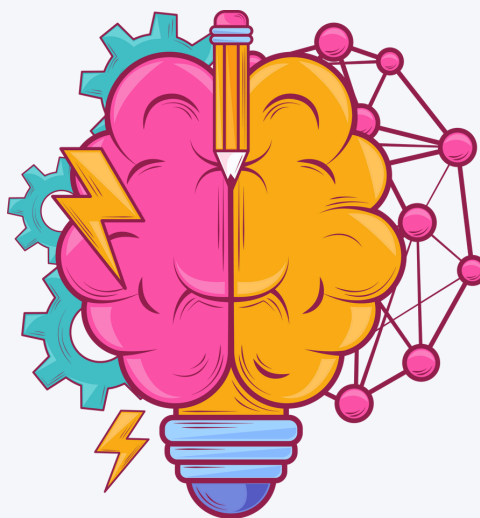


Talking to a child about being autistic

*This resource is aimed at children aged roughly 6-10 years old. It is designed to be a script on how to speak to your child, but these are just some suggestions, adjust the language and examples for your child's age and ability.

Everyone is different. For example, some people are tall, some short. Some have blue eyes, some brown. Some people can run really fast, others can't. Some people are good at drawing, others may be good at writing.

Well, some people have brains that are wired differently. There are a lots of different ways your brain could be wired and there are different names for each type of brain there is. Some might be dyslexic, which means they might have a harder time with reading or writing. Some might have ADHD which means their brains can be super busy and energetic and hard to keep focused. And some (perhaps like you), are autistic.



Being autistic means a lot of things but in short, your brain is a bit different to most other people. You'll be really good at things that other people aren't, and you might need a bit of help with other things. For example:

- You might enjoy lining up your toys, while others might like pretending the toys are alive and making stories with them
- You might not like looking at people's eyes when they talk while other people look at each other's eyes to show they're listening
- You might like jumping or flapping your hands
- You might be able to hear, smell and taste a lot more than other people can
- You might not understand when people talk using silly words like "raining cats and dogs"
- You might not like it when things change
- You might have really big emotions and need a bit of help figuring out how to handle them
- You might be really good at making plans or thinking about things in a way that others don't
- You might be very good at quickly fixing problems
- You might be very good at collecting facts and remembering information about things you're interested in

Being different is okay. It might come with some hard parts but it also comes with some really good parts. Autism is part of what makes you who you are, and just like everyone else, you get to learn what it means to be you, what you're good at, what you're not good at, and what makes you stand out.



Note for parents/guardians

It's natural to worry about telling your child about their diagnosis too soon or even at all, or about them not being able to understand. However, if your child is able to understand differences between people, they are able to start learning about the differences between brains. If your child is autistic, even if they don't know about their diagnosis, they will realise they are different to their peers, they will likely experience some kind of negative labelling and without an explanation, that can be much harder to shake. Even if your child is not autistic, lacking an understanding for difference puts them in a position where they might contribute to the isolation or mistreatment of others around them who are different. It is important, even from a young age, to be taught about diversity, and that includes invisible disabilities such as autism.

When teaching a child about such things, it is important to use positive or neutral language and take it into consideration if they, or other autistic people tell you that your language is coming across negatively. It can be very easy to unknowingly or unintentionally come off the wrong way, especially if your brain isn't wired the same. However, if the child is autistic, this is a part of them that impacts practically every part of their life and who they are, having a positive or neutral frame around it will foster a better sense of self-esteem and wellbeing.

If your child has questions about autism, do your best to answer them. If you don't know or you want to make sure you're using trustworthy resources, you can reach out to us at Autism NZ.