

RESPONDING TO PARENTS' CONCERNS ABOUT AUTISM

Suggestions compiled from survey responses from parents of children with autism

Helpful responses

- **Acknowledge/validate** the parent's concern (even if you disagree with this diagnosis)
 - **Reflect** what s/he says
 - *"You are worried about autism." "You feel like your child doesn't play like other children do."*
 - **Empathize**
 - *"That behavior must be very frustrating." "This must be very hard for you."*
 - **Ask follow-up questions**
 - *"Tell me more about why you think it might be autism." "Can you describe some of the specific behaviors you're concerned about?"*
- **Discuss the parent's behavioral concerns** with respect to what is known about early signs of autism
- **Give the parent suggestions for how to act on their concerns**
 - *"Thanks for bringing this up. Let's talk about some next steps. Here are some suggestions to get you started"*
 - Refer to Early Intervention, where they will evaluate your child's development and offer specific supports and services to help your child and your family
 - Refer for a diagnostic evaluation, to confirm or rule out autism. There may be long waiting lists, which is why it's good to get started with Early Intervention first
 - Provide an up-to-date resource packet
- **Provide reassurance**
 - *"There are many supports available for children with autism. It's good that you raised these concerns now, so we can follow up and get you and your child started with services to support your family's needs."*
 - *"I will work with you each step of the way to help your child get what s/he needs"*

Unhelpful responses

- **Dismissing parent's concerns/Failing to suggest action steps**
 - *"Let's wait and see"*
 - *"He'll grow out of it"*
 - *"You're over-reacting, there's nothing to worry about, your child is fine"*
 - *"Your child is just a late-bloomer, he will catch up eventually"*
 - *"Boys mature more slowly"*
 - *"Don't compare your child to other children"*
- **Comments that parents may interpret as blaming them for their child's behaviors**
 - *"It's probably because he spends too much time watching TV"*