

If you are interested in participating in a research project studying the earliest signs of autism, visit [AutismSpeaks.org/science/research-initiatives/high-risk-baby-sibs](https://autismspeaks.org/science/research-initiatives/high-risk-baby-sibs) or find a research project in your area at autismspeaks.org/science/participate-in-research.

These studies provide intense observation, documentation and feedback by experts in the field on the development of your child with autism and any other children at risk for autism.

If you are interested in other intervention programs that are not part of these studies, visit the Resource Guide on the Autism Speaks website to help find an early intervention program in your area. autismspeaks.org/resource-guide.

How Will This Affect Our Family?

Even though it is your child who has the diagnosis, it is important to acknowledge that autism affects the whole family. This section of your tool kit may help you anticipate some of the emotions you and other people in your family will experience.

The article below, adapted from *Does My Child Have Autism?* by Wendy L. Stone, Ph.D., provides some helpful information for talking to your parents and close family members about the diagnosis.

Breaking the news

Sometimes telling your parents about your child's diagnosis can be extremely difficult, especially with your own emotions running so high. It's hard to know what to expect; I've seen that parental reactions to this news can vary dramatically. One young mother told me, "My mother-in-law told us that we shouldn't bring my son to family gatherings until he grows up. It's heartbreaking to hear her say that she would rather not see any of us for years instead of trying to understand her own grandson." But then I've also been told, "We were very touched by how our family



reacted to my son's diagnosis. Everyone asked what they could do to help and they showed us so much support. I know his grandparents read books and articles on the disorder so they could better understand him. My mother even quit her job to help me through this very difficult time." Yes, reactions vary widely. But whatever reaction you get, it will be very important to educate your parents about the nature of autism after you have told them about the diagnosis. To begin your discussion, you might talk about specific behaviors. For example: "You know those behaviors we've been confused about for so long? Well, now we have a name for them and an explanation for why they occur. Howie doesn't act the way he does because he's spoiled or because he's shy or because he doesn't like us – he acts that way because he has autism. Autism explains why he doesn't speak or use gestures and why he doesn't seem to understand what we say. It explains why he's not as interested in interacting with us as the other children in the family have been and why he plays with spoons and bottles instead of toys. I know this is upsetting news for all of us. But the good news is that the disorder has been diagnosed early and there are a lot of things we can do to help him. He'll be starting some therapies soon and I'll be learning about things I can do to help him at home. I know that you will need some time to think about all of this. But if you have any questions as we begin his therapy, I'll be glad to try my best to answer them. I know we're all hoping for the best outcome possible." After the initial conversation about this diagnosis, continue to keep your other children and your extended family in the information loop.

*Autism doesn't affect only one child.
It affects the entire family.*