

# WVATC TIP SHEET:

WV Autism Training Center

(304) 696-2332

www.marshall.edu/atc

atc@marshall.edu

How to

## Explain Autism to Your Child

Receiving an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis of a loved one is difficult. Deciding how and when to share that information with the individual can be even more unsettling. Many experts concur about the critical importance of discussing the diagnosis of autism with your child, as not doing so “increases the risk of anxiety, depression, and mental health issues” (ABA Centers of America\*). Below are some suggestions and tips for doing so with your child.

### When to tell?

There is no exact age to tell, and many factors need to be considered as the diagnosis can occur at any age. Parents must gauge this on the individual’s level of social awareness, abilities, developmental level, and personality. Depending on your comfort level it may be best to start this conversation early after the diagnosis to avoid the risk of your child having negative experiences with peers. For example, if your child knows about their diagnosis, they can be prepared to answer questions or clarify misunderstandings expressed by their peers. If you are uncertain and struggling with this, you may wish to seek the help of a professional.

### What and how to tell?

Being positive, encouraging, and supportive is key! You may want to begin with minimal information and light conversation. Focus on the fact that everyone is unique and that we all have talents as well as challenges. Try to use concrete examples of your child’s areas of strength. There are many books, videos, workbooks/worksheets, and TV shows/movies with examples and information about autism that may be of interest. Also, meeting others diagnosed with ASD may be an eye-opening, positive experience.

### Who and where to tell?

Explaining an autism diagnosis is an ongoing process and circumstances vary widely. Create a safe, calm atmosphere to have the conversation. Answer questions honestly and right away to decrease stress and anxiety rather than putting it off until later. If questions can not be addressed by loving, caring family members, asking a friend or professional with knowledge of ASD is also an option.

### Resources:

*Indiana Resource  
Center for Autism*



<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/learn-about-autism/getting-started-introducing-your-child-to-his-or-her-diagnosis-of-autism.html>

*Autism Parenting Magazine*



<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/explaining-autism-to-child/>

*\*ABA Centers of America*



<https://www.abacenters.com/discussing-autism-seven-step-guide/>



WEST VIRGINIA  
**AUTISM TRAINING CENTER**  
AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY