

Answering Questions About Your Child's Special Needs

At family gatherings or in neighborhood parks, adults often start conversations by asking about your newborn or young child. Easy questions can range from "How old is he?" to "Does he let you sleep through the night yet?" As your child grows, family and friends may ask more intrusive questions about your child if his development is slower than normal or delayed. Do you respond to their questions? If so, how, why, and when?



Focus first on positive topics


- Point out what she does well: "She loves to coo and make happy sounds."
- Introduce what you admire and love about your baby: "He has the brightest eyes."
- Note progress in your child's development: "She's sleeping longer at night."

Welcome efforts to include your child

- Identify ways your child can participate. Can he watch the activity or can he join in? If he joins, are there different ways or expectations for participating?
- Acknowledge that your child may need support: "He likes to go down the slide with help, but isn't ready to slide alone. We can take turns if I can help."

Decide what information you want to share

- Not all questions are necessary or appropriate. It's OK to set boundaries around information and decline to answer personal questions.
- If you agree to discuss your child's special needs, then find a time and place when you can talk without interruptions and with privacy. You also may want to include information about early intervention services if the listener shows genuine interest.
- When your child is behaving differently, remember that all children experience challenges and respond in ways that are in fact "childish." You may want to ask the inquiring adult if their child was ever "shy," "awkward," "silly," or "mad." Most will have had similar experiences whether their child has special needs or not.

 For more information about helping your child with special needs, see the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eiclearinghouse.org>.

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