



Day to Day: How Do I Tell My Child He/She Has Autism? Easy ways to help your child everyday

You have received the news of your child's diagnosis, and you have taken the time to get started on therapies and interventions. Now that you have begun navigating your child's diagnosis, you may start to wonder if your child notices anything different about him or herself.



How:

- **Visually** and/or **verbally** depending on how your child takes in information best.
- Share the information at the **right level**.
- Create a **social story**. Read "Pictures of Me" by Carol Gray for a great example.
- **Involve someone that the child trusts**. Have a conversation with just you and your child, or family, or friend, or pediatrician. Who does your child connect to best?
- Make sure you are well prepared for the conversation. If disclosure is presented without enough background, the child can be frightened and upset, so make sure you **prepare** your child with phrases according to his/her personality.
- Start by helping your child focus on his/her characteristics—such as his/her **strengths**, challenges, and the way he/she learns. Be **positive**. Say something like, "Everyone is unique. Everyone has things that they are good at, and things that are more difficult for them".
- Don't be too vague, **be honest, direct, and open**. Allow your child to ask questions, but know that it is OK to not have all of the answers. Explain that you will find out together!

When:

- The first, and most important thing you need to ask yourself is: **Am I ready** to tell my child about his/her diagnosis? It is important to make sure **you** understand the diagnosis.
- A child is ready for disclosure when they have sufficient **awareness** of their differences from other people. Have they began to ask questions like, "Why am I having such a hard time in gym class" or "Why is it so hard for me to make friends in school?"
- Think of the **possible reactions** from your child, and think of how you will respond: Positive- something special, they may not fully understand the diagnosis; Negative- why me?
- Assess what your child already knows and what he/she is **ready** to hear: How much can he/she understand?
- Oftentimes telling your child sooner rather than later will allow for children to learn **self advocacy**.



The Autism Program
AT BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER



Day to Day: How Do I Tell My Child He/She Has Autism? Easy ways to help your child everyday

A **four-step** framework for sharing an autism diagnosis to a child (as well as siblings) includes:

1) First, help your child develop awareness of his/her **strengths** and **challenges**, for example: "I'm strong in music but I struggle with math".



2) Next, help your child line up his/her strengths and challenges by exploring how to find strengths that can make up- for challenges. These are called **compensatory skills**. For example, a child who is good with computers can perhaps prepare his school reports this way if penmanship is a challenge.



3) Third, help your child compare his/her own characteristics with those of other people he/she knows and looks up to. Keep judgment out as much as possible. **We all have strengths that need to be noticed**. For example, help your child see, "I'm good at math and my sister is good at writing."



4) Fourth and finally, tell your child about the autism diagnosis in a **positive, matter-of-fact, and age-appropriate** manner.

Adapted from Autismspeaks.com

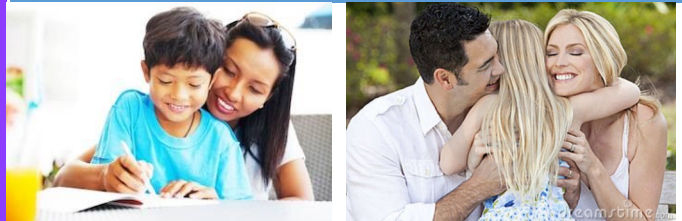


For more information visit:

www.bmc.org/pediatrics-autism-program

Think about what support you need :

- Confide in a friend, and/or find a friend who also has a child with Autism
- Ask your child's pediatrician or specialty care provider to assist you in talking about this
- Find a support group
- Become involved with AANE
- Access books about Autism
- Create time every week for just you



Think about ways to support your child after you have told them:

- Meet them where they are at: denial, indifference, and sadness.
- Provide them with more information, find the answers to their questions.
- Help build their self-esteem and confidence.
- They may want to talk about their diagnosis with their peers, or class. Guide them in how this will be done.
- Access our resources—including our Empowerment Guide by calling The Autism Program at Boston Medical Center at (617) 414-3842



The Autism Program
AT BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER