

Tips for sharing a diagnosis

There isn't one right way to tell your loved one about their diagnosis. Every family's explanation will be different, and they could choose to share it at different times.

Telling someone about their diagnosis enables them to develop an understanding of themselves, develop a sense of identity and creates an opportunity for discussion.

Considerations when telling someone about their diagnosis:

- Think about the person's needs specifically not relying on textbook explanations or definitions of autism: You could create an 'All About Me' profile which describes their diagnosis. See our template for help with this.
- Choose the right time: Sometimes parents will tell their family member about their diagnosis during a difficult time in their lives. This can then attach negative feelings to the diagnosis and could lead to the person associating autism with bad times or feeling sad.
- Reframe the way you talk about autism: Explaining it in terms of differences in neurology could be a good place to start.
- Be prepared: Ensure you have the most up-to-date information from credible sources so that you can answer any questions in an informed way. If you don't know the answers to any questions, asked that's fine you could research the answers together with them.
- Make sure you aren't reinforcing any misconceptions that exist in relation to autism: You may feel it's beneficial to talk about the fact misconceptions exist in order to widen understanding.
- Use past experiences as a tool for learning: For example, if comments have been made in the past about the persons struggle to process too many instructions at the same time, explain why this may be.

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- It really is beneficial to feel part of the autistic community. Introducing groups with other autistic people may be useful.
 - Use tools such as books to help support your explanation: Ensure you read the book first to make sure it is relevant and doesn't focus on any misconceptions.
 - Be honest and open: Try not to hide anything you don't want their autism to be associated with something that you should hide or be ashamed of.
 - Create an open line of communication: Encourage feelings around their diagnosis to be discussed and encourage questions. Create a method for this that the person is comfortable with. For example, a question box.
 - Revisit the conversation: The first discussion is likely to include a lot of information that the person will need time to process. Revisiting the discussion allows time for information they may have missed to be absorbed and for questions to be asked.
 - Consider the environment when you're telling your loved one about their diagnosis: Ensure you are in a familiar, comfortable and distraction free environment and choose a moment when you are both in a calm mood. You also don't want to be interrupted during your conversation so consider this too.
 - You know this person best: Every person is unique and will be ready to discuss things at different times. Take their lead.
 - Some people may become very anxious that there is something seriously wrong with them. You may need to emphasise that being autistic is not a disease and you can't die from it. It may be that you can ask your GP for support with this, so they are able to offer scientific answers and explanations to questions.