

# Sun Safety Tips for Autistic Children



## **Keeping children safe in the sun is a priority for all parents and carers, especially in Summer and especially in Australia.**

It's important that we protect children from the harmful UV rays and sunburn that can lead to long-term skin damage. Many Autistic children experience sensory sensitivities which can make some of the sun safety advice given hard to follow. There are ways to keep your child safe from the sun while also taking their sensory needs into consideration. Here you can find some tips to help make sun protection for your child a little easier.

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

- Try roll on or spray sunscreen. This type of sunscreen is not as thick as traditional pump or squeeze sunscreen, so it will need less rubbing in and may feel lighter on your child's skin. You can get sample sizes of different sunscreens and try a variety until you find one that works. You can also try moisturisers with a high SPF for their face.
- Show your child how to apply sunscreen. Rub sunscreen on yourself and encourage your child to mimic the action on themselves.
- Sunscreen often feels most greasy when it is first applied so try distracting your child with a fun video or game while it soaks in. It should start to feel better once it is fully absorbed.
- Try different ways of applying sunscreen:
  - Use a soft make-up brush to gently apply face sunscreen.
  - If you are using roll on sunscreen, try drawing shapes with it to add some fun.
  - Try applying the sunscreen with firm pressure to help regulate the sensory experience.

*“Roll on sunscreen – we’ve never been burnt, and my kiddo can draw pictures and alphabets on his arm and legs whilst he gets a massage.”*

- Amaze Community Member -

### **2. Find comfortable, sun-smart clothing**

Wide brim hats and sleeved shirts with collars are perfect to wear when outdoors to help protect your child from the sun. Below are some sun-smart clothing suggestions you might want to try.

- If you can, try involving your child when picking out their sun smart clothing. Let them feel the different fabrics and try on hats to find what they like and feel comfortable in.
- Look for hats or shirts which link to your child's interests or likes, as this can help them get excited to wear it.
- The Cancer Council recommends fabrics that are woven together more tightly (e.g., linen, cotton, hemp) as they let fewer UV rays through.

### 3. Spend time out of direct sunlight

- Find covered areas out of the sun for your child to sit and play or create shade with a pop-up tent if you're going to the beach or a park.
- Check the weather app to see what the UV index is for the day and plan your child's outdoor activities before or after high-UV times.
- Use a parasol or umbrella when walking to create shade. You may want to buy a smaller umbrella for your little one to use and hold themselves.

*“My son is sensitive to fragrance, I bought small tubes of sunscreen for him to try the smell of. When we found one that he tolerated, we encouraged him to apply sunscreen for himself and on us to get him used to the sensation of it.”*

- Amaze Community Member -

### 4. Create a routine

- Talk to your child about the importance of sun safety in a way they can understand. Make sure they know why they need to put on sunscreen and wear protective clothing.
- Use visual aids, such as posters or social scripts, to teach them about sun safety. Make a 'sunny day' routine to help them understand the steps they need to take to be sun safe.
- Give your child plenty of warning before they need to put on sunscreen, if possible, and try avoiding surprising them with suddenly needing to put on sunscreen.
- Offer your child choices when getting them ready to go outdoors (e.g., “Would you like to wear the red hat or blue hat?” or “Would you like to wear long sleeves or put sunscreen on your arms?”). Giving your child a choice in some of these decisions can help them feel empowered to make safe and sun smart choices.

It might take time to find a sun smart routine and products that work well for your child. Don't get discouraged if not everything you try works – keep trying new strategies and keep building your child's understanding of sun safety. A good sun protection routine means your family can spend valuable time together outside without the worry of sunburn or skin damage.

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