

# Taking care of yourself when you have a child with physical, emotional, or behavioral problems

Being a parent of a child with physical, emotional, or behavioral problems can be exhausting. Try to take good care of your physical and emotional health. Doing so will help provide you with needed energy to care for your child with special needs.

Schedule time for yourself. Use a calendar or planner to set aside specific times for buying and cooking healthy foods, resting, visiting with friends, and doing other things you enjoy. Don't be afraid to ask family members or friends for help. Take a break while your child uses community services (such as school programs, social skills training, job training, and counseling). Ask your doctor about other resources that can provide you with needed personal time.

Learn ways to handle the normal range of emotions, fears, and concerns that go along with raising a child with special needs. Seek information about your child's condition so that you will know what to expect. Use exercise, positive self-talk, relaxation, deep breathing, and other techniques to help you handle stress. Learn how to recognize when you need to use them.

Find out whether there is a support group in your area for parents of children with the same condition. Local and national groups can help connect families and provide much-needed sources of information. It may help you to share your feelings with others or simply to find out how others have addressed common issues. It can be comforting to talk with other parents who also face the challenges and joys of raising a child with special needs.

Seek and accept support from others. Don't wait for information and assistance to come to you. Consider using respite care, which is a family support service that provides a break for parents and siblings. Trained staff can relieve family members from caregiving duties as needed. These breaks can help families communicate in a less stressful context and allow parents to focus complete attention on their other children for a while.

Allow yourself time to grieve if needed. You may feel a sense of loss about the dreams you had for your child. As you work through your grief, you will be better able to care for yourself and your family. Talk with your doctor or another health professional if you think you or another family member may be depressed or having other emotional difficulties.

Be realistic. In raising any child, there are no guarantees for success. It is important to remember to do the best you can and to know that you can't control everything.

Believe in yourself. When self-doubts creep into your thoughts, remember to focus on the many good things you do for yourself and your child. If you are having problems dealing with your feelings about your child's condition, talk with your doctor about whether counseling may be helpful.

## Work with family and friends

Your family and friends may have concerns about your child. To address those concerns, you can:

- Talk about how your child's condition affects you. Be open and honest about your hopes and concerns. Encourage others to talk about their feelings.
- Encourage them to learn about your child's condition.
- Ask your other children to help with the care of the affected child as much as they are able. Allow them to refuse to help if they do not want to.

**Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)**

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