

Thoughts for Parents of Special Needs Children

Adapted from fathers.com

Families who have special-needs children or kids with life-threatening diseases face daunting challenges. Not only are their families more *financially* stressed, but the emotional, physical and relational strains of caring for a child will impact the entire family.

1. Stay positive. Parents set the tone for how the entire family copes with the child's special needs. If you can be positive about the situation, interjecting hope and maybe even humor into your family life, your spouse and the other kids will likely follow your lead.

2. Be flexible. It's likely you'll need to find new ways to interact with your child. For many parents (especially Dads), physical play is our primary way of relating, especially with young kids. But if what comes naturally to you doesn't seem to work with your son or daughter, find an alternative. Hugs and playfulness are a good place to start, but keep looking for other points of connection.

3. Ask for help. Parents in households where there are ongoing daily challenges like this are more likely to withdraw, divorce, and be vulnerable. We all need outlets to talk through the ups and downs and get support and encouragement. At the very least, all parents—in any situation—should be meeting regularly with other parents for support, and it's more important for parents facing daily challenges.

4. Look for the good, even through difficulties. One young girl named Hope was diagnosed with leukemia at age two, and then tragically died only seven months later. But her father openly said, "My daughter's cancer and her death have changed me to be more compassionate, to make the most of life, and do more things that really matter."

Special-needs children will test any family, and while none of us would choose to endure the trials and tests that often come, they do help us develop perseverance and other virtues—not to mention that they prepare us to help other families who go through similar things. Life doesn't seem fair sometimes, but our children still need us to do our best for them.