

COPING WITH STRESS

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



Coping with stress and developing resilience

The extra demands of caring for a child with a disability or special educational need can mean that parent carers are much more likely to suffer from stress, anxiety or even depression. We don't pretend to have a magic wand that can make your lives stress-free but there are things you can do that can help you to cope and that may increase your chances of managing stressful times more successfully in future – this is often called developing resilience.

Recognise the signs and symptoms of stress

One of the most important steps to building your resilience is noticing when you are stressed. These can be some of the common signs:

- Feeling irritable and emotional
- Eating more or less
- Avoiding social situations and being more withdrawn at home
- Feeling unable to enjoy activities such as family time, even when you've had a break
- An inability to concentrate and lacking motivation
- Aches, pains, headaches, dizziness, digestive problems, frequent colds
- Feeling worn out and not feeling refreshed after a good night's sleep

Don't ignore these signs – treat them like a red flag that's warning you to think about your needs.

Talk to someone

If you notice you are showing signs of stress, tell someone you trust. This could be your partner or a friend or family member. Or if you find it hard to speak to your nearest and dearest, you could talk to a professional such as a counsellor, your GP or social worker. Just speaking about your state of mind can help to relieve stress and may lead to practical solutions that prevent problems getting more serious.

Ask for help

It can be very hard to admit you need help and, even when someone offers their support, you can find yourself saying "It's OK - I can manage," or worse still, accepting 'help' that in reality makes your life more difficult. Remember, there's nothing to be ashamed of in asking for help and many people feel touched if you choose to ask them to support you.

It can help to spend some time thinking about the things that would really make a difference to you – perhaps someone to do the recycling, someone to babysit your other kids while you go to the doctors – and identify people who you think could do them. This also means you have some specific examples to hand whenever someone offers to help out of the blue.



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Remember the basics

We all know we function better when we eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep and a bit of exercise though it's not always easy to do. If possible, try not to neglect these simple things and remember to appreciate all the things you do to make sure your kids have got their basic needs met too.

For many couples, parenthood brings them closer together, but looking after a relationship takes time and attention, something parent carers struggle to find. Stress can also get in the way of open communication and mutual encouragement. Take time to do shared activities with your partner outside the family if you can and keep talking.

If you are single parent, try and make time to maintain your friendships if you can. Not only can you draw on their support when you need help but sharing fun times can be crucial for general wellbeing. You could also see if there's a single parent group or network in your area.

Join a support group

Getting to know other parent carers can be a life saver. Just being able to talk to someone who's going through the same sort of thing as you or who has been there before you and lived to tell the tale can make a world of difference and you may make lasting friendships. There are lots of local parent support groups, some for families with children with specific disabilities and some for any condition. Look at the 'Ask about' section below for details. If your child has a rare condition, **Contact a Family** (0808 808 3555 or www.cafamily.org.uk) may be able to put you in touch with a group. They also have an online forum called **Making Contact** (www.makingcontact.org) which puts parents in touch with one another.

Ask about

- **Wellbeing courses** - Amaze runs a 'Looking After You' course that teaches techniques like mindfulness and Pilates specifically for parent carers (call 01273 772289). **Mindful Health** offer low cost or free mindfulness courses for parent carers with a referral from Seaside View. (Email kv@mindfulhealth.co.uk or visit www.mindfulhealth.co.uk). **Brighton Buddhist Centre** run mindfulness courses. Call 01273 772090 or visit www.brightonbuddhistcentre.co.uk
- **Parent support groups** - There are lots of parent led groups for children with disabilities in Brighton and Hove. Some are for all children with SEND and some for children with specific disabilities. See a full list of local groups at: www.amazebrighton.org.uk/services-and-support/parent-support-groups
- **Online forums** - If you're not ready or able to meet other parents face to face there are a number of online forums that allow you to chat online with other mums and dads of children with SEND. **Mascot** is a local online forum for parent carers of children with ASC (www.asc-mascot.com); **Contact a Family's** 'Making Contact' forum lets you share your experiences with others and get support (www.makingcontact.org); **Scope** also has an online community for all people connected by a disability (www.scope.org.uk/Community).
- **Counselling** - The following services all provide counselling to parent carers: **Seaside View Child Development Centre** (01273 265787); **Parental Support Counselling Service** at Downs View special school (01273 682253); **Scope Face 2 Face befriending service** for parents of newly diagnosed children or any parent carers at times of crisis (07436 810608). **Possability People** (formerly The Fed) counselling service for disabled people and their siblings (01273 894040 or www.possabilitypeople.org.uk); **Relate** relationship or family counselling (01273 697997); **Dialogue Families Plus** counselling run by YMCA Downslink on 01273 222550.



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- **Carers' Card** - This card (a joint project between the council, **Amaze** and the **Carers Centre**) lets carers get discounts on leisure and wellbeing activities across Brighton & Hove. Call 01273 295153 if your child is under 18, or **01273 295555** if they're over 18. Young carers aged 8 to 25 also qualify for a Carers' Card – call the **Carers Centre** on **01273 746222**.
- **Short breaks** - If you need a short break from caring for your child you should ask for an assessment via the **Disabled Children's Social Care Team (01273 265825)** or the **Adult Social Care Access Point** if your child is over 18 (**01273 295555**).

Further reading and useful links:

- **'Looking after you' fact sheet and videos** - You can try out some of **Amaze's** Looking After You course and download a tips fact sheet at www.amazebrighton.org.uk/services-and-support/training-support-groups/looking-after-you
- **Through the Maze** - Amaze's handbook for parent carers of children and young people with SEN and disabilities (0-14) includes lots of information on education, money matters, social care, health, leisure and more. It's free to parent carers of children who live or go to school in Brighton and Hove. Call the **Amaze** helpline to request a copy on **01273 772289**
- **MIND** - has lots of useful resources if you're feeling down and want to get further information about depression/anxiety and what can help. Visit www.mind.org.uk
- **Five Ways to Wellbeing** - Developed by the New Economics Foundation, these five steps have been proven to enhance wellbeing. See www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/improve-mental-wellbeing
- **Contact a Family** - The Family Life section of their website has lots of information and advice about managing the demands of being a parent carer. Visit www.cafamily.org.uk/advice-and-support/family-life

