

Dealing with a New Diagnosis

Many caregivers wish their family members with extra needs came with instruction booklets. For families who have a family member with a extra need, this feeling may be magnified. As you learn about your family member's disability and interact with medical and educational professionals, remember that you are the expert on your family member. Although you may feel bewildered by the challenges you face and may have many questions, no one will know your loved one as well as you will. Use this module as a guide to help you find solutions for your problems and answers for your questions. You are not alone.

Discovering Your Family Member has a Delay or Disability

Learning that your loved one is developmentally delayed or has a disability can come as a shock. You may be flooded with emotion, and feel overwhelmed. However, there are constructive actions that can be taken now, and there are many sources of help, support, and reassurance available.

Some Caregivers Feel...

Denial - Often the first reaction people have to any loss is denial. When you have just learned that your loved one may have a disability, denial may propel you to explore further and seek the opinion of another professional.

Guilt - It is not unusual for caregivers to blame themselves and wonder whether something they did caused their loved one's disability or illness.

Sorrow - Sadness can occur as you realize that the future you had envisioned for your family member might not materialize. Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and if you discover that your loved one has challenges, you may need to grieve for the healthy child you had dreamed of.

Anger - Anger is a reasonable reaction to the loss of something precious, and you are entitled to feel angry. This is especially common for parents who have a child with a disability. You might be asking, "Why me? Why my child?" Eventually, many parents use their anger to energize themselves in the struggle to get the best possible services for their child.

Anxiety and Fear - When you learn that your family member is not developing in a typical way, there is good reason to be anxious. Coping with a loved one who has a disability or is chronically ill can be exhausting and confusing. Worries about the future and your own ability to be a good caregiver are common.

Acceptance and Hope - Finally, the roller coaster ride starts to level out. Your loved one has a disability or delay, but you have a greater understanding of his or her condition and you realize that you can take loving care of your family member.

What Can I Do?

Reach Out

First of all, ask any questions you may have of the professional who is seeing your loved one. If a doctor or professional is using words you don't understand, ask: "Would you please explain that again?" A large amount of information is being absorbed and it can be very confusing. Go to appointments with your partner or a friend for support and make notes to follow up later.

Learn about Your Loved One's Condition

Search your library and the Internet for information on your loved one's condition. Ask your doctor any questions you have about your family member's condition. Jot down questions that occur to you as you go through your day. If you don't understand something don't be embarrassed to say so.

Contact Your Local MFRC

Your local MFRC is a valuable resource for information, support and community connections. Staff can help you find support and advice from other parents, including other military families, who understand some of the special challenges you and your child may face. Join the online forum as part of this website. This can be a safe place to discuss some of your questions and challenges.

Seek Other Caregivers Caring for a Family Member with a Disability

Realize that you are not alone. Your local MFRC, children's service agency, or health care provider can help you find a support network that will meet your needs. Ask for assistance finding families who have dealt with similar challenges.

Family Connections

Keep talking with your spouse. The more you can communicate in challenging times the greater your strength as a couple will be. You might not react to this new information about your loved one in the same way, but try to explain how you feel and listen carefully as your spouse shares feelings as well. Sometimes agreement is less important than understanding. If there are other children in the home, be aware of their needs as well. Include friends and extended family in building a network of support for all of the members of your family.

Adapted from a resource by [MilitaryHOMEFRONT](#).