

# The positives of being parents to disabled children

There's a common cultural assumption that having a disabled child is a negative thing [1]. This could be most noticeable when the child is born and friends and family offer sympathy rather than celebrate that you've become parents.

This usually comes from a good place, of course - people's first thoughts might be about how you'll cope with the challenges you may face. These challenges will vary from parent to parent depending on your child's individual needs. These are some common difficulties that parents face:

- \* Intense or unpredictable childcare demands.
- \* Difficulty getting the right support.
- \* Changes to work situation (which can link to issues with money). [1]

But, despite all of these challenges, two out of three parents say having a disabled child has been positive for their family [1].

So what are the upsides? What do these parents mean by 'positive'? Here are some common responses:

*"Personal growth and stronger relationships between family members"*

It's sometimes difficult to know how far people are willing to go to help you, especially when it comes at a personal cost to them. It's times like this when you can really find out what your family are made of, and what they're capable of in terms of support. Some family members can surprise you!

Having more help can also mean that you build better relationships with your wider family. In the UK we typically have what's known as 'nuclear' families. That means we keep our 'immediate' family very close and the extended family at a distance. We may only see wider family at special events like weddings, birthdays and Christmas time. You may find that members of your extended family will be happy to help, if you let them know you'd be okay with them offering to do so. Some of us might not be so good at accepting help. We often reject offers out of politeness or worry that we're putting people out. By accepting help though, the relationship has a chance to develop in a way that it otherwise might not. Family members might even relish the chance to care for you in a practical way that they know you'll appreciate.

Of course, this isn't limited to blood relatives. This extends to friends that become part of your family network. For your child, having a larger community like this can really help them as they grow.

*"Changes in perspective (e.g. understanding what is important in life and making the most of each day)"*

Some parents in the study felt they had a stronger sense of priority. This could be down to the higher demands of attention and focus, which can cause all the little details of life to fade into the background. If you experience this you might also find that it extends to your relationship with your partner, making you realise how strong you are as a couple.

## References:

[1] David McConnell, Amber Savage, Dick Sobsey & Bruce Uditsky (2015) Benefit-finding or finding benefits? The positive impact of having a disabled child, *Disability & Society*, 30(1), pp.29-45.

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