Parenting a child with a disability

Roughly half a million Canadian children live with a disability. Disabilities can cover a wide spectrum, from conditions involving physical or developmental limitations to chronic illness. Some are apparent at birth, while others emerge as the child gets older.



If you are a parent of a disabled child, the extra time and attention required can add considerable additional strain on you, your family and your career. Building and using a support network is essential for parents with disabled children. Learn to request and accept help and you will ultimately be in a far better position.

Some of the challenges of caring for a disabled child include:

Dealing with day-to-day physical care
Coordinating services and attending appointments

- Juggling your child's care with the needs of work and other children
- Finding appropriate child care
- Dealing with family and friends who may be unsupportive
- Dealing with medical emergencies
- Finding the necessary support in the educational system
- Dealing with related stress (financial, marital, physical fatigue, etc.)

What you can do at home:

- Give yourself and others time to adjust.
- Learn as much as you can about your child’s condition.
- Contact organizations that specialize in your child's disability.
- Find out what government aid or community support is available to you.
- Learn from other parents who have walked the path—join a support group.
- Ask for help from professionals, extended family, and friends.
- Take care of yourself. Take time off as needed, eat well, exercise, and spend fun time with your child and with other family members and friends.

What you can do at work:

- Communicate with your supervisor about your child's disability and special needs.
- Explain that you may be temporarily distracted as you try to organize life for your child. Try to give a time line of when you anticipate that you will have at least organized the practical side of things.
- Discuss whether a flexible work schedule is possible. You’re likely to need extra time to take your child to medical appointments, etc.
- When you are properly back into your work, try to focus on your job during work hours. If you must make phone calls or run errands related to your child, try to do so during your lunch break.
- Emergencies happen but avoid “surprises” whenever possible. Give your supervisor as much warning as you can of upcoming days off.
- Arrange back-up daycare for your child to cover sick days or other times when your regular caregiver is suddenly unavailable.

The additional care needs of disabled children can place added work and stress on parents and caregivers. Remember that you are not alone. There are broad support networks available to you in many areas of your life. Ask for help and understanding and chances are, you will receive it.