



Preventing Parent Burnout

*Stress Management for
Parents of Children with
Special Needs*

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All families experience the stress of ordinary life events.

- birth
- death
- loss of job
- moving

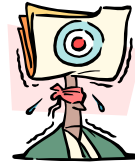
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All parents experience the stresses of parenting in general.

- Worries over growth and development
- Worries over their child's physical safety.

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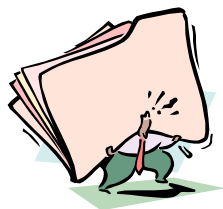
Extraordinary Parenting Responsibilities Create Extraordinary Pressures on Parents.



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Parents of Children with Special Needs act as their child's:

- Case manager
- Nurse
- Therapist
- Advocate
- Teacher



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Parents often feel plagued with feelings that they should always be doing more.

- Researching a new therapy or medication
- Making another phone call
- Advocating for an important program



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At the same time, parents often...

- Have no formal training to prepare them
- Lack quality childcare
- Feel homebound and isolated
- Have little time to maintain their own health
- Have limited time for other children
- Have limited time to maintain healthy relationships

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Problem: When child is diagnosed, ALL the attention is focused on helping the child.

Parents also need help with learning how to cope with the additional stresses of parenting a child with special needs.

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What has you stressed out?



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- Most common stressors reported: worry about the future; the child's difficult behaviors; increased financial burden; finding services; disagreement between parents.

All Stress Is Not Created Equal

- Stress can be divided into three primary categories:
 - internal stress
 - external stress
 - physiological stress

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Internal Stress
"The Enemy Within"

- perceptions
- beliefs
- expectations
- attitudes

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STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH INTERNAL STRESS:

Managing the Reality Within

"As parents, we may not always be able to totally control the reality outside of us, but what we can manage is the reality within us."
- Dr. Joel Goodman

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Challenge Beliefs

- The success or failure of my children depends entirely on me.
- Other people must see me as a good parent, able to handle everything.
- I should always deny my own needs for rest and recreation in order to help my children.
- It's selfish of me to spend time and energy on myself.
- I can't really change my life; I just am who I am.

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Develop Realistic Expectations

- Unrealistic expectations lie at the root of burnout.
- When expectations are not met, our first thought is often, "What did I do wrong?"
- Develop realistic expectations for both your child and for yourself as a parent.
- Remember that the goal is progress, not perfection.
"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

- Theodore Roosevelt

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Catch Yourself Making Negative Statements and Challenge Them

- Pay attention to your self-talk.
- Stop putting yourself down for mistakes and imperfections that are just part of being human.
- On top of the stress of your life experiences, you're adding additional stress in what you're telling yourself.
- Try talking positively to yourself. Tell yourself "Good job" or "You handled that tough situation well."

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Practice Positive Thinking through Daily Affirmations

- Letting go of what I cannot change celebrates my courage.
- It won't be this way forever.
- What's on the other side of this awaiting me?
- Life does not have to be perfect to be wonderful.
- Don't believe everything you think.

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Appreciate Yourself

- It's far too easy to take ourselves for granted.
- Acknowledge the good you do for your family, friends, community and yourself.
- Learn to appreciate your own worth and value.
- Realize that each one of us is talented in our own unique way. Appreciate your own special skills.
- Sometimes it's enough to try hard. Sometimes our skill is perseverance. We need to honor our effort.

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Managing your child's special needs can be emotionally draining.

A strong support system and a willingness to share your concerns with others can help.

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Acknowledge and Work Through Your Negative Feelings

- Communicate with your spouse or partner.
- Develop a support network.
- Rely on positive sources in your life.
- Seek professional help.
- Pen pent-up emotions. The simple act of disclosure is what helps relieve stress.

"Go where you will be comforted, but take someone along who cares about you, who will listen along the way, and with whom you can share a quiet toast when you reach your destination."

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Recognize What You Can and Cannot Control

- The only real control you have is the choice of your own thoughts, your own words, and your own actions.

"You can't push a wave onto the shore any faster than the ocean brings it in."

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External Stress Factors

- Dealing with school about your child's program.
- Coping with difficult behaviors.
- Educating neighbors and relatives about your child's special needs.
- Helping siblings understand their brother or sister's special needs.
- Financial pressures.
- Working with spouse on child management and discipline.

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External stressors often involve relationships with others.

- Strong communication, problem solving and organization skills are key to your ability to successfully manage external stressors.



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Strategies for Coping with External Stress *Analyze Problems Thoroughly*

- Describe the problem with a specific statement.
- State how it could be better.
- Determine what is keeping it from getting better.
- Propose solutions for the things over which you have control.
- Plan action with specific, achievable goals.

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Be Assertive *Stand Up for Your Decisions!*

- Assertiveness simply means expressing your feelings and letting others know your beliefs and opinions.
- To become more assertive:
 - Speak up.
 - Disagree with others when you believe differently.
 - Say no to unreasonable demands.
 - Learn about your child's needs so you can be an active participant in meetings, etc.

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Time Management

“So much to do, so little time.”



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- Define your limits, then say no.
- Simplify your life.
- Develop routines.
- Set short-term goals and prioritize them.
- Delegate.
- Become an expert organizer.
- Live by lists.

Physiological Stress

Diet, Exercise, Rest, and Recreation

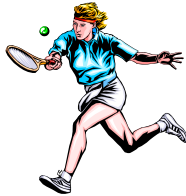
- Children with special needs often require exceptional amounts of energy.
- In order to replenish energy, parents need to be sure they get sufficient rest, eat well balanced meals, and exercise vigorously.



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Strategies for Coping with Physiological Stress

- Get physical.
- Get rest.
- Have a good laugh.
- Play.
- Relax – deep breathing, guided imagery, meditation.
- Give yourself permission to take time off.



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Begin to think of yourself as a person who is worth a moment of your time.

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Start a YOU List

- Think of yourself for once.
- Rediscover yourself as you remember who you are and what you like, apart from your children.
- Make a list of things that you enjoy doing.
- Put the list on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror so you are forced to look at it.
- Each day do something on your growing list.

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A YOU List may include:

- Reading a good book.
- Listening to music.
- Taking a long bath or shower.
- Writing, painting, or other creative activity.
- Praying or going to church or temple.
- Exercising or getting outdoors to enjoy nature.
- Talking to a close friend.
- Eating a meal without interruptions.

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If you don't find positive ways to cope, you will suffer from negative ones. Identify six ways you can soothe yourself when under pressure.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

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Fostering Resilience in our Children: Parents as first teachers

Our children learn how to cope with life's challenges through our example.

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All parents share one thing in common:
they all want what is best for their child.

- The best teachers
- The best therapists
- The best doctors
- The best support staff

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But how often do we stop to consider if our child deserves a parent who is at their best?

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When we are able to effectively manage stress in our lives, then we have something to give to our important parenting role.

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Questions?

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