

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

**PARTNERS
FOR HEALTH**
EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

What are developmental disabilities?

At several points during Kerrie's young daughter's first year, Kerrie was concerned that she wasn't exhibiting expected behaviors like rolling over or bearing weight on her legs. Kerrie arranged testing through her doctor, who referred the girl for additional testing with a neurologist. It was discovered that she had a "genetic deletion" causing physical and intellectual disability. Kerrie recognized that life for the family would change.

The term "developmental disability" refers to impairment in a child's physical functioning, learning, language or behavior. These conditions begin at birth or during childhood.

Types of developmental disabilities. Some types of these include autism spectrum disorders; down syndrome; language and learning disorders; cerebral palsy; fetal alcohol disorders; muscular dystrophy; behavioral disabilities (e.g., ADHD); and vision or hearing impairment.

Causes of these disabilities. Developmental disabilities appear to be caused by a complex mix of factors. Contributing factors can include genetic and chromosomal irregularities; poor parental health and behaviors (such as smoking or drinking) during pregnancy; complications during birth; infections impacting the mother or infant; and exposure to high levels of environmental toxins such as lead.

Steps to take. If you're concerned that your child isn't achieving certain developmental milestones—talk with your child's pediatrician. Arrange for comprehensive evaluation of your child.

Supportive services. Depending on your child's specific disability, treatments can include physical, speech, and occupational therapy, plus behavioral supports and coordinated care planning (wraparound) services. Learn everything you can about your child's condition. Work with your child's school system, agencies and providers to arrange the services that would benefit your child.

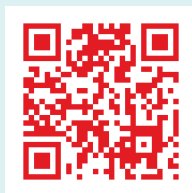
Tap into all the supportive resources you can find, including your ParTNers EAP! (see the resources article on page 3)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Learning that your child has a developmental disability is a life-changing realization. Although you'll undoubtedly face challenges that you never could have previously imagined, your child will continue to bring you joy and brighten your life.

Raising a child with a disability can generate a range of feelings over time, from frustration to accomplishment, from feeling overwhelmed to feeling grateful. It helps to be honest with yourself about what you're feeling and to share these feelings with others. It's also vital to take good care of yourself and to ask for help from family, friends and professionals.

Your ParTNers EAP can serve as a helpful resource both for connecting you with services you may need (see the resources article on page 3) and for helping you learn how to cope and manage stress. Call ParTNers EAP toll-free at **855.437.3486**, 24/7 or visit us www.HERE4TN.com.



How a child's special needs can impact the family

Being a parent of a child with a developmental disability can be a challenge each and every day. However, it may help to remember that you are not alone. Millions of parents in America today are raising children with disabilities. It helps to network with other parents of disabled children for support and caregiving ideas. Below are some common challenges for families raising children with disabilities.

- **Parental stress levels may be high.** Children with developmental disabilities typically have complex educational and childcare needs, in addition to specific social and recreational needs. They may require early intervention programs for physical, developmental, and/or emotional rehabilitation. Parents may struggle to coordinate various disjointed services while balancing their own lives. Given these challenges, parents of children with developmental disabilities experience depression and anxiety more often than other parents.
- **Other siblings can feel adverse effects.** The time and energy required for parents to care for a disabled child can have an effect on other children in the home. In some cases, resentment, jealousy and short tempers may develop if the child with disabilities seems to require too much of the parents' attention. Siblings' health and development can be adversely affected. It's important to be sensitive to other children's feelings regarding their sibling with a developmental disability.
- **The family may feel financial strain.** Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school districts to provide free and appropriate educational services to children with disabilities, there are often other expenses that families must cover. These can include out-of-pocket costs for medical care, child care and other supportive therapies.
- **There also is an impact on the child with a disability.** Given the cumulative effects of the challenges listed above, the child with a developmental disability may experience poorer health and well-being. The many challenges the family faces—if not addressed through active stress management techniques—can impact every member of the family.
- **Parents need to reach out for help.** To address the family's needs, parents should access resources such as your ParTNers EAP, respite care, social and recreational activities for children, medical advice specific to the child's condition, and parent and sibling support groups.

Source: *Maternal and Child Health Journal*.

A caregiver's health is crucial

Studies show that the health of someone caring for a child with a disability has an impact on the quality of care the child experiences. If the adult isn't able to adequately take care of him or herself, the child suffers.

- Common shortfalls in parents' self-care include not getting enough sleep, not exercising, not eating regular nutritious meals, and failing to seek medical attention for themselves. These factors can result in clinical depression, isolation from social activities, high stress and low quality of life.
- Caregivers often experience more disease symptoms, physical limitations, chronic health conditions and reduced immune function.
- Stress management is a necessity. If you're a caregiver, make sure you take breaks to rejuvenate yourself. Maintain your personal interests, hobbies and friendships; seek balance. Adopt stress management techniques like mindfulness, yoga, meditation or long walks outdoors.
- Don't ignore your health. If you get sick, arrange for backup caregiving, and see your doctor. Pay attention also to your mental and emotional health. Eating a healthy, balanced diet will help you stay resilient. Regular exercise will help you stay strong and reduce stress.

Tips for caregivers

If you're caring for a child with a developmental disability, you might consider these ideas for improving your effectiveness.

- **Work in synch with the school and therapists.** Maintain frequent communication with your child's teachers and therapist(s). Find out what skills your child is learning at school, and seek ways for your child to use those skills at home and in social situations.
- **Be an advocate for your child.** If your child does not seem to be progressing, discuss this with the teachers.
- **Join a support group.** There are parent support groups (either in-person or online via social media) targeted to every type of child disability. In addition to sharing ideas on how to best work with schools and therapists, a support group can help combat the isolation and fear you may experience as a caregiver.
- **Savor small successes.** Regardless of how things are going, spend time together doing things that the child enjoys. Build a feeling of success by praising their efforts and providing special rewards when they succeed. This can help offset the days when things don't go so well.



Developmental disability resources for families

At no cost to you, your ParTNers EAP can identify resources for your child with a developmental disability.

If you have dependents with special needs, you may find it difficult to balance your work, family and social activities. Your ParTNers EAP is a place where you can turn for personalized information and assistance. The work-life services of your EAP are in place and ready to help. Key advantages we offer include:

- Telephonic access 24 hours a day to professional work-life specialists who have education, background and experience in special needs areas, simply call 855.437.3486.
- Personalized referrals to care providers, therapists or community resources—with confirmed, pre-screened openings that meet your child's unique needs.
- Convenience services to help simplify other aspects of your family life.

We do the legwork to find the services, resources and practical solutions that work for you! Call us, consultants are available Monday – Friday 6:30am – 5:30pm CST.

Magellan
HEALTHSM