

Raising a special needs child: An expert offers guidance

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Parents of children with special needs face a number of challenges, so

here's some advice from an expert.

"Raising children is an adventure for any parent, but the journey for parents of [children with special needs](#) often has a few more twists and turns," said Dr. Thomas Challman, medical director of the Geisinger Autism & Developmental Medicine Institute in Lewisburg, Pa. "From identifying [medical conditions](#) they may have a predisposition for, to securing the most effective education, it's important to know what your options are."

Learn everything you can about your child's condition so you can identify potential medical complications, help with their development and advocate for them at every stage of life.

"Many [developmental disorders](#) affect a child's physical health, and vice versa," Challman explained in a Geisinger news release. "For example, children with [autism](#) may experience seizures, gastrointestinal difficulties, sleeplessness and trouble eating."

Awareness of these issues will help you advocate for your child at [home](#), in school or at the doctor's office.

It's important to start children with special needs on the road to independence when they're young.

"If possible, teaching [children](#) to be responsible for their own laundry or other chores will provide great experience and translate to [self-confidence](#) when making their own decisions," Challman said. "It will also encourage them to continue seeking out their own successes, teaching vital [life skills](#)."

Activities such as riding public transportation or running errands together will also help your child get used to more crowded areas and

become more comfortable coping outside of the home.

Be involved with your child's school and teacher.

"At-home engagement on in-class topics can cement the teachings in a way homework can't always fulfill," Challman said. "Plus, your child will see how important school is to you, allowing you to lead by example."

Group activities like art, camps or sports will give your child a chance to socialize outside of the home, build confidence and create lasting friendships.

"Being able to play well with others is a foundational skill for effective participation in school settings," Challman said. "It means they can work well in a group, learn to compromise and take responsibility. Confidence in [social situations](#) can also translate to personal independence."

Join a family or parent support group where you can share experiences, frustrations and successes, and practice self-care.

"Remember, you're not alone," Challman said. "Other parents have been through this, or are currently going through it, so they might be able to help [answer questions](#), give advice or provide support."

More information: There's more on children with special needs at the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

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