



Parent Support

What support do parents need?



Parenting can be stressful. If your child has recently been diagnosed with a disability — or if you believe your child may have a problem — you may be under even more stress than usual.

You may feel scared, worried, frustrated, sad, or angry. Or you may not be feeling any strong emotions at all. All of these reactions are normal, but if you're feeling emotions you do not understand or know how to deal with, it is important to look for help and support so that you can be the best parent

possible. Good support — which can include everything from a consultation with a specialist to attending a support group — will help you use your energy to help your child, your family, and yourself.

In the U.S., about 14 percent of children are diagnosed with special health care needs. The numbers vary, as some children are diagnosed at birth before they leave the hospital, and others may not be diagnosed for several years. And in some cases, no medical diagnosis

children, or even your ability to socialize with friends. Make a special effort to connect with others often.

3. Make time for yourself. You may be busy, overwhelmed, and constantly worried about your child. But don't neglect your own needs. If you're not regularly resting and taking time for yourself, you might become exhausted and overwhelmed.

will ever be made. However, children with delays or disabilities may receive special educational services, regardless of diagnosis.

Navigating the path of finding a diagnosis and accessing services can be overwhelming and confusing. It is important to know that in most every community, other families are following similar paths and are there to support you.

Talk to your child's doctor or a local hospital to find a support group, or another parent you can talk to. Find out how other parents manage their stress, and how they make time for each child in the family — not just the child that has special needs.

It is also important to make time for yourself. Ask a relative to babysit, plan a weekend away, or lean on your spouse or partner. Going it alone is the hardest path to take.

Ways to help your child:

ONE Find out everything you can about your child's disability or delay. Researching and knowing the "lingo" can help you communicate better with experts and other parents about your child's condition.

TWO Go through your local hospital or school district to find a support group or parent-educator. Talk with other families of children with the same disability or delay for support, friendship, and ideas on working through tough parenting issues.

Resources:

Call [Early Access](tel:1-888-IAKIDS1) at 1-888-IAKIDS1 if you have child development questions or concerns.

Link to an [Area Education Agency](#) in your region for more child and family information: www.iowaaea.org. Find a contact for your area under the [AEA Directory](#) tab.

The [Access for Special Kids \(ASK\) Family Resource Center](#) helps families of children with disabilities or delays find services and support.

The [University of Iowa Disability Resource Library](#) offers books, DVDs, and help with research on a wide variety of disability topics.

The [National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education](#) helps parents become advocates.

This factsheet is part of an informational series for parents of children ages 0-5, developed by the Iowa Department of Education Early Childhood Services Bureau. (Updated April 2010)

Three important facts about caring for yourself:

1. Know that you're not alone. One in seven children is identified as having special needs. The circumstances and needs of each family are unique, but each family has common experiences and can understand your stress and frustrations.

2. Everyone in your family is affected by your child's disability. This can put stress on your marriage, your relationship with other

THREE Create as many "normal" family moments as possible. Play games, go for walks, read lots of books. Make time for relaxing moments in which everyone just has fun being together.

FOUR Nurture your other relationships. Hire a babysitter and go on a date night with your partner, or enjoy an evening out with friends. And if you have other children, be sure to spend time with them doing activities they enjoy.