

How to **COPE** with Being a New Parent of a **Special** Needs **Child**



Coping With A Special Needs Child

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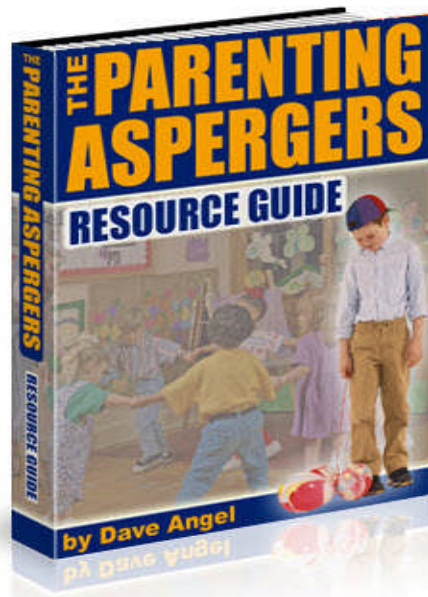
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If you want to learn more about parenting a child with Aspergers then please take a look at our companion product "The Parenting Aspergers Resource Guide"



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How to Cope with Being a New Parent of a Special Needs Child

Section I: Adjusting Your Life

Recently you learned your much-awaited child is going to have special needs. It's not the perfect-baby fairy-tale you expected, but if you are like almost every other special needs mom on the planet, you'll quickly find your baby's story is going to have its own very real magic.

The first major step lies in realizing that parenthood is actually *never* guaranteed perfect. In fact, the only thing that has really changed will be the nature of the challenges facing you. Along with the expected special needs challenges, you will find that many unexpected joys lie ahead for you and your family.

If you're reading this Special Report, you most likely are experiencing one of these 3 scenarios:

- You're pregnant – and the doctors have told you that your baby will have special needs
- Your special needs baby has just been born (and the "special needs" part may or may not have been a shock)

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- Your baby has *finally* been diagnosed with special needs after months of denial that anything was wrong on the medical establishment's part, or after a mystery that left both you and your doctors struggling to find an answer

Important Clarification (Please take time to read)

If your baby is **not** a special needs baby, but you suspect he or she is not developing normally, this report is not really what you're seeking, since it assumes a diagnosis ***has already been made***. Instead, you may wish to start your search for more information by checking out the CICC (Center for the Improvement of Child Caring) [website](#), where you'll find more information on what constitutes 'special needs', and an online diagnostic "tool". (Note that CICC does include a solid disclaimer concerning the nature of this tool, and its proper use. Don't skip reading the [CICC Discovery Tool](#) terms of use, before you employ it.)

Above all, be **proactive** and **assertive** in insisting on **thorough investigation**, if you suspect your baby has hidden health challenges or is not developing normally. If one doctor seems to brush you off with "it's normal" when you really feel it isn't, seek a second opinion... and a third. Early diagnosis plays a major role in your special needs child reaching full potential.

Your Situation Is Unique

There are many types of special needs. Whether your baby is dealing with a life-threatening or utterly disabling condition, or we're talking "minor" developmental delays or a "simple" microtia ear, the bottom line for every parent of a special needs child remains – you are still going to be faced one or more of the following challenges to your family unit:

- Ongoing medical costs
- Ongoing therapies
- Ongoing medication costs
- Possible surgery or multiple surgeries

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- Away-from-home living expenses as you support your child through specialized hospital stays (and provide care for your other children)
- Extra paid care giving
- Specialist staff
- Special equipment
- Assistive technology
- Travel expenses
- Time off work (or outside work given up altogether)
- Special travel arrangements or needs

All this can seem overwhelming, but the first thing to realize as the mother of a special needs baby is that *help is available*: Not complete help, perhaps – but lots more resources than you currently may be imagining!

Before we get to these resources, however, let's deal with something you are most likely processing right now...

Dealing With Your Feelings

Finding out your baby is going to have a possible lifelong challenge is not the outcome to pregnancy that new parents normally expect, but the fact remains that as many as 1 in 28 babies are born with some sort of special needs issue (visible – or not).

It can take time to process all the feelings you may experience – from your first bewilderment or fear for your baby through all the stages of a complete grieving process. Even if the special need is caused by a non-life-

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threatening and relatively minor physical condition, you may experience a strong degree of grief, feelings of loss – and anxiety for your child.

If the special need area is more complex and severe, it's also totally normal to panic and think, "*I can't do this!*", "*I'm not ready!*", "*How did this happen?*", "*Why us?*", "*I'm not strong enough!*" and 101 variations on that theme. If you are going through this stage, please don't beat yourself up for not being able to handle it in one magnificent, saintly stride. You are not an inadequate parent – you are just overwhelmed, as anyone would be. *It is normal* to feel overwhelmed and paralyzed; angry at God; sorry for yourself; sorry for your baby; and a million and one other conflicting emotions.

And you are just as qualified (or unqualified) as any other mother on the planet. The feelings are real, so honor them. Coping techniques will be learned – one step at a time!

Grief is unique to every person and every situation. You will process it, and adapt. Unexpected attacks of grief that sneak up now and again will be counterbalanced by surprise moments of joy that transcend even the deepest grief. It's important to be prepared for these feelings. Just remember that no one has the right to make you feel guilty, inadequate or ashamed whenever sadness for what might have been, or what you see your family and your child going through, intrudes on everyday life. (Least of all, you!)

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In 1969 Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross wrote her iconic book, *On Death And Dying*, identifying and presenting the “5 stages of grief”. Although her study related to terminally ill patients, psychologists everywhere quickly realized that the 5 stages of grief apply to almost **any situation where there is loss**. Parents of special needs children typically go through these 5 stages too.

1. **Denial** (“This can't be happening to us...”)
2. **Anger** (“Why us?”)
3. **Bargaining** (“If you’ll only let my baby... I’ll...”)
4. **Depression** (“Our lives are over, it’s nothing but pain from this point onwards...”)
5. **Acceptance** (“Well, our life is different than we thought it would be, but hey, we can do this!”)

It’s important to give yourself permission to go through and fully experience all stages of the grief process – because you’re going to experience them in some degree anyway. And they may cycle through again, in varying degrees of severity, many times during your child’s life.

And that will hold true whether the special needs circumstance is something as manageable and correctible as fused fingers, or as catastrophic as a life-threatening illness certain to take your baby at an early age.