

Fact Sheet 11

RESPONDING TO STARES AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT YOUR CHILD

It's never easy when people stare or say something about your child. Even if comments are not meant to be hurtful, they can still leave you or your child feeling upset. The encouraging part is that many people respond with compassion and kindness once they understand more. This fact sheet shares simple ways to handle those moments, reassure your child, and build their confidence as they grow.



Why Do People Stare or Make Comments?

- Curiosity, ignorance, or discomfort can drive stares or thoughtless remarks.
- While not always meant to harm, such behaviour can affect both you and your child emotionally.



How to Respond in the Moment

1. Stay calm and composed

- Use self-regulation strategies - such as taking a slow breath, counting to three, or pausing for a moment - before you respond.
- Showing calmness teaches your child how to manage these situations.

2. Use simple, factual explanations

- Example: "He was born with a condition that required surgery on his face/head."
- If you're comfortable, educate others briefly - this can dispel myths and build understanding.

3. Redirect the conversation

- Shift focus to your child's personality or interests:
- "Yes, she's had some surgeries, and she's also amazing at drawing!"

4. Set boundaries respectfully

- If a comment is rude or invasive, it's okay to say:
- "That's a personal question. Please don't speak about my child like that."

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Supporting Your Child's Wellbeing

As children grow, they may become more self-conscious about their face, head, or scars, especially when they notice stares, hear comments, or become aware of society's ideas of how people "should" look. These moments can feel difficult, but they are also opportunities to help your child build resilience and self-confidence.

5. Acknowledge their feelings

- Let your child express how they feel.
- Example: "That was a hurtful thing for someone to say. I understand why that upset you."

6. Practice responses together

- Help your child build confidence by role-playing answers to questions or stares. For example, saying "I'm a cranio-warrior" can build curiosity in others and may diffuse the situation.
- Other examples: or "That's just how I was born," or "I've had surgery to help my face grow right"

7. Use person-first language

- Emphasize that your child is not defined by their condition.
- "This is Maya. She loves swimming and just finished a big jigsaw puzzle!"

8. Build a positive identity

- Encourage your child to focus on their strengths, talents, and interests. Remind them they are valued for who they are, not just how they look.
- "I'm proud of how hard you worked on your soccer game. You're strong and determined!"

9. Prepare for self-image challenges

- Talk openly and age-appropriately about body image and beauty standards. Remind your child that everyone has differences and that their story is part of what makes them unique.

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10. Encourage social confidence

- Encourage your child to gradually engage in social situations at their own pace.
- Positive, supported experiences related to their condition help build their confidence and resilience over time.

11. Create safe spaces for expression

- Encourage your child to share their feelings with trusted people—family, friends, teachers, or counsellors. Knowing they have support helps reduce isolation.

12. Seek extra support if needed

- If your child struggles with self-esteem, bullying, or anxiety, consider connecting with a psychologist, social worker, or craniofacial peer support group.

13. Advocate and educate

- Work with schools, teachers, and communities to create understanding environments.
- Share child-friendly books about craniofacial conditions or invite speakers from craniofacial support groups.

14. Take care of yourself too

- Processing these experiences can be draining. Connect with a support group, therapist, or trusted friends.

While challenges may arise, many children also experience kindness, friendship, and encouragement from others, which can strengthen their confidence and resilience over time.

This information is based on the expertise of clinicians who work with families affected by craniofacial conditions and the lived experience of parents with children who have been diagnosed with craniosynostosis. We thank everyone who contributed to this fact sheet.



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How we can support you:

- Care packs
- Financial assistance
- Family support coordinator
- Connection to other families

