

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 life stress-free but there are things you can do that to 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- Avoiding social situations and being more withdrawn at home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 – they can be a red flag that your own needs must be prioritised.

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 (**0808 808 3555** or <https://contact.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) where parents can chat to each other.

Ask about

- **Amaze** – the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disabilities for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk, call **01273 772289** or visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **Amaze Face 2 Face Befriending** – a service for families in Brighton & Hove offering up to six months of support after a diagnosis or new challenges. Befrienders are trained parent carers. For more information go to <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/face-2-face-befriending>
- **Carers' Card** – a joint project between Brighton & Hove council, Amaze and the Carers Centre, this card gives carers discounts on leisure and other activities across Brighton & Hove. Young carers aged 8 to 25 also qualify for a Young Carers' Card. Call the Carer's Hub on **01273 977000**, email info@carershub.co.uk or apply online at new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/adult-social-care/care-and-support-adults/apply-carers-card.
- **Counselling** – **Seaside View Child Development Centre (01273 265787)** provides counselling to parent carers of children with complex needs and learning disabilities. Sometimes parents whose children do not fit the criteria can be seen if the waiting list allows. **Parental Support Counselling Service** for families of children at Downs View special school (01273 682253); **Relate** relationship or family counselling (01273 697997 or www.relate.org.uk); **Dialogue Families Plus** counselling run by YMCA Downslink call **01273 725259**.
- **Parent support groups** - there are many parent-led groups for children with disabilities in Brighton & Hove. Some are for all children with SEND and some for children with specific



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disabilities. See a full list of local groups at: amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/info-advice-parent-carers/survival-strategies/parent-support-groups/

- **Social care assessments for short breaks** - contact the **Specialist Community Disability Service (01273 295550)**. Over 18s can also contact **Access Point** on **01273 295555** or email accesspoint@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- **Wellbeing courses. Mindful Health** offers 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

Further reading and useful links:

- **Contact** – the Family Life section of their website has lots of information and advice about managing the demands of being a parent carer. Visit: <https://contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-child-your-family/family-life/>.
- **Family Fund** – you may be able to get help to pay for activities and short breaks. Go to: www.familyfund.org.uk and fill in their online enquiry form.
- **Five Ways to Wellbeing** – developed by the New Economics Foundation, these five steps have been proven to enhance wellbeing. See: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>
- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities
- **MIND** – has lots of useful resources about mental health. Visit: www.mind.org.uk
- **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's** 'Making contact' forum lets you share your experiences with others and get support (www.makingcontact.org); **Scope** has an online community for all people connected by a disability (www.scope.org.uk/Community); parenting sites **Mumsnet** (www.mumsnet.com) and **Netmums** (www.netmums.com) also have dedicated SEND areas within their forums.
- **Reading Well Books on Prescription** – borrow books that can help you cope with stress, anxiety and depression. Also has a list of mood-boosting books recommended by readers. See: www.reading-well.org.uk.

