

Thriving When Your Baby Has a Diagnosis Involving Developmental Delay

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Raising a child with a genetic diagnosis is a daunting task, and you may already be experiencing its effects on your family. Parents caring for a newborn with a disability often have higher stress levels and are at higher risk for mental illness. You may be making multiple big changes to your life. Are you cutting back on work hours? Is your marriage or relationship with your partner suffering? In the flurry of both expected and unexpected changes, don't forget about your own health and wellness! "*Problem Focused Coping*" is a strategy that can help you look at the future and your child with love and hope.

Problem Focused Coping helps you to think about your child and his or her disability in practical and active ways. This is different from "Emotion Focused Coping," which helps you to better control your negative reactions (anxiety, anger, denial, sadness) with various stress management skills. While each type of coping has its benefits, parents that emphasize Problem Focused Coping overall feel more satisfied, better adjusted, and less stressed. Here are some examples and tips:



Become an Expert on Your Child's Disability. Understanding your child is the first step to helping your child. Incorporate developmentally appropriate and stimulating toys and books at home. Community resources such as early intervention (speech, behavioral, occupational therapy, and more!) and individualized educational plans can be helpful. Over time, you will become your child's best advocate as the leader of your child's team!



Maintain a Routine and Plan. A steady routine will help your child learn faster and be less frustrated. Back-up plans will keep everyone calm and collected when things do not go as planned



Create a Support System. No parent is expected to raise a child without help. A strong support system often includes family, friends, and perhaps a spiritual community. Strongly consider joining a parent support group specific to your child's diagnosis. And of course, don't forget your friendly neighborhood pediatrician and medical home! 😊



Positive reappraisal. Your child has so many talents and gifts that can be easily overlooked during times of stress – don't forget them! Remind yourself of your child's strengths every day by cherishing each accomplishment, no matter how small.



Include Your Partner! Each parent has unique ways of interacting with and talking to your child that are equally important to his or her growth. Having your partner help out also relieves some of the burden and makes sure that the two of you are on the same page. Families that work together to nurture their child have higher marital satisfaction and lower divorce rates. If you are a single parent, include in your child's life responsible role models of the opposite gender – your child can still learn a lot from him or her! Also look for a reliable confidant – commonly a close family member – who can be your emotional outlet. If you are actively dating, make sure your partner is a person who also appreciates your child's gifts.

When you take care of yourself, and share both the joys and challenges of the parenting journey with your "village," you may find that your new child with a disability helps to strengthen your family in unimaginable ways! Your dreams for your child are only just beginning, and will continue to evolve with his or her growth.