

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Caring for families

Parenting is a tough job, but it is even tougher when one or more of your children have special needs. It is hard for parents to take then time out to care for themselves when their child's needs seem so important but if you look after yourself you will have the energy to care for your child better.



Here are some ways to help care for yourself and others in your family so as to have the energy needed to care for your child with special needs:

Think about your physical health and wellbeing. A healthy diet, adequate sleep and regular exercise will help you manage your day to day demands more effectively. It is hard to care well for your children if you are run down, tired and unwell.

Think about your emotional wellbeing. Finding out your child has a disability begins an emotional roller coaster that can include feelings of grief, anger, resentment, fear, stress, loss, sadness and depression as well as love, hope and joy. Allow yourself time to deal with your emotions and be aware that they will change over time. Realize that you and your partner may experience things differently and have different needs. For some people denying the problem can be a way of taking a break from emotions and a way of coping but this can be hard for a partner who wants to deal with things differently. Ask for help if you need it from family, friends or a professional counselor.

Be aware of your stress levels and take steps to manage them. Stress can impact on your health and relationships. Raising a child with a disability can be a particularly stressful experience so it can be useful to learn some strategies for managing stress. These might include relaxation techniques, counseling, self-talk techniques or meditation.

Think about your life balance. Your role in caring for your family, work and household chores needs to be balanced with some time socializing with family and friends and doing some activities or hobbies you enjoy. This will help maintain your energy levels, manage your stress and help your ability to stay positive. Using planning, time management and organization to make time for the things you enjoy is important to help you cope.



Think about respite care. Some families have friends or relatives that can take your child for a time to allow a much needed break. Other families do not have a lot of family support or feel their child is too difficult for friends or relatives to manage. Respite care provides a safe environment and staff trained in caring for children with special needs to allow families a much needed break. Child care centres can also provide care for children with special needs to allow parents some time for tasks such as shopping or just some time to themselves.

Pace yourself. Don't try to be the perfect parent in every way and burn yourself out in the early stages. Realize that what you are doing is hard work, you are human and you can only do your best. Remember to save some of your energy for later on. Remember that everyone is different and don't compare yourself to others.

Consider a support group. Sometimes family and friends just don't understand what you are going through. A support group of parents with similar children gives you a chance to exchange ideas, share concerns, find out information and vent your feelings with people that really understand what you are going through.

Support your other children in dealing with a sibling with a disability. Make sure your other children have the opportunity to openly discuss their feelings about their sibling. Try to spend some one on one time with your non-disabled child. Don't give them too many responsibilities in caring for their sibling and allow them time to be a child. Watch for signs that they may need some support or time out for themselves. Many disability services have support programs for siblings.

If you feel that you need some extra support do not hesitate to ask for it. Your child's therapist should be able to help you find the help you need. Disability services such as Autism SA, Disability Services and Child and Youth Health should also be able to suggest suitable services.

Talking Matters now has a psychologist who can support parents. This service is available privately, with medicare plans or through the FAHCSIA funding for eligible families.

Remember you are your child's most important support so look after yourself!

