

TAGS: Special Needs; Challenging Behavior

Parenting a Child with Special Needs: Calming the What If's

When groups of parents hang out or socialize, it often seems as if the parents of kids with special needs or learning disabilities tend to find each other. It's almost as if there's a homing signal that draws them together. As parents to kids with special needs, the connection is shared experiences and understanding those experiences in ways that other parents sometime don't get.

It doesn't even have to be a life altering special need; it's enough to be parenting a square peg in our round-holed world-- the type of kid who just doesn't fit the mold.

One of the things that parents of a child with special needs understands is the inherent "what if's" and "what then's" that seem to come with the territory of parenting a child that is "different." Those questions can lead to fears that keep a parent awake at night with a grip of panic about what the future will bring for this child... and for the parent.

Author Elizabeth Stone once said, "Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." When you are parenting a child with special needs, you know just how unbelievably true that statement is. It's as if your heart is walking around firmly attached to your child, and thus is subject to all the emotional bumps and crashes that life brings his way. You know that if you have a kid with special needs or learning disabilities there will be plenty of bumps and occasional crashes.

The Fears That Keep A Parent Awake At Night

Most parents worry about their kids. Some of those fears that parents of kids with special needs experience are common to all parents. Some of those fears feel bigger, weightier when held up against the future that will likely not be typical. Will he go to college? Will she be able to fulfill her dreams; would they have friends? Would he find fulfilling employment? Will she be happy?

What Do Parents Do with That Fear?

There aren't easy answers for how to parent kids who are different or struggle or have special needs, but there are some things you can intentionally focus on when those worries about parenting set in. Here's some helpful advice from our partners at [Creating a Family](#), about handling the worry over kids with special needs.

- Your fears are likely based on what your kids are like right now and projected into the future, failing to take into account that your child will grow, mature, and change. Your kids are more resilient and adaptable than you give them credit for—especially when you're obsessing in the middle of the night.
- Most parents, adapt to the new reality as the kids age. It may feel hard to believe in this moment, but you are probably much more resilient and adaptable than you give yourself credit for — again, especially in the middle of the night.
- Technology and medicine will advance, and your kids will be the beneficiaries.

- The world is a big place with room for lots of different skills, talents, and personalities. There will be a place for your precious child.
- Your idea of "success" might - and likely won't - be his idea of success, and his idea will probably be realistic to his abilities.
- The really awful things that you might obsess about *can* possibly happen, but the truth is most often they don't.

Good ole Yogi Berra, American icon and source of frequently unintended wisdom, said it best: "The future ain't what it used to be." And it's important that parents of special needs kids add: "it ain't what we're afraid it'll be either."

If you are parenting a school-aged adopted or foster child with special needs, this [resource by C.A.S.E. called Supporting Adopted Children with Special Needs in the School Setting](#) will be of great interest to you. Additionally, Creating a Family's [When School is Not Working for Your Child](#) is very helpful.