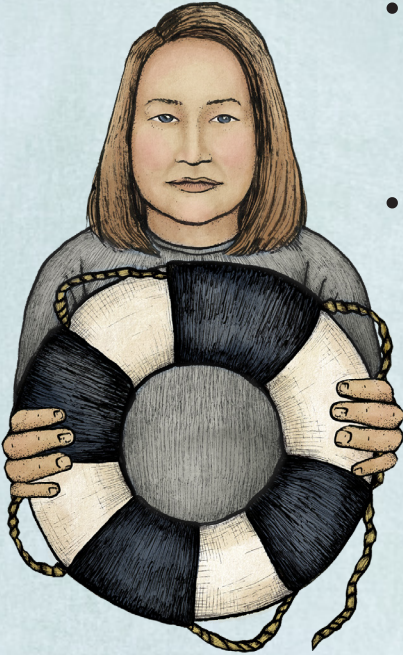


5 OFFER A SOLUTION



- **Tell parents to talk to their pediatrician about getting their child screened**
 - Explain that children with autism have different sensitivities and needs, and they need the right help to function and interact with others successfully
 - Tell them that a doctor's evaluation can't hurt, but it can help tremendously if it's needed
- **Reassure parents that they can get help with costs and next steps**
 - Let them know that children with autism are entitled to Early Intervention treatment services from their state
 - Resources like the National Autism Association's First Signs, Next Steps Toolkit can help with the process of screening and intervention

“Stress the importance and potential benefits of acting early, and that there are systems in place to help.”

Shannon,

Early childhood educator & aunt of a child with autism

6 KEEP LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

- **Stay available, but give them space if they need it**
 - The parent may have follow-up questions as they think about what you've said
 - Some parents become depressed, or angry, or show signs of grieving. They may shut you out, or keep their child away from you
 - Stay understanding, loving, and as supportive as possible
- **Revisit the conversation or get help if needed**
 - If the parent doesn't take action, you can offer more information or details
 - Consider asking for help from a nurse or doctor, another parent of a child with autism, or someone close to the parent whose opinion you know they trust
 - Be careful not to nag or pester

“Sharing concerns about autism is never easy. Don't give up or put it off—the earlier a child gets help, the better off they will be.”

Roma,

Nanny for babies and children



3 CHOOSE YOUR WORDS & TONE CAREFULLY



- Seek a tone that is caring, open, and loving
 - Put yourself in their shoes and speak to them in the way you'd want to be spoken to
- Plan what to say to reduce the risk of the parent misunderstanding, getting defensive, or getting angry
 - Consider how a parent might react and how you might respond
 - It may be helpful to role-play with someone
- Avoid words that might sound intimidating or judgmental
 - Be careful not to imply that what they've been doing is wrong, or that their child is worse than or inferior to other kids
 - Try not to use words or phrases like "special needs" or "disability." Choose words like "unusual" instead of "weird"

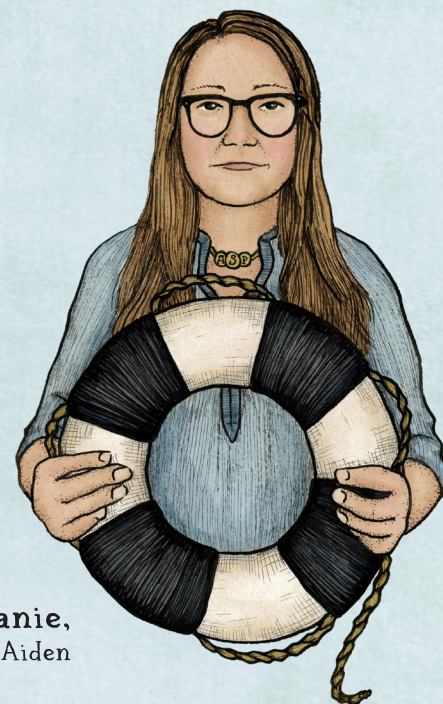
"I hinted. Questioned. Pointed out what I was seeing in Aiden. I was careful to be polite, but I could have been more direct."

Karen,
Speech pathologist & grandmother of Aiden

4 BE SPECIFIC

- Be as specific as you can about the child's actions
 - Describe exactly what they did and how long they did it
 - Remembering specifics can be difficult; it might help to take notes when you see these actions
- Referring to resources can help
 - The CDC's list of developmental milestones can put a child's actions in perspective and help parents talk about it to their pediatrician
 - A screener like the one found at M-CHAT.org can also help

"Aiden was diagnosed at 5. It could've been earlier. But when my mom was hinting, I couldn't see it. Or wouldn't."



Stephanie,
Karen's daughter & mother of Aiden

TIPS FOR MAKING THE TOUGH CONVERSATION EASIER

1 PLAN THE CONVERSATION



- Think about exactly how and when you will open the discussion
 - Consider a private place with few distractions or interruptions
 - Make sure you both have enough time to talk as long as you need
 - Look for natural opportunities, like when a parent expresses concerns
- Set goals for the conversation
 - Do you want them to take action, or are you just trying to start them thinking? Sometimes parents just need to learn more so they can arrive at an understanding on their own

“This is too sensitive a topic and too important a conversation to just ‘wing it.’”

Samad,
Parent of a child with autism

2 START POSITIVE & LISTEN BEFORE SPEAKING

- Compliment the child and the parent's role
 - This is an easy way to please a parent and start the conversation on a positive note
 - Point out something you like about the child—for example their smile, their curiosity, or their love of puzzles—and how the parent must have helped with it
- Understand the parent's point of view and concerns
 - Ask what they've observed about their child
 - Ask how they think their child is developing or if they've seen anything the child seems to be having trouble with

“Some parents blame themselves for developmental issues—starting positive helps to reassure them that they're not bad parents.”



Lorraine,
Parent of a child with autism & daycare administrator