

## Raising Children with Special Needs

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Some children are born with disabilities such as Down's syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. Other children are diagnosed later with disorders such as Autism, developmental delays, learning disabilities, or hearing loss. No matter when children are recognized to have special needs, we all play a role in helping them feel accepted, loved, successful, and comfortable in their environment. Although a child's needs vary depending on the disability, parents need support to overcome the obstacles and challenges they face.

### Ways to support parents who have children with disabilities:

- Don't be afraid to ask questions and offer help.
- Offer to go shopping or bring a meal by their home now and then if you notice your neighbor is looking stressed.
- Remember, there are more similarities than differences among people, so be inclusive whenever you can.
- Be observant of a child's strengths and don't just focus on the special needs.

### Tips for parents of children with special needs:

- Reach out to others for help. Look for respite care from neighbors, friends, relatives, and agencies. Find people who like your child, and who you trust.
- Take time to nurture your adult relationships. Even good marriages are at risk due to stress and fatigue. Don't let negative feelings build. Communicate your needs.
- Let others know when there's an unfair division of labor and you're feeling resentful.
- Face feelings like grief, fear, anger, and frustration. Find a friend, relative, or professional to talk with. It's normal to have days when you feel that life's not fair.
- Get a good night's sleep as often as possible, and eat a healthy diet. Try not to skip meals.
- If there are siblings in the family, they'll need one-on-one time with you. This will help to minimize the jealousy they may feel because of the attention your child with special needs receives.
- Take classes to learn how to advocate for your child in school and in the community. Learn about your rights, and teach your children how to advocate for themselves.

Most parents of children with disabilities say that all of the hard work and challenges are worth it. There is great pleasure seeing children smile, grow, and trust that there are adults who love and accept them.

The next time a child with disabilities passes you on the street, say hello or smile. They will appreciate being seen. We all have different abilities to be noticed and respected.

For more information, visit The Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund at [www.dredf.org](http://www.dredf.org), or NICHCY, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org).

