



LIFE IN A BLENDER: **Caring for a Child with Physical, Emotional and/or Behavioral Needs**

Parenting a special needs child, whether with physical or emotional disorders is not what you expected parenting to be. It takes you down roads and through experiences you never dreamed you would be taking. Many times it shatters dreams, tests limits, challenges beliefs and strains relationships. It shatters dreams, tests limits, challenges and strains relationships. This is important to remember for two reasons:

- 1) These differences make it almost impossible for others to understand your experience, and
- 2) These differences make it hard for you to see what you are doing well.

Realizing – sometimes over a period of years – that your child has special needs, gradually changes your lifestyle and view of the future. The emotions that go along with this adjustment are often overwhelming, especially because they are with you all day – everyday – morning, noon and night! These feelings don't just visit your home and family: they move right in. Just who are these less than welcome visitors?

UNCERTAINTY: This is uncertainty of not knowing if the next minute will bring crisis or calm: the uncertainty of having no answers to your questions; the uncertainty about what kind of person your child will become; the uncertainty of not being sure how other children in the family are doing and how your marriage may be surviving through the day-to-day stress and repeated crisis.

GUILT: Families feel responsible many times for their child's disability. They often feel that they did something to cause the problem. Professionals may reinforce this feeling of guilt by making parents or caregivers feel inadequate.

GRIEF: There is frequent pain that comes from watching your dreams for your child slip through your very hard working hands. There is day-to-day sadness of sharing your child's frustrations, failures and fears. There is the disappointment of seeing hopes for other parts of your life fade – friends, family, marriage, job stability, and financial security.

ISOLATION: There is the near total aloneness you may feel listening to parents whose children are not struggling with special needs and can trade stories on their child's successes. You may feel isolated from your extended family as they may judge you rather than support you. Then there are professionals whose reactions may leave you questioning your sanity and competence. Isolation also haunts you when your child is excluded from activities and friends.

HELPLESSNESS: Your feelings of helplessness stem from your never-ending wish to make your child better totally and forever – and your lack of success to make that wish come true no matter how hard you try! Then there is the day-to-day helplessness of using every tool you have to solve a problem and nothing seems to make a difference.

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All of this is made much worse when you get reports that your child is causing more problems, failing in school, is suspended or expelled, is arrested, is victimized or suicidal.

LOSS OF YOU: You may have become completely accustomed to having no time for yourself or you may have forgotten what it is like not to worry constantly and enjoy yourself. Friendships, hobbies, leisure time, reading, fun – these are things of the past. This loss only leaves you more vulnerable to all of the other feelings whirling around you.

ANGER: It may often seem like you are angry at the entire world; angry at yourself for not knowing what to do; angry at your child for being so demanding and giving back so little; angry at your spouse for not supporting you more or understanding your child the same as you do; angry at family, friends and professionals for blaming you rather than helping you; angry that services aren't available or take forever to access.



Taken together these feelings probably stress you to the edge of burnout, if not over the edge and beyond. Remember that even with all of this, you haven't given up. Take a few moments as you read these words and honor your courage and strength to go on everyday for your child.



Adapted from "Coping Skills Manual"
prepared by Parents Supporting Parents of Maryland
1994

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