

PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



APRIL 2018

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: SUPPORTING YOURSELF AND A CHILD WITH DISABILITIES



For parents of a child with special needs, it is important to remember you are not alone. Caring for a child with a disability brings multiple challenges to you as a parent. Some of these challenges may be additional financial burdens for treating your child's condition, dealing with the child's behavior and social stigma associated with disabilities. Because of this, parents of a child who has special needs often experience more physical health symptoms, negative effects and poorer psychological well-being than parents with a child without a disability.

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For parents of exceptional children living with a disability, below you will find suggestions to help alleviate anxiety and make your life a little less complicated.

- **Accept help.** All parents are expected to be good at multitasking and juggling their kids' schedules. However, if you start to feel exhausted and overwhelmed with doctor visits and therapy sessions, turn to others. Asking for or accepting help can help you recharge to be a better parent to your child.
- **Be honest about your needs.** You have your own needs as well. People want to help, but they do not know how if you do not tell them. Make a list of the things that would make your life easier. Then, match the task with the friend who would have the easiest time helping you out. By expressing your emotions and needs, you allow others to enter a day in your life. This gives your family members, neighbors and friends opportunities to help support you as a person, partner and parent.
- **Consider other caregivers.** Parents of children with disabilities often feel that they are the only ones who can properly care for their child. This is true to an extent. However, you still deserve a few hours to focus on you every now and then. By leaving your child with a trusted sitter or family member, you are teaching your child to handle change. Your child will develop the resilience and adaptability that every kid deserves to learn, regardless of overall health.
- **Maintain contact with friends and families.** This can be hard for parents caring to the needs of a child. If you do not have another caregiver, invite a friend to come over after the kids go to bed. Talk over a pot of coffee, share a meal or watch a movie. Take time to connect and laugh with others and free yourself from your usual worries. Support groups, both online and in-person, can be helpful, too.



Coping with your child's special healthcare needs:

- Understand your feelings.
- Express your emotions.
- Educate yourself about your child's illness or condition.
- Keep communications open.
- Talk to other parents.
- Focus on the strengths and goals that are achievable.
- Believe in your child.
- Establish routines.
- Maintain your sense of humor!
- Remember that taking care of yourself is caring for your family.

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Written by: Natalie Jones
Edited by: Connee Wheeler
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
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