

How to Talk to Your Child About Their Disability



**TIP
SHEET**

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. As your child's understanding grows, your conversations will also grow. Be honest, supportive, and clear. Listen to your child's questions and concerns.
- Use words and phrases that help your child understand their disability and needed supports rather than medical or clinical terminology. For example, if your child struggles with sensory input, rather than using a term like "sensory overload," you can help your child identify a stressor, such as loud subway stations, and ways to address it, such as listening to music.
- Talk about their strengths and areas in need of support. Reassure them that 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 with your child's 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/area 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 to 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...