reference.

Assessing the Social Story

Once you've started using the social story, make sure to monitor the social story for effectiveness in the autistic person's routine.

- Once it is integrated into the routine, monitor the social story for effectiveness.
 - Make sure to update the social story when necessary
 - Write new social stories when the time comes

iPad Accessories

iPads are far less resilient than other assistive devices on the market for autistic children, and it's a necessary part of using an iPad to have accessories to protect it from wear and tear. These are the accessories you need to protect an iPad:

1. A protective case
2. A screen protector (anti glare would be best).

Protective Cases

Some of these links are affiliate links; it's considered good etiquette to disclose when something is an affiliate link. But remember, why would we have affiliate deals set up with these companies if their product really wasn't awesome and worth sharing?

- [OtterBox Affiliate Link](#)

OtterBox is an accessory company, and they make a wide range of ruggedized cases and accessories for every phone imaginable. Today, however, we are focusing on their line of iPad cases, in the Defender style.

The Defender style case is their most rugged line of cases, and is perfect for using with those with autism. It can handle being dropped repeatedly, thrown, left in piles of dirt, and pretty much anything short of being completely submerged in water.

OtterBox is a very widely used brand, and in addition to being available online, they are available in any cell phone or electronics store.

- [LifeProof Affiliate Link 25% off](#)

LifeProof cases are phone and tablet cases known for their distinctive feature - the original line of cases, nüüd, is completely waterproof.

If the OtterBox case is not enough protection for you, you can pay a premium for LifeProof cases which should stand up to anything short of a volcanic eruption.

However, the disadvantage (or perhaps the advantage) of this case is that it's extremely difficult to take off and put on. This is bad for you, because whenever you want to change some setting on the device or back it up to the computer (if you're not using iCloud), you have to pry the case off. The advantage is that the person with autism would also have trouble taking the case off, keeping the iPad protected.

They even have a [sweet accessory](#) which assures that the iPad will float in water - meaning the person with autism can play with the pad in the pool, if they are frequent pool-goers.

- [Weight Shock Case Affiliate](#)

This is a foam case that comes at a far less steep price than our two most highly recommended cases above. It is made out of treated foam to protect the iPad from bumps and falls, and has a handle on the case which also doubles as a stand. A treated foam case like this is excellent for someone on a budget.

- [Bumper Handle iPad Case Affiliate](#)

This case has handles on every side of the iPad, and so is convenient for someone with autism who is on the go a lot or who tends to hold things limply in their hand or drop them. It is also inexpensive and is made out of treated foam, like the previous product.

However, this case also comes with a kids stylus and screen protector, so that a person who has trouble tapping on the screen where they intend to can use the stylus instead.

- [Griffin Survivor Case Affiliate](#)

The Griffin Survivor case is similar to the OtterBox defender case explained earlier, but it has a different look. We always go with Otterbox cases and have

more experience with them, but there's no reason not to go with the Griffin Survivor case line, either.

iPad Settings

There are a lot of settings on the iPad that are changeable, and as a caretaker there are some you will want to know about.

Settings to Increase Battery Life:

- **Turn off wifi and cellular data.** If you're not planning to use an app which needs data from the internet, turn these off to increase battery life dramatically.
- **Turn off data fetch.** Some apps on the iPad automatically download data from the internet, and turning this process off by making it manual will also dramatically lengthen battery life.
- **Keep apps up to date.** Software engineers update the apps all the time, and sometimes the updates include optimizations for battery life.
- **Turn down the brightness.** Turning down the brightness will increase battery life on the iPad as well.

Guided Access:

Guided access is a setting on the iPad that allows you to restrict the app usage of an iPad. It is useful for autistic people who might have trouble focusing or staying in one app, and it limits the amount of apps they can jump around to (or what buttons they can press).

General > Settings > Accessibility > Guided Access

Next, go to the app you want to start the session with and triple-click the home button. Then determine the areas of the screen you want to turn off for the app, and they will be disabled until you triple click the home button and enable them again. This is child protection for every app you have, regardless of whether the app has child protection.

Parental Restrictions

General > Restrictions

Parental Restrictions has a lot of wonderful options for turning things off and on on your iPad. They allow you to disable many of the functions on the iPad a parent might find dubious, and they can only be turned on by entering the passcode again in the Settings app.

We recommend opening up this section of the iPad yourself, to pick out which settings you do and don't find appropriate. Generally, give the person as much

freedom as is possible, rather than less because you fear for their safety. Most people when presented with inappropriate content will lose interest, rather than poke around.

- We also recommend turning off Siri, since it will get activated a lot more by accident than used, most likely.
- We recommend limiting the age restriction on downloadable apps, but not eliminating downloads all together, because downloading and learning to use new apps encourages computer skills and learning new software on their own. If you limit the age to appropriate ages, almost all games will be easy to use and a good experience. The freedom to download your own apps is something which is important to growing people.
- We recommend disallowing Safari altogether, since advertisements in apps can cause Safari to open, and generally the Safari app can be a huge distraction if not used correctly. However, if the child has websites they like to use which are available on the iPad and do not have their own app, you should leave it available.

In-App Restrictions:

General > Parental Restrictions

Some apps, like YouTube, have their own parental restrictions available within the app. Apple apps have parental restrictions available in settings.

Chances are, you are going to want apps like the App Store, iTunes, and Stock Market unavailable on the iPad, since these are not appropriate or relevant to the person with autism.

iCloud Accounts

We recommend making separate iCloud accounts for the person with autism and then buying the apps you want on those accounts, because if it's the same account it will share all iCloud data and apps, which means apps you have (Google Mail, e.t.c.) will be on their devices, as well as they will receive all alerts such as calendars and that. You don't want that.

If iCloud accounts are kept separate, they can have iCloud backing up and syncing, meaning you don't have to repossess the iPad every so often to sync it or take care of it.

Closing

iPads are amazing, flexible tools that can be used to bring about fantastic improvements in the life of a child with autism. We hope that you'll be able to get your hands on an iPad and get one for those in your life with autism.

Thanks,

Pufferfish Software