

Talking with Kids
About Disabilities

Get Started

“Carl the Collector” stories show that there is no right or wrong way for brains to work, and that embracing each other’s differences is part of being a good friend. The tight-knit group of friends in Carl the Collector model kindness and compassion as they learn how to handle emotions and manage conflict. As Carl and his friends work and play, they discover what connects them and also what makes each of them unique. Along the way, Carl and his friends learn more about what it means to have autism and other differences, and how everyone benefits when their strengths and needs are respected.

It’s important to talk about disability with your kids. Talking about disability can help kids accept their own differences and be more accepting of others’ differences. These conversations promote self-esteem, kindness, and inclusion.



Talk About It

- Questions mean your kid cares. They might ask questions like “why is that person in a wheelchair?” or “why do I leave the classroom to take tests?”**
- If you don’t know the answer, encourage them to ask someone else or research it together.**
- If their question is awkward or embarrassing, don’t shut it down. Model the words they can use instead.**

Set the Example

- *The best way to teach your kid acceptance and kindness is to model it yourself. Speak positively of other people's differences, including your kid's own differences.*
- *Model respect with everyone you encounter, regardless of ability. Be patient and understanding in your interactions with others- your kid will notice!*
- *Normalize disability. Did you know that more than 1 in 4 people have a disability? And everyone has their own strengths and challenges.*
- *Fill your home with books and media that reflect positive representations of people with disabilities. These can be great conversation starters, too.*

Keep It Simple and Positive

- *Keep your language value neutral. Avoid outdated, derogatory terms like "crippled," "retarded," and "handicapped."*
- *Kids are curious. When your kids wonder why someone looks, talks, or acts differently than they do, take it as an opportunity to teach them that disability is a normal part of life.*
- *Express empathy, not sympathy. Avoid expressing sadness for people with disabilities. Instead, try to understand each individual's unique experience.*
- *Take the focus off what someone "can't" do because of their disability. Instead, talk about what support or tools help them. For example, instead of saying "Johnny can't focus during work" you could say "Johnny needs a quiet room and extra time to get his work done."*



Things to Keep in Mind

- *We may not know someone is disabled by the way they look, since some disabilities are inside a person's body or brain. For example, we can't see things like autism or many chronic health conditions.*
- *Adaptive equipment can look fun to play with, like communication devices, fidgets, and even service dogs. Teach respect for these tools and make sure kids ask before touching or trying to help.*
- *It may take time, and a few different tries on different days, to get to know a new friend. If she isn't ready today, try again another day.*
- *Be patient. Just because someone is quiet or looking away doesn't mean they are not listening. It's okay to wait for their answer.*

