

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 and the child's observed behavior and M-CHAT-R/F results (*also see [handout on discussing M-CHAT-R/F results](#)*)
- **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 provide 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 EI first
 - Provide an up-to-date resource packet
- **Provide reassurance**
 - *"Autism is treatable. It's good that you raised these concerns now, so we can follow up and get you and your child started on the right path at a young age."*
 - *"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"*
- **Suggesting that parents may be to blame for their child's behaviors**
 - *"It's probably because he spends too much time watching TV"*