



MONTHLY PARENTING TIP FROM THE ACFC

May 2010



Navigating the Disability Maze*

Almost every family faces the struggle of dealing with a disability or illness at some time. Whether it is a child or parent, it's important to face the problem directly and use your best educational efforts to learn all you can. Knowledge is a powerful ally in helping your children deal with the challenges of their own disability or illness, or that of a family member. It is important for parents to understand their legal rights, and to find the support and help they need to guide their family successfully through this difficult time.

1. **Know your disability or illness.** Medical and educational specialists are your first line of information. Become knowledgeable about the challenges, treatments, and coping strategies of the particular disability or illness you are dealing with. Find a support group where you can interact with other families who are facing the same challenges, or who have walked this same path. Support groups are a way to learn what has worked and not worked for these other families and can help you avoid the same trials and errors.
2. **Know your rights.** Great strides have been made in ensuring the rights of Americans facing a disability. Knowing these rights is paramount to ensuring that you or your children are not discriminated against because of a disability and that they receive the education they are entitled to. Find the information you need at www.idea.ed.gov and www.ada.gov.
3. **Know your child's teachers and other professionals.** The positive relationship you build with your child's teachers, doctors and therapists is an important part of their success. You must rely on their expertise but you also know your child best. There may be times you will have to aggressively express your opinion of what you think is best for your child. It's important to be your child's cheerleader and advocate.
4. **Help your child build courage.** Overprotecting or overindulging a child with a disability can rob them of the opportunity to develop and build their strengths. It's important to allow them to take risks to develop the courage to master new skills and experience successes. Help your child face their problems courageously as obstacles to overcome, not as barriers. Avoid doing on a regular basis what the child can do for themselves. Overprotection robs children of the courage and self-esteem that comes from struggling and succeeding. And, of course, show acceptance and love. Letting them know that you are glad they are your son and daughter and that you love them unconditionally shows them your acceptance of who they are and what a wonderful part of your life they are. This can be expressed through words and actions, such as a kiss, a hug, or play time together.

We all know the story of Helen Keller and the tremendous accomplishments she made in her life, despite her disabilities. Her story is an example of how when a disability or illness strikes a family, it is a challenge that can make a family stronger when they face it head-on and find the strengths in each other.

*Excerpt from "Getting Through to Your Kids", by Michael Popkin, Ph.D.

© Active Parenting Publishers, Inc.

Learn more about ways to develop courage, responsibility and character in your children by joining an Active Parenting Online Group.

This six-week, video-based interactive class is being offered free to CWA represented employees in DE, MD, PA, NJ, VA, WV, Washington, DC, or can be purchased at a discounted rate for non-CWA represented employees.

Visit ACFCcares.com for more information and to register for the next available group.