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# Identifying Occupational Needs in Childcare for Parents with Disabilities

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A with Honors

Parenting can be challenging and unknown territory for anyone, and having a disability can make it even more difficult. There are other ways to still be able to parent by learning how to adapt. Using tools or procedures can aid parents with disabilities so they can still take care of their children. Having a disability does not keep a parent from being loving and capable of the job.

Parenting can be intimidating and scary at many times. No amount of books, articles, seminars, or magazines can really prepare you for what is to come. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the most difficult aspects of parenting with a disability include communication, participation in school events, limited income, maintaining stability in children's lives, discipline, keeping up with the kids, transportation, social messages given to children, doing everything that must be done, and physical exertion. At the beginning of parenthood, a parent with a disability may feel like they don't have as many resources or support as other parents do. Currently there is a pretty large gap in occupational therapy in parenting with a disability, but more and more sources are becoming available. Many parents-to-be like to dig up lots of information about childcare, but advice and support related specifically to the parent's disability is what will really help the most. Talking with other mothers, both with and without disabilities, may be a crucial plan for some women. Getting together for book clubs, lunches, or other social events can help parents learn more about different strategies they can use for childcare. Listening to their stories about what works best for them may help other women parent better and easier.

The article “Parenting with a Disability,” states that the best thing you can do for your child is to look at how much help you will need financially and physically. One or both of the parents may not be able to work as much because they will be taking care of the child. Parents should take into account what their financial plan needs to be for when the child arrives. Also, they should think about if they need a personal assistant, family member, or friend to help them with parenting duties every so often. So, if they must pay a personal assistant to help care for their child, they must take into account how much employing an assistant will cost. Parents that are disabled should see their needs as a parent as a constant process because as the child grows throughout the pregnancy and throughout life, their needs will change. Also, the parent’s disability may change too as the child grows older. If their disability gets worse, they must find ways to compensate and still parent.

Parents with disabilities can adapt in many ways and still be able to take care of their children. A mom with paraplegia may wonder how she can change her baby if she cannot reach the changing table. A changing table can be lowered to a convenient height so parents can pull their wheelchair up to the table and be able to reach their baby with ease. All of the supplies for diapering will be placed within the parent’s swing space, and a reacher will be nearby in case they cannot get to a certain item. If a parent has trouble getting the diaper underneath the baby’s bottom, they could use a device similar to a sock aid, but to help get the diaper on. A pull up or already stuck together diaper could be placed around the plastic piece. The parent could stand the child up on a table at a convenient height and just slip their legs right into the plastic leg holes. Then the parent could hold the baby standing and press a button on the back of their headrest with their head to get the diaper aid to pull the diaper up.

Many children love bath time, and they want their mom or dad to help them do this activity. Parents with paraplegia could use a transfer tub seat with a built in stable seat for a child to help them bathe their baby. They could scoot their wheelchair next to the tub and slide their baby into the seat that is built onto the transfer tub bench. Then, the child would be at the same level as the parent so they could reach them. A showerhead and hose that comes off and can be moved around would be ideal for parents. Then, they can scrub and rinse the infant off when he or she is sitting in the seat. Also, a lowered kitchen sink with extended handles would work well to help parents bathe infants. They could slide their infant into the sink and then begin washing them.

Every family wants to eat a meal together for supper, and everyone should get the chance to do that with their children. A highchair at the same level as a wheelchair is ideal for parents with paraplegia. They can easily slide their infant into the chair and place the plate on the tray. Parents can use utensils with extended handles if it helps them pick up the food and guide it into the infant's mouth. Parents can use a big traveling pillow, which is a pillow in the shape of a U, to set on their lap so they can have support to help hold the baby while giving him or her a bottle.

Dressing an infant can be challenging, especially since they like to squirm around a lot. Parents can lay their infant on the accessible heightened changing table to aid in dressing. The infant's clothes should be placed in lower drawers, and the rack in the closet should be lowered to an accessible height. A baby seat that supports the child's back and goes in between their legs helps hold the child, so then the parent doesn't have to hold the child while dressing them. Parents can put their child in this seat on a table and be able to easily put a shirt on their child.

Even though parenting with a disability may seem challenging, it is still very doable. Every parent is going to go through some ups and downs with their children no matter what.

Adapting is the best way to be able to parent easier and better. Also, it is very important for parents to be able to take care of their children independently.

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