



New Families - Helping You and Your Family Adjust

Grandparents

Telling grandparents

After you receive the news that your child has cerebral palsy then comes the time to tell family and friends - including grandparents.

You may be finding it quite a challenge working out how much information to share with family about what is happening with your child. At the same time you may have parents or siblings asking with great concern about how everything is going with your child. Yet sometimes, family members will not ask anything for fear of causing upset.

Your family will have their own emotional responses too

As you are grappling with the new information you are getting it may be really difficult trying to break down the details and translate it to your family. Coping with family responses as well can be daunting. Your family may also have a range of reactions which can include shock, denial, anger, concern, sadness and love. Many parents say that they are often not only dealing with their own reactions but trying to support family members as they talk through their responses.

It is possible that some family members responses seem unhelpful and can cause further distress. Sensitivities can be at an all time high so any slightly negative or value laden comment can feel like a 'kick in the guts'.

Sometimes these negative responses really demonstrate that the other person is unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this situation and maybe need time to make their own adjustment.

Responding to inappropriate comments is important however and you may find yourself educating family members about the nature of disability. Also you may find yourself dispelling preconception and myths around disability and educating them around modern advances and medical interventions.

Overall this can be an emotionally challenging exercise to keep family up to date with the recent developments of what is happening with your child.

Some family members can respond by being overprotective and smothering. It can be a really difficult challenge to help everyone in the family to find a good balance between giving attention, but also enabling the child with a disability the opportunity to also see themselves as a contributing member to the family and not always the centre of attention.

Some positives

Some family members can react very positively to the news by understanding your need to tell the information at your own pace. Supportive family members will also relate to the child as their grandchild, their nephew or niece not as a child with a disability. Most parents say it is wonderful when people relate to their child at his/her normal developing age. Also, having family members who can be excited with you about every step forward that your child makes can be a great support.

Family stories

Sam - I just came straight out and told our family and friends. Maybe a lot of people had it in the back of their minds. Anyone who has a child ... would have twigged something was not quite right

Nerita - My friends and family handled it better than my husbands family who said, 'What's that?' I sort of had an understanding already but not an in-depth one, but I knew what it was and I knew that it didn't necessarily affect intellect.

Michelle - I still have to explain to the mother-in-law. We tell her in front of him that he is intellectually normal and she will say, 'Won't he ever walk or won't he ever talk?' We say, 'Can't you shut up? He's listening.' I tell her, 'If you want to ask me something... ask me when he is not here'.

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