

# How to talk to kids about others with autism

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Your child will meet people with all sorts of personalities and traits at school. It can be exciting, but there can also be challenges when it comes to understanding others.



Encountering autism in social and educational spaces may be confusing for your child, but it shouldn't be. Take the opportunity to open up a dialogue about neurodiversity with your kids.

Danielle Baron, a children's educator, coach and therapist, says: "Planting the seeds of awareness at a young age increases the likelihood of acceptance and understanding."

Here's how to approach these conversations, according to experts.

## DISCUSSIONS AT SCHOOL

"Conversation about autism should take place regularly, rather than be linked to one-off awareness days," says assistant principal Leah Cooper.

"Schools can use assemblies and tutor times as opportunities to raise awareness and promote acceptance of autistic children's differences, through developing a better understanding.

"Recognition of the natural differences in autistic children's style of playing, socialising and communicating, can lead to more acceptance from their peers, avoiding exclusion or isolation."

Have these chats at home, too.

## POINT TO ROLE MODELS

"Signpost to role models past and present, who children can identify with, to further their understanding of autism and autistic children's needs," says Leah. "Not all autistic people have the same challenges; each person is an individual and should be treated as such."

## WHAT CAN AUTISM LOOK LIKE?

"The most common symptom of autism is difficulty with social interaction, altered communication skills and repetitive behaviours and interests," notes Danielle. "Some individuals with autism may have difficulty making eye contact or understanding social cues, while others struggle to understand sarcasm or figurative language.

"It can be linked to other disorders, such as ADHD. People with autism may have difficulty with non-verbal communication, such as

## USE THEIR LANGUAGE

Talking to children about neurodiversity early will increase acceptance and their understanding

facial expressions and body language.”

Make it clear your child may need to be more sensitive to others’ needs.

“It is important to speak to children about autism in child-friendly language, and to show them it’s OK if

they don’t understand autism completely, and that they can ask questions, because learning about autism is endless; no one knows everything about it,” says Danielle.

**CORRECT THEM KINDLY**

Danielle says: “It is important to compassionately correct any misconceptions and to ask why your child thinks a certain way about children with autism.

“As parents, we need to make sure we get ourselves clued up about autism first, to enable us to explain well to our children.”