



PARENTING SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

“With compassion and courage, parents of ‘imperfect’ children share their experiences with others, and affirm the reality that every child is a gift from God, no matter how long that child is in our arms.”

- Mark Shea



Your child has just been diagnosed with a developmental, medical, psychological, learning or other disorder - what now? A child's diagnosis can bring a wide range of emotional responses:

- * **Denial:** *I can't believe this is happening to me*
- * **Anxiety:** *How can I possibly handle this? Who will help me?*
- * **Fear:** *What will happen to my child and my family?*
- * **Guilt:** *What did I do to cause this?*
- * **Depression:** *My hopes and dreams seem to be lost forever.*
- * **Sadness/Grief:** *I have lost the child that I thought I had. I have to completely adjust my vision and expectations of what the future may hold.*
- * **Anger:** *This isn't fair! My child and I don't deserve this.*
- * **Relief:** *Finally my child's struggles have a name and I can start to learn more and get some help.*

Studies show that mums who have children with special needs often neglect themselves during their consuming quest to help their kids. Ignoring personal needs can result in exhaustion, depression, breakdown in relationship with other family members and a host of other physical ailments.

In fact, taking care of oneself and combating feelings of isolation are the primary challenges faced by parents of children with special needs.

Getting past the self-blame is crucial to well-being. It's about shifting one's perceptions and expectations. Children with special needs develop at a different pace. Instead of focusing on what your child can't do, take pride in positive attributes and small steps made.

Parents cope better with the challenges of raising a child with special needs when they have regular interaction with parents in the same situation. Such support helps to strengthen them, and it's also the source of some of the best information on how to cope with their child's needs, solve problems and find the best physicians, therapists and equipment.

It helps parents to know that they are not alone. Finding others who understand their experiences will help parents to navigate this uncertain and very challenging world. While each child and family is different, whether your child is diagnosed with a learning disability or a rare medical disorder, connecting with other parents with similar experiences can help you feel not quite so alone in the struggle.

Maria found out that parents who understood what she was going through could provide expert referrals and advice, as well as a sympathetic ear. "I thought I am alone. I really am the only one. I was devastated." A year later Maria found a parent group that made her feel supported. "There's a comfort in having someone who knows where you're been and where you're going. You know that if she can do it, I can do it." Once you connect with the right person or group, you can share information, support, strategies - even a laugh or two. "We talk about what to do when people are staring at your daughter in public. We talk about the depth of our grief and spout off. It's all about understanding. You have to have some comic relief, and only another parent with a child with special needs can share that with you. There are times when we look at each other and just start laughing - and that's so necessary for survival."

If you are a parent with a special child, there is a group of parents with special needs children, who meet once a month known as Heart Club Plus. Please call CLM for more information.

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