

[www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/parents/starting-school/](http://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/parents/starting-school/)

## Talking to your child's teacher

You know your child best. Sharing observations with your school – and communicating your child's strengths, challenges, differences and needs – helps to build understanding, reduce stigma and increase acceptance. Information about your child can help your teacher and school provide the best possible support for your child.

It's important to know that accommodations and adjustments to classrooms can benefit all children, not just autistic children.

**Communicate to your school and teachers the language you and your child prefer to use such as 'neurodivergent', 'autistic', 'on the spectrum', or 'with autism'. Note that most autistic adults prefer the term 'autistic', as autism is an important part of their identity. Autism is not something you can 'remove' from a person – autism is part of who a person is.**

### Why share your observations with your child's teacher?

Research shows that sharing information can be empowering for a child and can help them get the right support at school. While some parents may worry about stigma or labelling, or fear that their child might be treated differently, those within the autistic community report that labelling happens regardless of whether parents discuss diagnosis or not. It can instead take the form of harmful labels like 'weird' or 'strange'. In fact, others are more likely to form negative first impressions when they do not know someone is autistic.

When a family is open about their child being autistic, they can shape their own strengths-based narrative around their child and embrace terms such as 'independent', 'passionate' and 'determined', rather than misguided ones like 'naughty' and 'defiant'.

When your child's teacher and school know about your child's autism signs or diagnosis, it will help you and the school put the right supports and accommodations in place for them.

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*Video: How to communicate with your child's school*

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### Making and sharing your observations

All children starting school need to be able to do some tasks independently. Observing and taking note of your child's 'starting school' skills will help you to identify their strengths and abilities, and identify possible areas of support when starting school. The [Starting school skills](#) [PDF] list can help you to then communicate these observations to your child's school and teacher.

As a starting point, consider the [Indicators of autism](#) [PDF] your child might display. The [Family observation guide](#) [PDF] can help you to observe and record your child's communication style, interests, repetition and routines, and whether they have any sensory processing or motor differences that need to be taken into consideration at school.

Your child may already be receiving professional support. Discuss what information is appropriate to share with the school.



*Sharing your observations of your child's behaviours at home will help their teacher understand and better support them at school.*

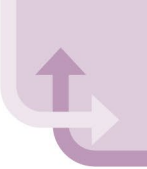
### **Some considerations before speaking to your child's teacher**

When speaking with your child's teacher, it can be helpful to keep in mind the environmental and social differences between school and home. For example, an autistic child might come up against more challenges when eating in a school environment than they do at home. Due to sensory sensitivities, a child might find the smell of another child's food overwhelming. They might be taking medication which affects their appetite, or struggle to open packets or containers.

Eating requires attention, and sometimes differences in executive functioning in autism can mean a child is easily distracted from the task of eating and drinking. Or they might eat and drink more slowly than peers. Some children might find eating and drinking in a large group overwhelming due to sensitivities or find that they do not have the communication tools required to ask for help.



*Discuss with the teacher any specific food preferences your child may have that may be outside typical school policies.*



Sometimes children can find it intimidating to approach their teacher when they need to do something, such as going to the toilet and managing their clothing. This can make them anxious and avoid what they need to do. It is worth considering that your child establishes an alternative way to let their teacher know they need something (for example, a gesture, hand signal, or putting a token in a designated bucket).

While some matters can feel quite private as a family, teachers want to support and accommodate the needs of your child to help them flourish.

Consistency and predictability build a strong foundation for autistic kids to feel safe at school. So, if there are any strategies, key phrases, signs or visual supports that help your child feel comfortable, it's great to let the school know.

Sometimes, though, it can be hard to communicate about such a broad range of things to your child's teacher. These [Conversation starters](#) [PDF] can be a good starting point, in conjunction with the [Family observation guide](#) [PDF] which allows you to document your observations of your child.

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*Video: Developing a positive home school partnership*

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