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Understanding Autism Spectrum

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Sharing a Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum with Your Child

Podcast 1

Welcome to my podcast. I'm Anna Tullemans bringing you information, support and tips on all aspects of Autism Spectrum.

Today's podcast is part of a series of podcasts on how to share a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum. Today we will be discussing sharing the diagnosis with your child and further individual podcasts deal with family and friends, grandparents and siblings.

You will find more information in my book "Disclosing the Diagnosis" which is available on my website: www.annatulleman.com.au . Each chapter gives specific ideas and encouragement on how to approach the topic of diagnosis and how to explain it in language that people will understand. It includes chapters for grandparents, siblings and extended family members.

Remember that the following is just a starting point to give you ideas. It is not definitive by any means. You need to look at what approach will work best for you and your family. You know your child best so follow your instincts and it will be the right way for you.

When discussing the topic of diagnosis, it's not just about the label, but also finding relevant examples that are pertinent and realistic to your child and your family circumstances. Eg "sometimes you find it hard to share your toys with your brother", or "sometimes you find it hard to control your anger". We'll discuss this in more detail a little later in the podcast.

Remember that we use the same kind of language and strategies to share the diagnosis with the family as we do with the child so before disclosing:

- Think about the words you are going to use
- Make sure the words you are going to use are appropriate to the age group
- Make sure you are comfortable and ready to talk about it
- That you have the right information that is specific for your child
- Be ready for some negative push back

Steps to helping you share the diagnosis



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- Find out what the child already knows and help to clear up some of the questions they may have
- Explain the diagnosis in terms that the child understands – think about the words they would understand
- Be positive
- Talk about the strengths your child has and then talk about the challenges
 - Eg you are really good at... but you find it hard to... and that this is sometimes called Autism Spectrum.
- Tell them that knowing about this will help them to understand themselves and why they do the things they do
- Tell them there are others who have the same diagnosis and that's why we know so much about it

Introducing the Diagnosis

Knowing about the diagnosis has many benefits and the best one is that the child can understand what he needs to do for himself.

My son (who was diagnosed at the age of 6 and is now an adult) always said that he wanted to know more about Autism Spectrum so he could find ways to help himself instead of constantly being told what to do and what not to do. He was so sick and tired of adults telling him that he was doing it wrong. As an adult he is thankful for the information that was presented to him in a way that he could understand. He is now able to modify and change my ideas to suit himself and his environment.

Another benefit is that children may hear you talking about the diagnosis and may be fearful that they have a fatal disease or they have contracted some form of coronavirus. One young person I was working with, Samuel, was so relieved when his parents talked to him about the diagnosis. He had overheard a conversation where his parents said that they didn't know what to do for him, and he thought he was dying. The year before, his grandfather had died in hospital. What he remembered was that the doctor had said there was nothing else they could do for his grandfather just before he died.

A great way to start the conversation is the indirect approach. I.e. by reading books and novels where one of the characters has Autism Spectrum. You can talk about the characteristics of these people and find some that your child shares with them. There is a list of books that are suitable for each age group at the end of each chapter in my book "Disclosing the Diagnosis".

When discussing the diagnosis always start with strengths:

- "You always remember which way to go..."
- "You do jigsaw puzzles really fast..."
- "You are a great reader and love reading about dinosaurs..."



Then discuss the challenges:

- “You find it hard to follow other children’s rules when you are playing...”
- “You always have to be the boss when you play...”
- “You get really upset when...”

Make sure that there is balance between both.

You may find that there are two kinds of reactions from your child:

- Relief – I’m not stupid
- Denial – Nothing wrong with me, it’s you who is the problem

Teenagers can go either way, depending on how successful their attempts have been at working it out themselves. Just be ready with more explanations and information when they are ready to listen.

Well I hope you have enjoyed this podcast on sharing the diagnosis with your child. This is number 1 in a series of sharing the diagnosis with grandparents, siblings, extended family, and friends.

If you would like more detailed information on this topic or to purchase a copy of my book “Disclosing the Diagnosis”, you can go to my website: annatullemans.com.au

Thank you for listening and we’ll see you next time.

