

# 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.

