

How to help your 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. Some of the challenges parents and kids face are simply because child diagnoses are a relatively recent addition to the world of parenting and we're all still learning about them (parents, kids and experts!).

Google searches like: Autism, ADHD and Dyslexia currently register up to 120,000,000 hits! This, to some degree, demonstrates how much people are looking for help and information (any information!).

While this guide certainly won't be able to answer all the questions you may have the aim is to give you some things to try based on the most up-to-date research. We've also included some local support networks, as talking about challenges with people who understand, really can help.

If you're considering or seeking a diagnosis for your child, this guide will hopefully help answer many of your questions too. Parents often work hard to get a diagnoses, however when it finally happens, it can still come as a shock and it's normal to feel some sadness and grief. Sometimes the support you'd hoped for doesn't always come in the timeframes or way you and your child need.

But hang in there. 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, either professionally or just as importantly, having someone you can chat and download to, along with simple things you can do to feel good. We love "The Mums" series from AttitudeTV and know other Mums and Dads love it too.

Working through BIG Emotions

Something to be mindful of – diagnoses or not – is that your child (and you!) will probably be experiencing BIG emotions. The following tips, when applied as consistently as possible (nobody's perfect, right!), will help your child. We've made sure to choose tips that fit the golden parent rule: Simple and doable.

1. Name emotions

Easy right? The more we can name ours and our children's emotions, the more they understand what they can feel like and talk about them. [The Plutchik wheel of emotion](#) (see final page) is a good model to consider, as it names emotions we tend to forget (e.g. serenity and remorse) and shows that when we ignore an emotion or leave it 'unchecked' it can intensify. Annoyance for example, if left, can intensify into anger.

Plutchik also points out that emotions are complex, sometimes we experience a mix of emotions, love is made up of a mix of optimism, joy and trust. We're not suggesting you become experts in Plutchik's wheel of emotion, but it's a good starting point to think about the huge range of emotions we 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 about what's actually going on for them. Anger may instead be frustration, or worry and our child's behaviour doesn't always indicate how they're feeling. If a child 'closes down' this doesn't always mean they feel shy or worried. It helps to remember that 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.

We love emojis as a way to talk to kids about emotions – they're fun and relatable – there are heaps of emojis expressing all sorts of emotions, a quick google search will give you plenty to go with 😊! Print some off and let your child use them to show how they're feeling.

Naming emotions in terms of colours can be great too e.g. "I'm feeling a bit blue today" (tired, sad, lonely, thoughtful) or "You seem in a bright yellow mood today, am I right?" (happy, excited, joyful, playful). Creative parents have come up with fabulous ideas to help – colour dials a child can use to literally pinpoint their feelings, rollercoasters with emotions children can move their rollercoaster 'cart' near to show how they're feeling. Finding a fun way for your child to express how they're feeling can be really helpful.

2. 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 the teacher or others, rather than point out all the things they need to be aware of "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."

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3. Be interested

Show real interest in the things your child is interested in, even if you think it's weird, or not what you're interested in. It's all about 'connecting' with your child. They may be 12 and really into My Little Pony, so learn their names, watch the programme with them. The reason we say this (in case you're rearing an eye roll!), is that sometimes our 'distaste' or lack of interest in a child's taste can be misinterpreted by kids as us not liking them. Showing an interest is a great way to connect with your child, and in time open up dialogue about other things. Being able to name Fluttershy and how great it is she loves nature means you can open up other nature-loving activities and opportunities.

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, which often don't come up on those Google searches (bother it!).

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, and in these instances you may be talking to someone who just really doesn't get it, even if they have good intentions. It's not their fault, we only know, what we know.

We recommend you completing our Strengths finder [here](#). It's research based, will take you about 15 minutes and will name your top 24 strengths, promise! It will make you feel good (hurrah!) and allow you to think about the strengths

you can use in different situations – at work, with your kids, in your relationship, when there's conflict... the whole deal! If your child is 11 or older, they can do it too, just choose the Youth option.

4. 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.

We recommend looking beyond the behaviour. The tips above on emotional literacy and connection remind us 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](#).

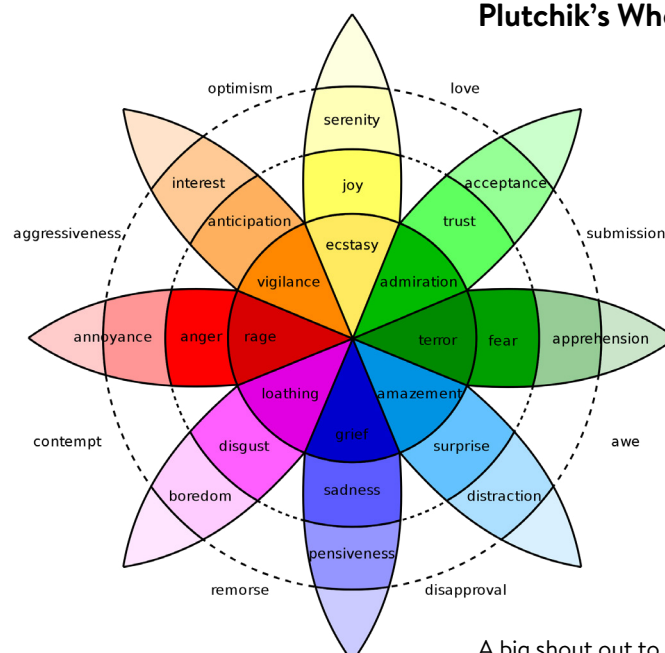
Resources we recommend

Anything Dr Seuss – he talks about differences a whole, awful lot!

All Right's [parenting hub](#), which includes info on [parenting courses and groups](#).

Support groups are there to give you connections with others who have kids with differences. People don't always go to learn new things (though that's often a bonus!) but rather to feel understood, not judged, to have worries and concerns normalised, and to be there for others going through similar things. Win, win, win!

Check out [No-drama discipline](#) by Dr Dan Siegal. Don't be fooled by the title, it's a truly great book and we have first hand knowledge of the difference it has made for parents and kids.



Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

A big shout out to Dr Dean Sutherland from the University of Canterbury, who helped with this content.