

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Balancing safety and autonomy: reasonable risk for autistic adults

Every skill your family member has ever learned came with some risk attached. Cooking risks burns. Community access risks getting lost. The internet risks exploitation. Relationships risk heartbreak. Zero risk isn't safety. It's a smaller life. Here is a framework for the difference.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · THE ETHICS OF A BIGGER LIFE

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DOMAINS WORTH THE RISK

Cooking. Community access. Internet use. Relationships. Each one can be approached with gradual exposure and real safeguards instead of a blanket no.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Name the actual risk

Not "something bad could happen." The specific, plausible harm, and how likely it actually is.



STEP 2

Build the safeguard

A safeguard that reduces the specific risk without eliminating the activity that makes life worth living.



STEP 3

Expose gradually

Small supervised steps, widened as competence and confidence grow, not an all-or-nothing leap.

The reasonable risk framework

Name it	What specifically could go wrong, and how likely is it really?
Size it	Is the harm survivable and recoverable, or catastrophic and irreversible?
Safeguard it	Build a specific protection sized to the specific risk.
Expose gradually	Small supervised steps, widened as competence grows.
Review and adjust	What worked, what didn't, what changes next time.

A STORY WE KNOW

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Devon's parents had never let him use the stove, worried about burns, until he was twenty-six. A support worker suggested starting with one task: toasting bread under supervision. Then scrambling eggs. Then, six months later, a full simple meal, alone, with his parents in the next room the first few times and eventually not at all. He burned himself once, a minor one, and reached for the aloe vera without panicking, because he'd been taught what to do if it happened. His parents said the six months of small steps did something bigger than teach him to cook. It taught them what he could actually handle, which turned out to be more than either of them had believed.

COMPETENCE WAS THERE THE WHOLE TIME. IT JUST NEEDED A DOOR OPENED GRADUALLY.

What matters, at a glance

Cooking

Real risk: minor burns, cuts. Safeguard: supervised first attempts, one task at a time, safety equipment as habit, not lecture.

Community access

Real risk: getting disoriented or lost. Safeguard: a practiced route, a communication card, a check-in plan, widened as competence grows.

Internet use

Real risk: exploitation, scams. Safeguard: explicit conversations about red flags, not a blanket ban that just moves the risk underground.

Relationships

Real risk: heartbreak, poor judgment in a new situation. Safeguard: an ongoing, honest conversation, not surveillance or prohibition.

Exposure, not exposure therapy

Widen the circle one supervised success at a time. Confidence is built from real, survived attempts, not permission granted all at once.

Zero risk has a cost too

A life with no risk in it is also a life with no cooking, no community, no internet, and no relationships. That cost is real and often invisible.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ A list of avoided activities, ranked by how much they'd add to daily life | ☐ A specific, sized-down first step for the top one |
| ☐ A safeguard built for the actual risk, not the imagined one | ☐ A debrief habit after each attempt |
| ☐ A willingness to widen the circle even when it's uncomfortable | |

YOUR MOVE

When fear has been running the decision, here is how you hand some of it back

- 1 Pick one avoided domain and name the specific, actual risk.
- 2 Size the risk: survivable and recoverable, or genuinely dangerous.
- 3 Build one specific safeguard sized to that risk.
- 4 Try the smallest possible supervised version this week.
- 5 Debrief what worked and what needs adjusting.
- 6 Widen the circle slightly and repeat.

A burn heals. A life spent waiting for permission to try does not.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

lifecoursetools.com · <https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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