

How to Talk to Your Child About Their Disability

Having a strong sense of strengths, abilities, interests, and values are key parts of advocating for yourself. A young person's awareness of how their disability may affect them at work, in the community, or with their education is a significant part of this process.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parents play a strong role in advocating for their child, but under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a young person must self-identify and advocate for themselves after high school.

Here are some tips for talking with your child:

- Start early and have more than one conversation over time.
- Be honest, supportive, and clear.
- Listen to your child's questions and concerns.
- Simplify clinical or medical terms.
- Use words and phrases that help your child understand.
- Talk about their strengths, what they excel in and what they need support with. Everyone, including yourself, has needs and must advocate in some form or another. They are not alone in this experience.
- Talk about strategies and supports that can help him/her with areas in need of support. Then, use opportunities in the classroom, at home, and in the community to help your child practice their self-advocacy and decision-making skills.

Here are some sentence starters to help your child practice self-advocacy skills at school:

- My classification (or disability) is...
- This means that I need help with...
- Some of my strengths/areas in need of support are...
- In class, I need help with...
- My short-term/long-term goals are...
- Some ways that my teachers can give me help with this are...
- I am going to achieve these goals by...
- The people who support me are...
- and they will help me achieve my goals by...
- Some things I am going to do to make sure I get the support I need are...