

TIP SHEET

Advice to Parents on Receiving a Special Needs Diagnosis

Upon learning that their child has special needs, many parents react with feelings of grief and helplessness. Once they learn more about the disability and various treatment options, they usually gain comfort from this knowledge. The following tips are provided by parents who have been through the experience of having a child diagnosed with special needs.

- Take a deep breath. Your child is the same beautiful individual he/she was before receiving the diagnosis.
- Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your child. Indulge in a bubble bath, take a nap, get some exercise.
- Avoid playing the "blame game." Your child's disability is not your fault.
- Early intervention can make a tremendous difference. Contact a reputable program, assess available treatment options, and get on the waiting list for services.
- Educate yourself so you can better advocate for your child. Other parents, medical professionals, libraries and the internet offer a wealth of information.
- Join a support group or talk with other parents of children with special needs. They can recommend reading materials, specialists, therapists, lend a shoulder to cry on, and help you celebrate your child's successes.
- Ask for help from friends and family. The sooner you surround yourself with a support system, the stronger you will be.
- Don't let your child's diagnosis frighten you. Sometimes labels are necessary in order to obtain necessary funding from the school district/county/state.
- Find a medical professional that specializes in your child's disability and use him/her to help you better understand the diagnosis and navigate the complicated processes involved in your child's treatment.
- Don't be intimidated by medical jargon. If professionals are using terminology that is unfamiliar to you, ask them to explain. Get the spelling of terms that you want to research on your own.
- Have confidence in your opinions and rely on your instincts. You know what's best for your child.
- Recognize both the positives and negatives. Parents of typical children also experience difficulties and obstacles. Appreciate the good moments and gather strength from them so you are better able to cope difficult times.

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources. For more tip sheets, visit www.fraser.org.