



Anna Tullemans

Understanding Autism Spectrum

Consultant – Author – Presenter



Sharing a Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum with Grandparents

Podcast 3

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 grandparents and further individual podcasts deal with sharing with the child, family and friends 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, extended family members and the wider community such as schools.

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.

It can be hard as grandparents when a grandchild is diagnosed with something they don't know about. Their first instinct is to usually help their own child as much as possible. Sometimes grandparents may feel frustrated and frightened for what the future will hold and they will need encouragement.

But something grandparents can do is build positive relationships and bond with the child with a diagnosis and provide help with the siblings.

You will have particular expectations which may need revising eg you may need to help the child learn how to give and receive cuddles and hugs. There is some great information in my book *The Fun Side of Aspergers* where I tell the story of Aunty Rina and hugs. I needed to teach my son how to give and receive hugs from extended family as this was very difficult for him.

The way you ask your grandchild to do different tasks needs to change too. You need to be very concrete, i.e. Black and White in your instructions.



annatulleman@gmail.com
www.annatulleman.com.au
0419 168 742

- Eg Instead of saying “ Can you wash up now?”
- Say “We’ll wash up now”

Or if you want to give a choice –

- “You can wash up now or in five minutes time”
 - Use a visual timer so they can see time passing for the 5 minutes

Babysitting

It could be that you might find it hard to babysit, but this is the perfect opportunity to create that I was talking about earlier.

Here are some tips on how to ensure that these visits are successful:

- Make sure that you are a part of the child’s regular people that he sees
 - This will help with consistency and structure
- Keep rules simple but consistent
 - You may need to make these as a visual to help the child remember
- Know what strategies work for the family and use these strategies so that there is consistency between home and your home
- Don’t be judgemental about parenting skills
 - It can be tough when as a parent you are constantly monitoring what you are doing to make sure that your household runs smoothly. Sometimes as parents we need to choose our battles and let some things just slide
- Always include your grandchild with Autism Spectrum in family activities
 - It can be hard but if we teach the child about self-regulation and give him some safe spaces he will manage family gatherings. There is a lot more information on how to include your child in family gatherings in the book *Disclosing the Diagnosis*.

I’d like to point out some things that grandparents shouldn’t do as well. We only want the best for our own children and sometimes we may say things that we don’t really mean. Eg

- Over reacting to the diagnosis.
 - It’s not the end of the world, it’s the beginning of a new adventure
- Doubting the diagnosis.
 - It can be easy to make judgement calls about behaviour, but the diagnosis is not made on just one incident. It is viewed over a period of time through many discussions
- Basing your expectations on movies or TV shows.
 - Each child is individual and progress at their own pace. Have realistic expectations that suit your grandchild and let them explore the world through their eyes but let them see that there are other points of view.



Making a difference

There are many ways that you can make a difference:

1. Don't judge or lay blame on anyone for the diagnosis
 - a. Parents need your support and encouragement to make the changes that will work for their child
2. View the diagnosis in perspective
 - a. It does not define the whole child, only part of them, but a diagnosis will help us to understand why the child perceives the world differently and gives us tools to help them understand and work with the world around them
3. Respect parental boundaries
 - a. Support your own child in their efforts to overcome the challenges they and their child will face. Validate their role as parents
4. Stick to limits and schedules that are established by parents
 - a. As a treat we would normally through routine out the window, but raising a child with Autism Spectrum requires that we stick to routine and structure as much as possible. This creates a safe haven for them as they are not good at problem solving and understanding why things have changed
 - b. If you are going to do things differently then always put these changes into context.
Eg
 - i. When you are at home you do it this way, but when you are here you can do it our way
5. Encourage independence
 - a. Provide opportunities for choice making and doing things for themselves. If it doesn't work help them to work through the decisions they made and give them other options which will help them to succeed eg
 - i. Eg the cup-cakes didn't rise enough. Talk through all the steps that were taken and discuss where the mistake might have been made
6. Spend special time with the sibling. Make them feel special too. Even though they understand the diagnosis, they may need some individual attention too as they need to feel validated and loved

Well I hope you have enjoyed this podcast on sharing the diagnosis with grandparents. This is number 3 in a series of sharing the diagnosis with the child, 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.





annatullemans@gmail.com
www.annatullemans.com.au
0419 168 742