



Building Confidence in Autistic Children

A practical, positive guide for families, teachers, and support professionals

- Every child has strengths, interests, and the ability to learn.
- Confidence develops when children feel safe, respected, and understood.
- Focus on progress—not perfection.



What does confidence look like?

Confidence can be quiet, gradual, and different for every child.

- Trying a new activity, even with support.
- Asking for help or communicating a need in their own way.
- Making a choice, completing a small task, or joining a group.
- Recovering from a mistake and trying again.



Start with strengths and interests

Use what the child enjoys as a bridge to learning.

- If a child loves trains, practise counting with train pictures.
- If a child enjoys drawing, offer drawing as a way to share ideas.
- If a child likes puzzles, use a puzzle to practise turn-taking.
- Celebrate effort and curiosity—not only correct answers.



Create small, achievable steps

Break a big task into manageable parts and build gradually.

- Example: Instead of ‘get ready for school,’ practise one step at a time: put on socks, then shoes, then pack the bag.
- Use a visual schedule or picture checklist when helpful.
- Offer extra time, predictable routines, and breaks.
- Reduce prompts slowly as the child becomes more independent.



Use positive and specific encouragement

Tell the child exactly what they did well.

- Say: ‘You asked for a break—good communicating!’
- Say: ‘You tried the first step by yourself.’
- Avoid comparisons with siblings or classmates.
- Praise should be genuine and comfortable for the child; never force eye contact or social performance.



Support communication and choice

Respect speech, gestures, writing, pictures, and AAC.

- Offer two clear choices: ‘Would you like blocks or drawing?’
- Wait patiently for the child to respond.
- Teach useful phrases or symbols such as ‘help,’ ‘stop,’ and ‘break.’
- Treat communication attempts as meaningful, even when they look different.



Build social confidence at the child's pace

Make peer interaction welcoming, structured, and optional.

- Example: Start with a shared game with one supportive peer and a clear turn-taking routine.
- Use shared interests to create natural opportunities to connect.
- Prepare the child for changes and explain what to expect.
- Respect a child's need for quiet time or solitary play.



Help children learn from mistakes

Mistakes are part of learning—not a reason for shame.

- Model calm self-talk: ‘That was tricky. I can try another way.’
- Offer help without taking over immediately.
- Notice persistence: ‘You kept going after it got hard.’
- If a child becomes overwhelmed, prioritise regulation and safety before teaching.



Work together: home, school, and support team

Consistent, respectful support helps skills transfer across settings.

- Share what motivates the child and what causes stress.
- Agree on simple goals that matter to the child and family.
- Use similar visual supports where practical.
- Review progress regularly and adjust strategies with the child's needs in mind.



A simple confidence-building activity

The 'I can' board: make strengths visible without pressure.

- Invite the child to choose a picture or write one thing they did.
- Examples: 'I put my shoes on,' 'I asked for help,' 'I tried a new game.'
- Add one achievement at a time; the child may choose not to share it.
- End with a warm message: 'You are valued just as you are.'



Remember

Confidence is not about making a child appear ‘less autistic.’

- It is about helping the child feel safe, capable, included, and heard.
- Respect sensory needs, communication differences, boundaries, and individuality.
- Celebrate meaningful progress at the child’s own pace.
- Small steps, patient support, and belonging can make a lasting difference.