

## Information Sheet

# Sharing an Autism Diagnosis with the School

Updated June 2016.

This information sheet describes ways you can share the diagnosis of autism with your child's school. It is for families of a child who is on the autism spectrum.

### Should I Tell the School?

Many children will be diagnosed with autism just before or shortly after they begin primary school. This means the decision on how open to be about the diagnosis may need to be made shortly after it is made. This information sheet has been written to support parents in making the decision to share their child's diagnosis with the school.

### Reasons to Tell the School

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

- The child can be encouraged in their areas of strength or interest.
- Accommodations can be made for the child's behaviours which may otherwise be thought of as naughtiness, rather than a lack of social understanding, sensory overload, or problems with the organisation needed to complete a task.
- The curriculum can be adapted to the child's learning style, such as presenting more information visually or adjusting the child's workload.
- Social difficulties at break-times can be acknowledged and the child supported or allowed to do alternative activities at recess and lunch.

### How to Tell the School

Sharing the diagnosis with the teaching staff is best done in a face-to-face meeting. The parent may wish to include other professionals who have assisted the child (e.g. speech pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist), so these professionals can also help in explaining the child's needs, strengths, and difficulties. Alternatively, copies of any assessment reports completed may be shared with the teaching staff, if recommendations are made in the reports specifically about education issues. The process of information sharing with teaching staff may need to be repeated each year, for each new teacher.

**A note to parents:** in fairness to teaching staff, it is best to ensure written information about autism given is concise and offers strategies specific to the student. Other issues can then be discussed during the year as they arise.

### Talking about autism with classmates and friends

Often in lower primary school, the child's classmates begin to notice differences and ask



questions about the student with autism. The teacher may choose to respond to individual children as questions arise, or there may be several reasons to inform all the class together about the diagnosis. Reasons to inform classmates may include:

- Preventing bullying or teasing by pointing out why the child has difficulties in some areas. The teacher can encourage students to be supportive and helpful to the student with autism, by informing them about specific ways to help. (eg. 'Billy finds it difficult 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').
- Stopping misinformation about the student being circulated in other student's gossip. (such as 'Billy is weird, don't play with him')
- Preventing 'perceived favouritism' – helping classmates become more accepting that some accommodations may be made for the student with autism, that won't be available for them.

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