

Momentum

Coping with a child's developmental disability



Employee Assistance Program
For Professional Consultation

Call 1-800-356-7089

For TTY Users: 1-800-456-4006

Importance of a caregiver's health

- ✓ If an adult doesn't practice good self-care, they may suffer chronic health conditions, social isolation and depression. This adversely impacts the child with a developmental disability.
- ✓ Stress management is a necessity. Take breaks from caregiving to self-rejuvenate. Maintain your personal interests, hobbies and friendships; seek balance. Adopt stress management techniques.
- ✓ Don't ignore your physical and mental health. Get medical care when you need it. Eat a balanced diet, and get regular exercise to cut stress.

What are developmental disabilities?

Learning that your child has a developmental disability is a life-changing realization. You may experience challenges and triumphs that you never could have imagined. In addition to learning everything you can about your child's condition, it's also vital to take good care of yourself and to ask for help from family, friends and professionals.

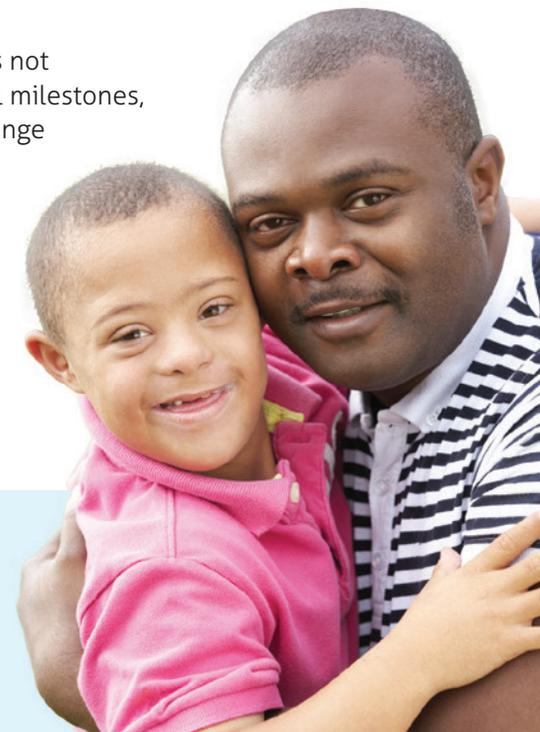
The term "developmental disability" refers to impairment in a child's physical functioning, learning, language or behavior. These conditions begin at birth or during childhood. They restrict a child's functioning in major life activities, and they are usually lifelong. Types of such disabilities include:

- Autism spectrum disorders
- Down syndrome
- Language and learning disorders
- Cerebral palsy
- Fetal alcohol disorders
- Muscular dystrophy
- Behavioral disabilities such as ADHD
- Vision or hearing impairment

If you're concerned that your child has not been achieving certain developmental milestones, talk with your child's pediatrician. Arrange for comprehensive evaluation of your child. Early identification can have a significant impact on a child's development.

Take advantage of all the therapies, services and supports that your child may need, and contact your program for coping assistance!

Depending on your child's specific disability, treatments can include physical, speech and occupational therapy, plus behavioral supports. Work with the school system, agencies and providers to arrange the services your child needs.



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How a child's special needs can impact the family

There are some common challenges for families raising children with developmental disabilities.

- Parents may struggle to balance their own lives while coordinating a complex set of services that the child needs. Parents of children with disabilities experience depression and anxiety more often than parents whose children aren't disabled.
- The time and energy required for parents to care for a disabled child can impact other children in the home. In some cases, resentment and jealousy may develop if the child with disabilities seems to require much of the parents' attention.
- Parents should access respite care, counseling, and available community services.
- The family may feel financial strain. Although public school districts provide educational services to disabled children at no cost, there are often other expenses that families must cover. These include out-of-pocket costs for medical care, child care and various supportive therapies.
- The cumulative effects of the challenges listed above can harm the health and well-being of the child with a developmental disability.

Source: *Maternal and Child Health Journal*.

Tips for caregivers



Synch with school

Maintain frequent communication with your child's teachers and therapist(s). Find out what skills your child is learning at school, and look for ways for your child to use those skills at home and in social situations. If your child does not seem to be progressing, discuss this with the teachers.



Join a support group

There are parent and sibling support groups (either in-person or online) that focus on every specific type of child disability. In addition to sharing ideas on how to best work with schools and therapists, a support group can help combat the isolation and fear you may experience as a caregiver.



Savor small successes

Regardless of how things are going, spend time together doing things that the child enjoys. Build a feeling of success by praising their efforts and providing special rewards when they succeed. This can help offset the days when things don't go so well.



Webinar—Join us on Wednesday, April 13, 2016 for an enlightening webinar: *Is Your Child Safe on the Internet?* Register [here](#).