

# The Front Porch<sup>®</sup>

A magazine for Marley Park residents



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From Your Neighbors, For Your Neighbors

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# Autism Awareness

We have all witnessed what appears to be an individual having a meltdown. The individual is stressed, and the caregiver or person providing support feels overwhelmed. As a bystander and well-meaning person, you may want to offer a helping hand. But there may be more to the situation than meets the eye. For an individual with autism, things like sensory overload, audience or the environment may further impact their behavior. Knowing these few tips can mean the difference between helping or making an already stressful situation worse.

Don't approach the situation unless asked. This is likely not the first time a meltdown situation has presented itself. A caregiver or person providing support to an individual with autism needs your understanding, not judgment. Approaching a caregiver or person providing support with comments can make them and the individual feel inadequate, uncomfortable, embarrassed, or even increase anxiety.

These caregivers are adept at knowing their reactions to certain situations and will know how

to calm the individual when episodes occur. They will know the individual best and how to support them.

Don't stare.

Some caregivers or persons providing support and the individual may be self-conscious about their behaviors and can be embarrassed by your reactions. The individual may notice your stares and feel blamed for them. Be a gentle presence that doesn't judge. This is the best way to offer support.

Stop. Look. Listen.

Individuals with autism thrive in calm, familiar, and supportive environments. If you come upon a situation where you are wondering if you should help, do the following:

Stop: don't feel the need to comment and only assist if asked.

Look: see if the caregiver or person providing support is signaling for assistance. If so, be helpful and take action by following their instructions.

Listen: pay attention and take action if the caregiver asks you to assist in some way.

More information about autism, diagnosis, and treatment is available at <https://www.sbhservices.org/southwest-autism-center>.



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