

Raising a Child with Special Needs

Parenting can be a tough job at every stage, and that's especially true if your child has special needs.

Whatever your child's challenge may be, it's important to find ways to enjoy his childhood.

- Define your child by his personality and things he enjoys, not by his special need.
- Include your child in family activities whenever possible, and give her tasks appropriate for her abilities, to help her feel like part of the family team.



One of the best things you can do for your child is take care of yourself.

- Join a support group in which parents who live with similar experiences can encourage you.
 - Participate in a respite care program, so your child can be well cared for when you need some occasional time away.
 - Seek information from organizations that can help you advocate for your child in school, within the medical community, and elsewhere.
- Give yourself a break. Sometimes you'll feel frustrated or wish things were different. Express yourself in a journal or with a trusted friend. Remember to celebrate the positive things your child brings to your life.
 - Tell your child you love him every day. Whatever his level of understanding, words spoken from the heart can have a positive impact.



Special Needs = Safety First

Children with special needs are more susceptible to common dangers, such as choking, falling or wandering away. As you focus on loving your child and providing for his needs, also take extra steps to keep your child safe.

- ⊕ **Learn child CPR** and stay current on how to assist your child in an emergency situation.
- ⊕ **Keep small toys out of reach** if your child (very young or older) is prone to putting things in her mouth.
- ⊕ **Remind your child to eat** while sitting at the table, not while walking or playing.
- ⊕ **Install handrails**, especially in places such as the bathroom, where the floor can be slippery.
- ⊕ **Tuck cords away** from your child's reach.
- ⊕ **Keep windows and doors locked** when they are not being used, or when you are home.
- ⊕ **Based on your child's level of development, teach her basic safety rules**, such as not to cross a street without looking both ways, not to give strangers personal information and not to accept food or drink from someone they don't know.

You know your child best. Consider her needs, and be proactive.