

Talking to your child about their additional needs

We may feel we want to protect our child from knowing their diagnosis in case it makes them more aware of being different. However, children are often the first to know that they are different in some way, even if they can't tell us. They need to know it's safe to express their feelings to us – in their own particular way.

Talking about their additional needs will not be a one-off conversation! It's impossible to talk about everything in one go. It needs to be a gradual, informal discussion that will take place throughout your child's life. Don't feel pressure to say everything at once – take it at their pace, responding to their questions as they come and talking about different challenges as they arise. It's important to work together with school and other carers to make sure that everyone is giving the same message.

- Special time may provide an opportunity for a conversation about their additional needs.
- Think about when it would be a good time to talk about this with your child. For instance, it will need to be when you are both calm and relaxed.
- Allow plenty of time to talk with them and allow time afterwards for them to think it over.
- Think about how they might react and how to prepare for this. For instance, they might need something to do, a safe place to be angry, or just a quiet, calming place to relax.

Other members of the family, especially siblings, will also need to talk. Try to develop a 'you can ask me anything' culture, where no topic is off-limits.

