

How to Talk to your Child about an Autism Diagnosis

Keep a positive attitude about differences in the family. Talk about each family member's unique qualities, such as physical characteristics, likes and dislikes, and aspects of personality, like sense of humor.

Set aside concerns that your child will not understand Autism, become angry, or give up on options for his/her future. That may or may not happen, with or without disclosure.

Be honest. Stalling or not providing information will not help your child. He/she may hear (or overhear) things from others. If you do not disclose, your child might make incorrect assumptions about his situation. He might feel he is disliked or always in trouble. He may know he is different, but not know why.

Try to pick up cues from your child to determine his readiness for disclosure. All children are not ready to learn about Autism at the same time. There is no recommended age for this discussion. Consider your child's awareness and abilities.

Begin with an explanation. Start with clear but minimal information and add more over time. For example, you could tell your child that Autism is something he is born with. He needs supports for some things, but he is really good at others. If possible, talk about activities and strategies that could be helpful. Older children may be open to a more detailed discussion about the characteristics associated with Autism and different therapeutic and educational options. In addition, they might be interested in greater involvement in decisions about their own care.

Present information to your child in preferred, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate ways. What will work best? Books, videos, websites, meeting others on the Spectrum? Think about, and when you can, preview your choices.

Assure your child that others have had the same experiences and concerns. Let him know you are available to talk about Autism and to answer (or find answers to) additional questions at any time.

Persevere. Disclosure is not a one-time event; it is an ongoing process. Few individuals, of any age, immediately understand this type of diagnosis. It is likely you will repeat the same information in different forms over time.

Be proud of your work as a parent. You informed your child about his diagnosis, and you will support him now and in the future. Your positive attitude is the foundation for his self-understanding and self-acceptance.



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