

## Early Childhood - Caring for Carers

# MANAGING EVERYDAY CHALLENGES

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Following your child's diagnosis, you may find it more difficult to manage daily tasks and meet your child's needs. Research suggests that parental experiences post-diagnosis in managing everyday challenges include: feelings of distress, anxiety, lack of control, and trying to focus on the present<sup>1</sup>. It can be hard to adapt, but while things may seem chaotic right now, parents often report that these challenges become easier over time<sup>2,3</sup>.

### One parent described their feelings following their child's diagnosis as:

*"Well we both felt quite devastated initially, and thinking 'just how am I going to live through this, day to day'...."*<sup>1</sup>

## Strategies for tackling everyday challenges

### Have a good team of health professionals you can rely on

You are likely to meet a number of health professionals throughout your child's diagnosis. A positive and collaborative partnership between you and the professionals working with your child is very important.<sup>1,4</sup> Ensure that you are engaging with people who make you feel supported and with whom you and your child share a connection.

### Focus on the present

Parents of children with disabilities have suggested that focusing on the present is an effective way to manage uncertainty<sup>1</sup>. Being present with your child will also allow you to include learning opportunities in everyday activities.

### Maintain a routine

Parents have said that maintaining a routine helped their family to cope after their child's diagnosis.<sup>1,4,6</sup> A regular routine will help your child know what to expect on a daily basis. It provides them with a safe environment to learn and grow and will also make you feel more proactive and in control<sup>1</sup>.

### One parent described changes to routine as a particular challenge for her child:

*"...as long as you are doing things that he understands and are within his capabilities, or something he wants to do, it is fine and it's easy. And it's when you get to a problem or task which is different from routine or something he doesn't want to do, that's where the problems start."*<sup>3</sup>

## Adapt to your child's needs

Many parents will need to adapt their everyday life to suit their child's needs<sup>3, 5-6</sup>. While this may not always be possible, it will make it easier to manage everyday challenges if you:

- Are organised and plan ahead
- Make to-do lists or timetables for yourself
- Have an awareness of what your child is capable of – try to match your expectations with their abilities
- Try to predict challenges based on your knowledge of your child's previous reactions and have a plan of how you can handle them
- Use [visual schedules](#)<sup>7</sup> for your child so they know what is happening
- Use [Social Stories](#)<sup>8</sup> to help your child understand what they will do that day
- Tell your child in advance if there are any changes to their routine
- Have a Plan B, in case things don't work out.

## Celebrate the victories

Your child may achieve milestones in their development differently to other children, but their accomplishments are as important and should be celebrated<sup>4</sup>. Facing everyday challenges with your child can be emotionally draining, however, there are also rewarding moments where your child will surprise you when they learn certain skills or achieves new things. Make sure you take the time to stop and celebrate these special moments.

## Talk about it

Parents of children with disabilities have stressed the importance of sharing their experiences with other parents<sup>3</sup>. It's an opportunity to exchange ideas, learn new things and build an emotional support network to help with everyday challenges.

## Self-Evaluation

### List some of the expectations you have for your child.

*Check and see if they match-up with your child's abilities. You can speak to a health professional to help you with this.*

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### List some of the everyday challenges you are facing at the moment. What could you do to manage these challenges?

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List some triumphs that you or your child have had recently.

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List some ways you and your family can celebrate everyday achievements.

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## References

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