

Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Communicating Screening Results with Parents

Support parents when sharing difficult news related to early identification of ASD.



Tips on Communicating With Parents About Early Identification of ASD

- Be honest, show empathy and avoid making judgments.
- Listen carefully to parents' questions, concerns and comments.
- Consider developing a script that can be adapted for each family. For example to share screening results, you might say, "your responses to the screening questions agreed with the concerns you shared with me about your child's development. The results indicate that further evaluation is recommended."
- Consider adult learning strategies when delivering diagnostic findings. This means describe, use visuals, give examples, and demonstrate the information you are sharing.
- Check for understanding of the information that is shared. Recognize that each parent will process and respond to information differently.
- Consider how to help parents continue to see their child's strengths and appreciate that their child is still the child they know and love even after diagnosis.
- Recognize that it takes time and repetition for parents to understand the meaning and implications of a diagnosis of autism.
- Have a concrete written plan for next steps to share with parents. Following a screening, this might be making a referral for a diagnostic assessment. Following a diagnosis, this might be making a follow up call or appointment to further discuss the understanding and implications of the diagnosis.
- Provide parents with resources for obtaining additional information, services and supports (e.g., web sites, written materials, a phone number for a resource center).