

What Every Special Needs Parent Wishes You Knew

Years ago when my husband and I began walking down the special needs path, we had so many questions, thoughts, and prayers go through our heads. We ran into much discouragement and many judgmental people, too, when we shared our son's special needs. It seemed as if many people thought they had the answer, "If you'd just give him . . ." or "If you'd do this program with him a couple times" or "We figured you couldn't come because your son . . ." We did research many of those suggestions and, yes, a few helped out, but ultimately God had to lead us to the answers made just for our son and his special blessings.

Fast forward years later, our son is now a CNA working in an assisted living facility while going to school to become a nurse and later on to medical school. He loves working with the elderly and caring for their needs. He comes home so happy after work. This son is the one we walked the special blessings walk with and still walk with him on this road. He is the reason my husband and I now are Special Blessing Coordinators for our state homeschool group. He is the reason we speak at our homeschool convention. He is the reason we formed a Special Blessings Support Group. He is one reason why we have grown so much in our faith in the Lord. He is the reason we have such hearts for special needs children. Our dream is to someday have a horse therapy center to offer to others with special needs in their families.

I took time a few years ago and asked friends and acquaintances who had children with special needs what they'd love for others to know. Below is a list of those many answers that came pouring in. There was much heartache and loneliness in these answers. My prayer is that if you are reading this and you have a child with special blessings you will realize that you are NOT alone. You are on the same journey as many of us today. If you do not have a child with special blessings but know someone who does, I pray that you will be able to use these as little reminders in your interactions with special needs families.

Here is just a sampling of the hearts that shared their concerns, pain, and prayers:

"My kid may present normal, but that doesn't mean he has issues."

"When planning things like co-ops, we might need someone to be their buddy."

"Moms of SN kids get tired of having to point out things that would be helpful. Start looking for accommodations that you can make in your interactions."

"Just because your neighbor's sister's kid likes trains does not mean that my kid likes trains. And his not liking trains does not mean he does not have special needs."

"Siblings of special needs kids often get left out of activities because the SN kid wouldn't be able to handle it. It would be wonderful for people to offer to take the siblings on field trips, invite them over for play dates, etc. Having a SN child sometimes means that reciprocity is not possible."

"Don't judge us if we use the school system or some services. Don't judge us if we homeschool."

“Teach your children to include those not like them in activities.”

“Being a SN mom is very lonely, and we would love to be included in your mom chit chats.”

“My kiddo and I are just like others, we want to belong.”

“We don’t want pity. We are just like others with struggles from time to time.”

“We need friends. We desire acceptance for ourselves and our children.”

“Please don’t call on my child to read aloud. He has dyslexia and will struggle reading aloud. If you want to call on him, please ask him to look over the reading ahead of time and see if he is interested in reading aloud.”

“Don’t talk about my child in front of her.”

“My daughter’s stroller served as her wheelchair, but we did not park in the handicapped spots.”

“Don’t say, ‘He seems fine to me.’ It took us 3 years before we finally got to have some sleep! And two years of working with teams of specialists.”

“Stop making me out to be a superhero. I’m just a mom. Don’t say, ‘I could never handle . . .’ because if it was you, you would because you have no choice and you love your kid. I rarely feel like I can handle tomorrow, but somehow I tuck my kiddo into bed the next night and we’re still standing.”

“My pet peeve is that people think with a physical disability your child is stupid and incapable of doing anything.”

“How exhausted I am!”

“Don’t say, ‘I’m sorry,’ when you hear my child is autistic.”

“Sometimes I want a break from talking about our special needs. I just want to talk about ‘normal’ stuff.”

As you can see in the above quotes, these friends and acquaintances of mine come from many walks of life, but in the center of it all is their need for love. I am reminded of Jesus telling us to love one another and of Paul talking about weeping with those who weep. We need to be there for those families with special needs. We can pray for them, offer to come over and help with the housework, invite them to join us, ask if there is something they need when you are running to the store, and be their friend. Love them. Come alongside them and weep with them when they weep. Laugh with them when they laugh. Be there.