

Family perspectives

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does having a child with a disability affect families?
2. How is everyday life different from that of other families?
3. How do siblings feel about having a brother or sister with a disability?
4. What do parents expect from schools?

1. How does having a child with a disability affect families?

All families are different, and having a child with a disability affects each member of the family differently.

Disability has an impact on all aspects of family life, including daily routine tasks and finances, education, employment, health, housing, recreation and relationships. Life is often unpredictable for families of children with a disability and it can be difficult to plan ahead.

Families are often in the process of acquiring a range of equipment, services and therapies as their child's needs change. This is an ongoing process and can take up a lot of time and energy.

A family's ability to respond and adjust will depend on a number of things, such as the overall level of demand placed on the family, how much daily assistance their child needs, behavioural issues, external issues such as finances, and each family member's individual resilience. The impact of these on family life will depend on the availability of formal and informal resources and support.

Parents of children with a disability often experience a wide range of emotions, particularly around the time of diagnosis. The depth and complexity of these emotions is a challenge for all parents. Some of these challenges are outlined in the following article [Elite Parenting: Mother, father, siblings and children adapting to disability](#).

Parents can often benefit from opportunities to talk to other families in a safe and supportive environment. This can be as simple as talking to another parent over the phone, catching up for a coffee, or joining a group. For parents seeking professional counselling services, Carers Victoria provides a free ['Talk it over' Carer Counselling Program](#) for carers, including families of children with a disability.

Attending or organising a [Family Perspectives on Disability presentation](#) run by our Association is a good way to gain more insight into what life is like for families of children with a disability.

Despite all of the challenges, families of children with a disability can also experience plenty of hope, pride, and joy.

2. How is everyday life different for families of children with a disability?

Meeting the needs of a child with a disability is usually more demanding than for typical children of the same age.

Routine daily tasks are often more difficult and time-consuming because children with a disability often need more support. This can continue well beyond the typical age for independence.

Some families have lots of appointments with doctors, specialists, therapists and disability services. Dealing with these can be tiring, frustrating and time-consuming.

Some children with a disability need surgery, medical procedures or have conditions that result in emergency hospitalisation. These events are stressful and disruptive to the lives of all members of the family.

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3. How do siblings feel about having a brother or sister with a disability?

It is common for siblings to have a range of feelings towards their brother or sister with a disability, including:

- love
- pride
- admiration
- protectiveness
- responsibility
- embarrassment
- sadness
- anger
- jealousy
- guilt
- shame
- anxiety

Siblings can also develop increased compassion and understanding of those with differences. Many siblings enjoy the opportunity to meet with others in similar circumstances.

Siblings often have extra responsibilities over and above that of their peers which may impact on their learning. Their home lives are somewhat different from that of a child without a brother or sister with a disability. For example, siblings of children with challenging behaviours may find it difficult to complete homework in a quiet place.

Overall, the experience of growing up with a sibling with a disability is unique and all siblings can benefit from greater understanding and guidance.

For more information about supporting siblings see our [SibSheets](#), [Siblink website](#) for school-aged siblings or the [Your Shout website](#) for adolescent siblings.

4. What do parents expect from schools?

Parents of children with a disability have the same hopes and dreams for their children as other families. This includes opportunities for their child to learn and achieve to the best of their potential, to be safe, and to experience acceptance and friendship.

Parents want their child to be included in classroom activities as well as excursions and other experiences. Most parents of a child with a disability are aware that their child may learn differently and at a different rate from others, but they are also aware that their child can achieve and they want their child to have opportunities to learn, succeed and progress.

All parents want the best for their children. Parents of children with a disability will often do everything they can to get the best help and support for their child.

First and foremost, parents of children with a disability want someone to listen and truly understand their individual needs and circumstances.

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