

First Words

A First Steps Communications Tool for Families From Family to Family

Handling Stress Through Journaling

“Keeping a journal and writing in it regularly... can be extremely helpful for a parent’s physical and emotional well-being.”

Stress—a word we’re all familiar with. We all have it, but we deal with it in different ways. As parents and family members of children with delays and disabilities, we may have more worries and stresses than most. We constantly do a balancing act, attempting to meet the needs of every family member, our jobs and all the other parts of our lives. When our stress seems to come primarily from the issues related to caring for our special needs child, it can seem hard to find a way to deal with the day to day pressures.

While support groups and online listservs and chat rooms are common ways to find others who share the same frustrations, this may not work for all parents or at all times. Another method of stress relief parents might consider is journaling. Though journaling might not work for everyone, some parents have found it a beneficial way to “let it out”. Keeping a journal and writing in it regularly, or at least occasionally, can be extremely helpful for a parent’s physical and emotional well-being. Writing can help you to organize and understand your thoughts and feelings. It may help you gain perspective and understanding about yourself and the things happening in your life.

To help journaling not become a stressor in itself, consider writing only when you feel the urge, whether it be once a day, a week, a month or more. Also, let the writing flow; no one else needs to read what you write, so don’t worry about sentence structure or finding just the right word. If you have trouble getting started, perhaps using one of the following questions will help:

- What was hard about being a parent today?
- What contributions did I make to my child or family today?
- How do I feel about my life overall?
- What happened today that gave me pleasure or satisfaction?

You could also try completing a sentence. Try one of these:

- The best thing about my child is...
- The worst thing about my child is...
- I am embarrassed or ashamed because I think or feel....
- My child has taught me that....
- I grieve about my dream that will never be...

Alphabet Soup

Each month we cover a few abbreviations, terms or acronyms parents might hear or see while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Here are just some of the abbreviations that you may see when learning about the types of providers you may need on your team:

- PT = Physical Therapist
- OT = Occupational Therapist
- SLP = Speech Language Pathologist (therapist)
- DT = Developmental Therapist
- RD = Registered Dietician
- LCSW = Licensed Clinical Social Worker

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Handling Stress Through Journaling

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- I dream a new dream that....
- The best thing about my spouse/partner is...
- The worst thing about my spouse/partner is...

Let your feelings flow. Hopefully you will notice some change and growth over time as you put your thoughts to paper. On the other hand, if you find journaling isn't for you, try another method—perhaps a support group, reading a book on the subject or seeking assistance from a professional (mental health professional or clergy member). Remember, to be a good caregiver, you have to take of yourself!

**Adapted from "Journaling Your Way Through Stress: Finding Answers Within Yourself," an article by Dr. Robert Naseef. Dr. Naseef is the author of Special Children, Challenged Parents and the co-editor of Voices From the Spectrum. You can visit his website at <http://www.alternativechoices.com>. Adapted and reprinted with permission of the author.*

Technology Resource for Families

The Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD) is a resource designed to support organizations and programs that work with families of children and youth with disabilities. They offer a range of information and services on the subject of assistive technologies. Some of the supports they offer include:

- A free CD-Rom of AT Resources
- FCTD Online Conference Series
- Monthly newsletters
- Searchable member database
- Searchable database of reviews of books, articles, research and other materials of interest



The Family Center on Technology and Disability operates entirely through program support from the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). For more information and to view the resources, visit FCTD on the web at <http://www.fctd.info>.

Advocacy Tip Of The Month

When you are dealing with professionals who work with your child, what does your body language say about you? Is it a positive message, one that says you are confident, knowledgeable and optimistic that you are going to accomplish what needs to be done for your child? Or, does it reflect a low opinion of yourself or your knowledge, or a feeling of pessimism or hopelessness? Next time you prepare for an important meeting or appointment, remember these tips:

- Sit or stand straight, looking professionals in the eye when you speak.
- Sit down in a relaxed but business-like manner
- Greet others at the meeting; open conversation
- Sit next to the most powerful person in the room
- Speak up, don't wait for permission to address the group
- Be organized and bring all the needed information to your appointment
- Dress like you are going to a business meeting
- Be courteous and pleasant, but direct with your input

Resources for Families

Check out these resources on stress relief for parents:

[Journaling Your Way Through Stress](http://www.specialchild.com/family.html)
<http://www.specialchild.com/family.html>

[Becoming A Resilient Family](http://www.ncaonline.org/monographs/17family.shtml)
<http://www.ncaonline.org/monographs/17family.shtml>

[Preventing Parental Burnout](http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/assist/article/preventing-parental-burn-out)
<http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/assist/article/preventing-parental-burn-out>

[Family Education—two pages to visit here!](http://life.familyeducation.com/health/mental-health/42810.html)
<http://life.familyeducation.com/health/mental-health/42810.html>

<http://life.familyeducation.com/stress/mental-health/35898.html>

[Help Starts Here](http://www.helpstartshere.org/mind_and_spirit/anxiety/your_options/anxiety_-_your_options.html)
http://www.helpstartshere.org/mind_and_spirit/anxiety/your_options/anxiety_-_your_options.html