

Needs or Experiences of Children

Research findings for mothers (Bourke-Taylor PhD©)



This fact sheet reports on research findings that identified some needs and experiences of children with disabilities that have a major influence on maternal stress (Bourke-Taylor, 2019). In general, most mothers report that they can manage quite difficult responsibilities caring for their child. However, mothers report that there are some issues around their child's needs that affect their stress levels more than others. There are four main issues that mothers talk about which increase their stress: communication challenges, social difficulties, pain and high exposure to medical procedures.

Communication challenges: Some children are not able to communicate with others effectively on their own when they are playing, at school or at a social event. Mothers of children with a disability actively take on the role of ensuring that their child is understood. Consequently, mothers can be very involved with many of their child's activities, and whilst this might be rewarding, it is also demanding on mothers' time and energy.



Social difficulties: Some children find social situations very difficult to manage. Mothers report finding that they also experience stress when their child is not able to adjust to social situations and activities. As a consequence, some mothers say that their family avoids new or stressful social situations outside of the home. This can lead to increased isolation and may put a strain on relationships.



Experience of pain: It is no surprise that research confirms that parents experience distress similar to their own child when their child experiences pain on a frequent basis. Pain that requires medication, positional change, emotional support from the parents and/or specific equipment can impact parental stress and family life as a whole. Families can become so familiar with the presence of pain that the impact on stress can be underestimated.

Exposure to medical procedures: Children who have high medical needs, take regular medications, or need surgical interventions may experience higher distress than other children. Consequently, parents also report higher stress.

So what can I do?

It is important to investigate ways to manage and contain your own reaction to these issues. Stress management techniques and planning ahead to contain your reaction and distress may help you.

- What triggers the most stress in your situation?
- Who might help you to avoid experiencing distress?
- Who can offer their support at times when you know you may be triggered?

Find and make use of the resources around you, including your partner, professionals, education staff, and close family and friends to support you and your child. It is likely that you may be one of your child's biggest supporters. It's okay to find support for yourself as well.



Understanding what triggers distress can help you contain the impact of issues experienced by your child. Finding the right supports and resources can improve your situation significantly.

Visit our website at <http://www.healthymothers-healthyfamilies.com/> for references and more information.

If this fact sheet has raised any concerns, please seek medical advice from your local GP. Alternatively, please call LifeLine on 13 11 14 or Carers Australia, who can provide short-term counselling and emotional support for carers and families, on 1800 242 636.