

How to Talk to Your Child About Being on the Autism Spectrum

Early conversations can help your child understand themselves better and promote positive self-identity. Talking about autism early allows your child to embrace who they are and feel empowered.



Key Message

- Autism is a part of who you are, and it's something to be proud of.
- Reassure them that autism doesn't change your love or expectations.
- Let your child know they are loved, valued, and accepted just as they are.

An example may be: "Autism is part of what makes you unique and special! It is ok that you do things differently!"

Use Simple, Positive Language

- Explain autism to your child in a simple way they can understand:
 - Keep it light, positive, and factual so they feel safe and understood.
 - Adjust your explanation to fit their age and how much they can understand.

An example may be: "Autism means your brain works in a special way. It helps you think, learn, and see the world differently. That's what makes you unique!"



Normalize Differences

- Let them know that everyone's brain works differently and that diversity in how people think, feel, and act is normal.
- Explain that autism is a natural brain difference. It's not "wrong" or "bad." Everyone is different.

An example may be: "Some people's brains help them run really fast or tell funny jokes. Your brain helps you notice things others might miss."

Highlight Their Strengths

- Focus on positive aspects of autism, such as:
 - Attention to detail or the ability to focus deeply on subjects they love.
 - Unique ways of solving problems or understanding things that others might not.
- Emphasize how these strengths make them capable.

An example may be: "It takes minds of all kinds and different perspectives to transform the world!"





Provide Examples of Autistic Role Models

- Share stories of successful autistic people. Temple Grandin, Greta Thunberg, Albert Einstein, Elon Musk, Mozart, Bill Gates, Lionel Messi, Tim Burton, and others may inspire your child.

An example may be: *"There are many people, like Temple Grandin and Greta Thunberg, who are autistic and have done amazing things in the world."*

Answer Their Questions

- Be open and honest and encourage your child to ask questions.
- You don't have to know all the answers; you can learn together!

Questions may be: *"What is autism?"; "Does being autistic mean I can do the same things as other people?"; "Why don't people understand me?" If you don't know an answer, say, "That's a great question. Let's learn about it together."*



Recognize Challenges with Understanding and Acceptance

- Discuss strategies, such as using headphones, taking breaks, or asking for support when needed.
- Be honest about challenges but frame them in a supportive way.

An example may be: *"Sometimes loud noises or bright lights can feel too much, and that's okay. Everyone has things that are hard for them."*

Reinforce Self-Advocacy

- Teach your child it's okay to ask for help, like extra time on homework or a quiet space to relax.
- Encourage them to express their needs and advocate for themselves.
- Empower your child to decide if and when they want to share their diagnosis with other people.

An example may be: *"It's ok to raise your hand in class to ask for a break if you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious."*



Keep the Conversation Ongoing

- It's crucial to keep the dialogue open as your child's understanding evolves.
- Regularly revisit the conversation to address new challenges and experiences.
- It's okay not to have all the answers. Your support and openness are what matter most.
- Conversations will naturally change as your child grows and their needs and understanding shift.

