

Sharing an Autism Diagnosis with the School

Why it's important

Sharing your child's autism diagnosis with their school is an important step. It can help develop positive relationships between teachers and students and create a better learning environment.



Reasons to tell the school

Some advantages in sharing your child's diagnosis with teaching staff are:

- Your child can be encouraged in their areas of strength or interest.
- An improved understanding of your child's behaviours.
- An opportunity for reasonable adjustments to be put in place to assist your child at school.
- The curriculum can be adapted to your child's learning style, such as presenting more information visually or adjusting the child's workload.
- Social difficulties at unstructured break times can be acknowledged and the child supported or allowed to do other activities at recess and lunch.

How to tell the school

You can share your child's diagnosis with teaching staff through:

- Meeting face-to-face
- Telephone
- Email

If you already have an agreed communication method, you may like to use that. If not, now is a good time to talk to teaching staff to find the communication method that works best for everyone involved.

You may like to involve your child in talking to teaching staff about their diagnosis. This will depend on their age and how they feel about their diagnosis.

If you choose to share the diagnosis in a face-to-face meeting, you may wish to include other professionals who have assisted your child (e.g. speech pathologist, psychologist, or occupational therapist), so these professionals can also help in explaining your child's needs, strengths and difficulties.

One idea is to create a one-page *About Me* document that briefly outlines your child's strengths and challenges and lists strategies that can be used in the classroom. You can also include recommendations about education issues made in any assessment reports from professionals in this document.

The *About Me* document can be updated each year to be shared with each new teacher, and also any time you have new information that is important for your child's learning and wellbeing.

Talking about autism with classmates

Even in lower primary school, your child's classmates may begin to notice differences and ask questions about your child. It's a good idea to meet with your child's teacher and talk about the approach you'd like to use. You may also choose to involve your child in the discussion if they're interested and able. There are many different approaches but two options are:

- The teacher and/or your child leading a class discussion about the strengths and challenges of autism.
- A broader class discussion about the similarities and differences between people. This can form part of the 'personal and social capability' section of the Victorian Curriculum. Your child and the teacher may like to be prepared for questions about autism and other disabilities.

Tips for inclusion and acceptance

It's important that your child's school is inclusive and accepting of differences.

Schools can do this by:

- Encouraging inclusion in the classroom and the playground by letting the class know why your child has difficulties in some areas. The teacher can encourage students to be supportive and helpful to your child by informing them about ways to help—for example, 'Billy doesn't like it when people walk too close to him in line. If Billy looks upset, move one arm's length away so he can have some space.'
- Helping classmates become more accepting that some children need adjustments to help

them learn—for example, 'Lily needs a stress ball in class, and Tim needs glasses; these both help them learn.'

Concerns about discrimination

If you have concerns about discrimination before or after sharing an autism diagnosis with your child's school, you can read the Disability Discrimination Act. This federal law applies to every school in Australia and says it is not acceptable to discriminate against people with a disability. There's a link to the Act in the *Resources* section below.

Resources

- Dundon, Raelene (2018). *Talking with your child about their autism diagnosis. A guide for parents*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, Philadelphia.
- This website has helpful information about the rights of students with a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act: <http://www.ddaedustandards.info/dda-edu/resources.htm>
- **Autism and Learning Plans at School** is a free online resource developed by Amaze for parents, students and teachers. To access the resource go to: <http://www.amaze.org.au/discover/about-autism-spectrum-disorder/resources/amaze-online-learning-portal/> and follow the instructions.

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