



June E-Newsletter

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7 Tips for Being a Friend to a Special Needs Parent

Word of Mom Blogger | Posted: December 20, 2012

Leigh Merryday is a school media specialist and autism parent blogger at FlappinessIs.com. She is married with two children - a typical five-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son on the autism spectrum. In her spare time, she vehemently denies being addicted to Facebook, reading, and peanut butter fudge. No one believes her.



Three years ago, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy we named Callum. He was, and continues to be, a joy to us. But, shortly before he turned a year old, I began to notice the telltale signs of autism. We soon were thrown into the world of developmental therapies, specialists, and ESE. It was a frightening time of worry for his future and adjusting to a reality not quite like the one we had envisioned. And, though we adore him and wouldn't trade him for the world, his needs have certainly affected every part of our lives. One of the things I wouldn't have expected it to affect was my friendships. But it did. Some of the people I expected to be there weren't. And some people I never expected to be there were. Often, I have noticed a hesitation or awkwardness on the part of friends who just don't know what to say or do. I know they care. And I know they mean well. They are, quite simply, at a loss.

Here is what I would like to say to them and others like them, if they were to ask how to be a friend to a special-needs parent:

1. You will probably look up the child's condition online to learn more about it. That's awesome. But try to remember that no condition has identical characteristics. For example, many people are afraid of upsetting an autistic child by touching him. But my son is a complete snuggle-bug. He, like every other person on the planet, is an individual. By all means, ask us about our kids. Feel free to ask, "Hey, I've read some have issues with such-and-such. Does she?" I promise you, we're happy to talk about it. We need to talk about it. And, for a period of time, it may be *all* we talk about. Try not to resent that. We'll adjust. But we need a little time and a lot of patience.

2. Fight the urge to avoid interacting with our children. If you are nervous about how to hold our children or how to talk to/play with them, tell us. We'll help you. I'm happy to advise someone how to gain my son's attention. It's a wonderful thing to me when others see what I see in him, love him, and have fun with him.

This full day training provides information on Medicaid, Medicaid Disability, Medicaid Waivers, Children's Special Healthcare Services, Hoosier Healthwise, SSI, and private insurance.

July 6 ~ 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Kokomo South Branch Library
Kokomo

It's Not WHAT You Say . . . It's HOW You Say It: Effective Communication

Communication is a key factor when working with individuals and organizations. This training is geared toward parents of children with special needs to help build positive working relationships with schools, medical professionals through improved communication skills.

June 17 ~ 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Hopewell Center
Anderson

June 24 ~ 1:30 - 3:30 pm
St. Mark's United Methodist
Bloomington

June 25 ~ 4:00 - 6:00 pm
Ronald McDonald House
Ft. Wayne

June 26 ~ 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Wabash Center
Lafayette

My Child Has Special Needs: Now What?

This training helps parents map out the next steps for their child and family with a brief overview of how to:
> find support for your child and family,
> find information and services,
> find coverage to pay for services, and will help you start thinking about the future

June 18 ~ 10:30 - 12:30 pm
IPMG
Lafayette

June 15 ~ 11:00 - 1:30 pm
Indian Creek Christian Church
Indianapolis

June 24 ~ 10:00 - 12:30 pm
St. Mark's United Methodist
Bloomington

[Register for any of ASK's Trainings Here](#)

[Trending at](#)

[Information from The Arc](#)

Caregiver Support Services Applications Open July 1

Families on the waiting list for Medicaid Waiver services can receive \$500 of Caregiver Support Services (respite) at no cost. These hours are provided to families on the waiver wait list on a first-come, first-served basis, in each [BDDS district](#). The application process begins each year on July 1; previous applications do not carry over.

The application can be [submitted online](#) starting July 1.

3. Remember that every mother's heart is the same. I don't care what condition a baby is born with, his mama needs to hear how very precious he is. Our special-needs children are...children. They might be different than the other children, but they still do adorable things. And, yes, just like every mama who ever was, we have a desperate need to regale you with those stories. Fawn and coo and pretend to marvel over our kids the same way you would with any others.

4. If you have children, don't leave them unprepared for meeting ours. Children are curious about differences. It's okay to explain it to them. And they aren't being bad if they ask an honest question. How else will they learn? Help them to put themselves into the special-needs child's shoes. People say that children are cruel. But, in my experience, they can show great compassion when they understand the other child's differences and are encouraged to adjust their play.

5. Understand that parents of special-needs kids are inundated with unsolicited advice. Believe me, our kids have a plethora of specialists. We don't need any more. What we want from *you* is friendship.

6. Know that we will never again be the same person you first befriended. Our interests, moods, and opinions very likely have changed. We are still ourselves, yet we are different. Love us anyway.

7. Never say, "I'm sorry". We are not ashamed of or disappointed in our children. We love them. And they are a source of joy for us. "I'm sorry" implies something bad has happened. But we do not regret their lives. Neither should you.

Contact Us | Phone: 800-964-4746 | FamilyNetW@AboutSpecialKids.org

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