

## Parent Story

### What keeps me going

I'm the mum of two school aged boys on the autism spectrum. I have one at a special school and one at mainstream. What keeps me going? Some days I think it's adrenaline and chocolate. But in reality, it's having people around me who support me when I need it. I'm lucky to have a network of support which includes family, friends, work colleagues, therapists and a fantastic support group.

My husband and I have a real partnership and when things get too much I can take some time out for myself — I like to call this retail therapy but my husband calls it spoiling the children. My parents are always there for me and they help out by picking up the kids after school one night a week and sometimes they have one of the boys stay for the night. It's amazing how the household transforms into an almost tranquil existence when a child is missing.

I have a couple of close friends who provide a sympathetic shoulder to cry on when things get tough and their children are fantastic role models for my socially challenged kids. Work is something that also keeps me going. Those hours at work take my mind off everything else for a while and give me some adult interaction. It also keeps me away from the shops. Working would be impossible for me though, without the support of family and friends to help out when I need it. I have also found many services extremely helpful.

I know that school is often a hot topic amongst parents of children on the spectrum and I have experienced both a special setting and mainstream. I have to say that while the differences are huge, there are positives and negatives to both. Having a good relationship with the schools, however, has made it much easier to deal with any problems when they arise. In the early days following diagnosis, I began on a journey for answers, as I'm sure many parents do. Some questions have been answered, such as, will my son ever say I love you mummy? And some I will have to wait a little longer for, such as, will he drive a car, find a partner or live independently? Some questions may never be answered, such as, why?

I remember when my first son was born, my mum used to tell me that motherhood is the hardest job in the world and you are given it with absolutely no training. I doubt though, that any training could prepare you for raising a child on the spectrum. While this is something I would not choose for my children, I would not change them even if I could.

### Parent

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