

Bad Apples on the Family Tree

The news that a child in the family is autistic is most often met with a number of reactions. While all family members, even extended, would be supportive in an ideal world, the sad truth is that many are disgusted or disappointed. Does a family member scold the autistic child often? Does he or she look at your autistic child unfairly? Does this family member insist on treating your autistic child the same way he or she treats all the other children in your family, even when it is inappropriate? These are signs that this relative is not receptive to either your autistic child or the situation. This may often be the case when discovering a child is autistic, so as a parent, be aware and prepared for this to happen.

Often, unreceptive relatives simply do not understand what autism is or what it means for your child and your immediate family. Though many see autism as a mental retardation, many autistic children and adults are highly intelligent; they are just unable to communicate this in the same ways that others would. Try explaining what autism means to this family member, and have him or her spend some time with you and your autistic child. Allow them to see the effects of autism and the methods you can use to cope.

If the family member continues to be unsupportive or refuses your explanation, ask why this family member is so unreceptive to the situation. Are they scared of hurting the child? Are they worried about the added responsibility when spending time with the child? Perhaps they feel guilty or are embarrassed. If you can pinpoint why a family member is unreceptive, you can better address the issue and hopefully help him or her overcome their original perceptions.

Perhaps no amount of talking or spending time together will help this family member overcome their prejudice. If this person has stubbornly made up his or her mind, you will never be able to show him or her how beautiful your son or daughter is-autism and all. If this is the case, eliminating this person from your life may be difficult, but it will also rid you and your child of this family member's negative energy and personality. In this developing situation, you need the best positive support available. Remember that other family members have been supportive; that your children are adjusting well and are a source of strength for you. Strengthen your support network by participating in parent support groups for autistic children. And remember that you can surround yourself with those who do accept and love your child-family or not.