

Polk/Burnett Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter



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Grandchildren with Special Needs

Inside this issue:

- *Tips for dealing with grandchildren with disabilities*
- *What to look for in some disabilities*
- *Resources available*

Special points of interest:

You can't change what happened to your grandchild, but you can change your attitude or anger toward the problem.

Learn as much as you can about the particular disability affecting your grandchild.

No matter what else you do, tell your grandchild every day that you love them.

Many relative caregivers find themselves caring for children with special needs. A child may be born with Down Syndrome, or is later diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), often life-long disabilities. Sometimes a child is dyslexic or has trouble learning in school. Grandparents caring for grandchildren with disabilities can face unique challenges and require special support and education.

Tips for Dealing with Disabilities

You cannot take away the pain you feel when you have a child/grandchild with disabilities. You can't change what happened to your grandchild, but you can change your attitude or anger toward the problem and offer your support to the child. Here are some suggestions to make dealing with a disability a little easier:

- Show your grandchild every day that you love him for the special person he is.
- Listen when the child needs to talk.
- Show that you are interested in special programs and therapies for the child.
- Talk to other grandparents who have grandchildren with disabilities.
- If available in your area, join a support group for families with special needs children.
- Learn as much as you can about the disability.

Learn More About Disabilities

Learn as much as you can about your grandchild's condition. This helps you cope with what is happening and to anticipate what to expect in the future. Some of the more common disabilities include:

Down Syndrome. These children have an extra chromosome 21 which gives them some physical traits that are easily recognized. Children with Down Syndrome do best in a caring home. They can benefit from special services and learning programs.

Autism. Autism is a very complex brain disorder which usually appears by age three. The causes of autism are largely unknown. Autism affects the way a child interacts with others and his/her world. These children may have trouble socializing with others. They may be slow to talk or be very sensitive to sound or being touched.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Unborn babies can develop FAS when their mothers drink alcohol while they are pregnant. This syndrome affects the child's central nervous system. These children grow at a slower rate than other children. Some may suffer from mental retardation. Some may have learning disabilities. They often have serious behavior problems. There is no cure for FAS, but some special services can help these children cope.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Children with ADHD have trouble sitting still or paying attention. Some experts say that these children may not have enough of certain brain chemicals that help everyone pay attention and control their behavior. Medication, counseling and various therapies are used to treat ADHD. Your grandchild probably won't "out grow" ADHD, but they can learn to adapt to it and do well in school.

Learning Disabilities. A learning disability may make it difficult for your grandchild to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do math. The most common learning disability is

Websites:

<http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents>

<http://www.uwex.edu/relationships>

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dyslexia. Children with dyslexia have trouble reading and understanding words, sentences and paragraphs. Learning disabilities don't go away; people live with them their whole lives. Children who get support (tutoring and various therapies) early can become good students and be successful adults.

“A disability does not have to be a sentence to failure. It's not that these children can't learn—many are very smart—but they need to learn differently. Give them goals and aim high.” (deToledo, S., *Grandparents as Parents*)

Sources:

AARP web site

<http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents>

Grandparents as Parents, deToledo S. and Brown, D.E., 1995, The Guilford Press, New York, pp.240.

Controlled Evaluation of Support Groups for Grandparent Caregivers of children with Developmental Disabilities and Delays, McCallion P. Janicki, M., & Kolomer, S., Sept. 2004, American Journal of Mental Retardation, Vol. 109, Vol. 5: 352-361.

Resources Available:**AARP Resources:**

Grandparents and Child Development – If you know the normal stages of child development, then you'll recognize when your grandchild needs extra help.

A Grandparent's Role in the Family – Families need grandparents. Find out how you help.

Finding Help to Raise a Grandchild – There are so many new issues to think about when you begin to raise your grandchild. Find help with legal, financial, education and health issues.

Other Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) – has information about many children's disabilities and special needs.

National Down Syndrome Society – a wealth of informative articles, including some written especially for grandparents.

All About Autism – The Autism Society of American provides a host of articles about understanding, living with, and treating autism.

Mental Retardation Information – A national organization that provides information and support to people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities and their families.

Learning Disabilities Association of America – Provides support to people with learning disabilities, their parents, teachers and other professionals. Pittsburgh, PA (412) 341-1515

CHADD Fact Sheets – Download a variety of fact sheets about ADHD from Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (CHADD). Website: <http://www.chadd.org>

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome – Alcohol is a leading known cause of mental and physical birth defects.

Books: (Find these on line at <http://www.Barnes&Noble.com>)

Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Ed Child, Lawrence M. Siegel, Nolo, May 2004.

Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood Through Adulthood, Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, January 1995.

The Everything Parent's Guide to Children with Dyslexia, Abigail Marshall, Adams Media Corporation, October 2004.

It's Nobody's Fault: New Hope and Help for Difficult Children and Their Parents, Harold S. Koplewicz, MD Times Books, 1996.

