



# TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DISABILITIES

A Practical Guide for Parents by 2villages



# CHILDREN NOTICE DIFFERENCES

They notice wheelchairs, hearing aids, AAC devices, extra support in the classroom, different ways of communicating, and behaviors they don't understand.

And that's okay.

Curiosity is a normal part of childhood.

The goal isn't to stop children from noticing differences. The goal is to help them understand those differences with empathy, respect, and kindness.

When we avoid these conversations, children often fill in the blanks themselves. When we welcome their questions, we help build understanding.

# START WITH CURIOSITY

When a child asks a question about a disability, it can be tempting to jump straight into an explanation.

Instead, start by finding out what they're actually wondering.

Try asking:

- "What did you notice?"
- "What makes you curious about that?"
- "What do you think?"

Sometimes children aren't looking for a detailed explanation. They may simply be noticing something different and trying to make sense of it.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

You don't need the perfect answer.

You don't need to explain an entire diagnosis.

You only need to answer the question that was asked.

For a younger child, that might sound like:

"His brain works a little differently, so he learns and communicates in different ways."

For an older child:

"She has a disability that affects how her body and brain work. Some things are harder for her, and some things she does differently."

Simple, honest answers are often enough.

## TEACH BOTH

Teach similarities and differences.

Sometimes adults focus so much on what is different that they forget to talk about what is shared.

You might say:

"She loves jokes, music, and spending time with friends just like you do. Some things are different too, like how she communicates."

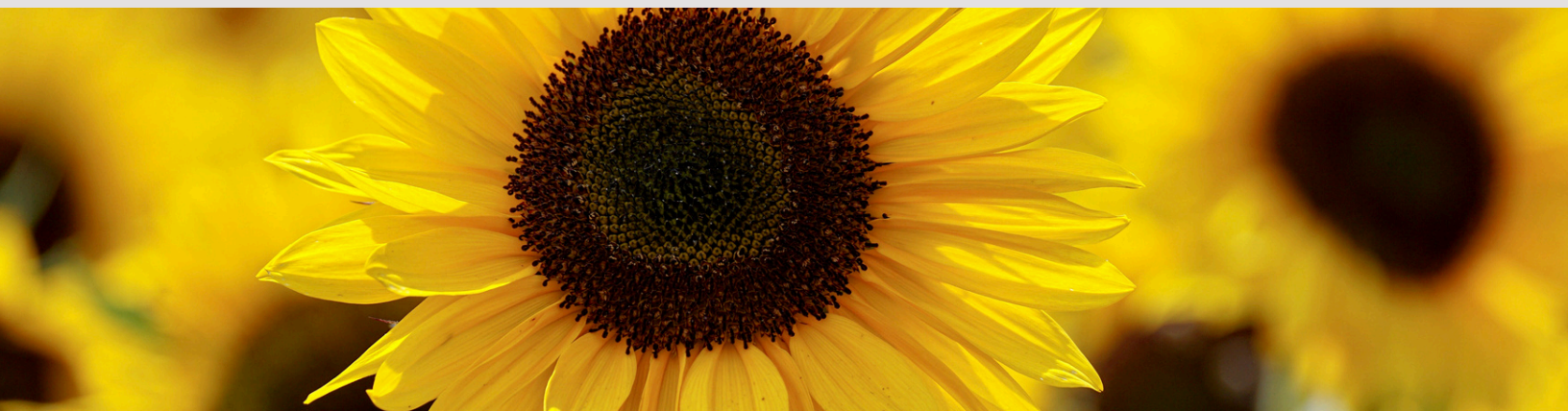
Children benefit from understanding both.

Differences matter.

Similarities matter too.

The goal is helping them see the whole person.

# IT'S OKAY TO SAY "DISABILITY"



Many adults feel uncomfortable using the word disability. They worry it sounds negative or unkind.

But disability is not a bad word.

Avoiding the word can accidentally send the message that it is something shameful.

You can model comfort and respect by speaking about disability the same way you would any other part of a person's identity.

"He has a disability."

"She uses a wheelchair."

"His disability affects how he communicates."

Simple. Respectful. Matter-of-fact.

Children often take their cues from us.

# TEACH WHAT TO DO



Children often want to know how to interact with someone who has a disability.

The answer is usually simpler than adults think.

You can encourage them to:

- Say hello.
- Include them in play.
- Be patient.
- Ask before helping.
- Respect different ways of communicating.
- Treat people with kindness.

Friendship doesn't require people to learn, move, communicate, or behave in the same way.

# WAYS YOU COULD RESPOND

01

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WHY DOES SHE TALK  
DIFFERENTLY?

"Everyone communicates in different ways. Some people use their voice, some use signs, and some use devices. The important thing is to create space for communication."

03

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WHY DOES SHE FLAP  
HER HANDS?

"That's something her body does when she's excited, happy, or trying to help herself feel regulated."

02

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WHY DOES HE USE A  
WHEELCHAIR?

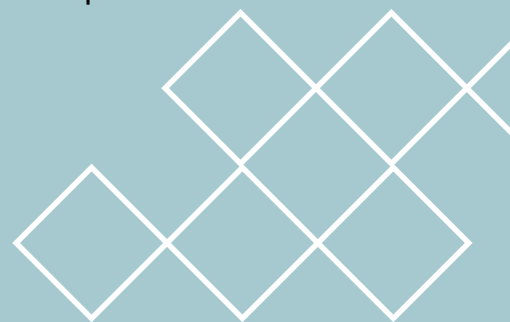
"The wheelchair helps him get where he wants to go, just like glasses help some people see."

04

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CAN THEY BE MY  
FRIEND?

"Absolutely. People don't have to be the same to be friends."



# A 2VILLAGES REFLECTION

Children learn how to think about differences by watching  
the adults around them.

Every conversation is an opportunity to teach empathy.

Every question is an opportunity to build understanding.

And every child deserves to grow up knowing that  
differences are a normal part of being human.

Different does not mean less.

Everyone belongs.

