

CONVEYING CONCERNS ABOUT AUTISM TO PARENTS

Suggestions compiled from survey responses from parents of children with autism

Helpful ways to convey concerns to parents

- **Provide a clear description of your concerns**
 - Explain the specific behaviors about which you are concerned
 - Talk about how your observations compare with expected milestones
 - *“I notice that it takes a lot of effort to get Joey’s attention... he seems to spend more time playing alone with his toy than interacting with you or me...”*
 - *“Most children his age show more interest in interacting with others and play with toys more flexibly.”*
- **Elicit input from parents**
 - *“Do you see these behaviors at home too?”*
 - *“What do you make of these behaviors?”*
- **Offer information and support**
 - *“These behaviors are sometimes signs of autism. Have you heard of autism?”*
 - Explain that autism is a spectrum, that there are supports and services available to help your child
 - *“We want to make sure we do everything we can to support your child’s specific needs so that they can grow and thrive”*
- **Expect and plan for an emotional response**
 - Be aware that emotions may impede the parent’s ability to process all the information
 - Write down critical information
 - Offer a follow-up appointment
 - Allow time for the parent to remain in the exam room after the appointment
- **Encourage parents to take action**
 - Explain the importance of early detection and intervention
 - Give specific referral information for Early Intervention and a diagnostic assessment
 - Provide an up-to-date resource and information packet
 - *“You know that s/he is a beautiful child and I can tell you take excellent care of him/her... I think it would be a good idea for you to contact an Early Intervention program, where they can take a closer look at these behaviors. There’s no need to worry right now. We’ll just get more information, and if the assessment indicates there’s something going on, we’ll work together to come up with some strategies for his/her care.”*

Unhelpful ways to convey concerns to parents

- Telling parents you are concerned about autism without giving any information about what to do
- Handing a pamphlet or giving a referral without explaining what autism is and what it means
- Failing to provide examples of behaviors of concern
- Failing to emphasize the importance of early detection and intervention
- Failing to use the word “autism”
- Failing to emphasize the importance of getting into services and on waiting lists as soon as possible