



HOW TO HELP KIDS WITH



DIFFERENCES & DIAGNOSES

Having a child with a diagnosis of ADHD, Autism, dyspraxia, Asperger's or high levels of anxiety or anger can be challenging for you – and your child.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Google searches like: Autism, ADHD and Dyslexia currently register up to 120,000,000 hits! This shows how much people are looking for help and information. Often even after all the hard work to get a diagnosis it can still come as a shock.

P.S: Here's a much better place to search

mentalhealth.org.nz/conditions

WORKING THROUGH BIG EMOTIONS

Something to be mindful of – diagnosis or not – is that your child (and you!) will probably be experiencing BIG emotions. The following tips, when applied as consistently as possible will help your child.

IT'S A BIT OF A ROLLERCOASTER LOOK AFTER YOU!

The most important person in your child's world is you. Be there, advocate, learn their ways of communicating and make sure you find the support YOU need too. Having someone you can chat to, along with simple things you can do to feel good make a big positive difference. We love [“The Mums” series from AttitudeTV.](#)

FOCUS ON YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS (AND YOUR OWN!)

Sometimes when our child is 'different' we can't see past this difference which can be frustrating, embarrassing and/or disappointing. So focus on their strengths instead!

When you introduce your child to their teacher or others, rather than point out all the things they need to be aware of, like “he can get very angry when he can't do something,” instead try “these are the things he's really good at. You can use these to support him to learn new things.”

NAME EMOTIONS

The more we can name our and our children's emotions, the more they understand what they can feel like. The Plutchik wheel of emotion (see final page) is a good model to consider the range of emotions we feel and that we can feel.

Children with differences have 'super' emotions – they're big and sometimes wonderful, however children may only know happy, sad and angry, leading to their confusion and frustration about what's actually going on for them. Our child's behaviour doesn't always indicate how they're feeling, anger may instead be frustration, or worry. Our children typically don't behave the way they do to annoy us – or others. They behave the way they do because of their emotions, feelings and senses – this can be overwhelming and have children attempt to 'shut down' from them.

Emojis are a great way to talk to kids about emotions – they're fun and relatable, expressing all sorts of emotions.

Naming emotions as colours can be great too e.g. "I'm feeling a bit blue today" (tired, sad, lonely) or "You seem in a bright yellow mood today, am I right?" (happy, excited, joyful). Finding a fun way for your child to express how they're feeling can be really helpful. A child can use colour dials to literally pinpoint their feelings, or use roller-coasters with named emotions and children move their roller-coaster 'cart' to show how they're feeling. And there are so many great books to help too. Head here for our faves allright.org.nz/sparklers/kids



BE INTERESTED

Show real interest in the things your child is interested in. It's all about 'connecting' with them. They may be 12 and really into *My Little Pony*, so learn their names, watch the programme with them. Sometimes our lack of interest in a child's taste can be misinterpreted by kids as us not liking *them*. Showing interest may be able to open them up to other things too.

Kids with ADHD, Autism and other diagnoses all have strengths because of their differences – more knowledge, more energy, more curiosity, more persistence, and often more honesty. Enjoy these wonderful differences.

You too have strengths that can help you support your child. Sometimes parents of kids with differences are told things like: "you're amazing" or worse still: "I couldn't cope with that, you're amazing!" Well, you are amazing, even if you don't always feel it.

ANXIETY IS COMMON IN 'DIFFERENCE'

We're talking about kids with 'super' emotions! Love will be LOVE, joy will be JOY, and worry will be WORRY. Anxiety and worry can look like many different things. It can masquerade as anger, withdrawal, regression, hyper-vigilance, the list goes on.

Remember to consider the emotions behind the way your child behaves to 'cope' with tricky situations. If big emotions are an issue you may like to check out our parenting guides, including [How to help kids manage worries](#).

PLUTCHIK'S WHEEL OF EMOTIONS

Plutchik R. (2001). The nature of emotions: Human emotions have deep evolutionary roots, a fact that may explain their complexity and provide tools for clinical practice. The emotions with no colour represent an emotion that is a mix of the two primary (coloured) emotions. The primary emotions move from lighter to darker to present how intense the emotion is:

