



New Families - You and Your Partner

Your relationship

How does a diagnosis of cerebral palsy impact on a couple's relationship?

For most parents, discovering that their child has cerebral palsy presents many unexpected challenges to their relationship.

Parents often say that one of the hardest parts is coping with all of the information they need to absorb and the many decisions they must make.

Dealing with concerned and inquisitive family and friends can also be really daunting because you may find you are supporting others as they respond to the news as well as the impact on your relationship with your partner and other children.

You and your partner could have completely different ways of handling the diagnosis. This can cause stress as you struggle to come to terms with the news in different ways.

Managing your own emotional response but also trying to understand your partner's emotions can be very trying. Parents with a new child have to re-evaluate their expectations of each other around household responsibilities, level of involvement with the child or children, and time out for self.

You may find that negotiating issues such as who gathers the information you need to make decisions about your child's care, and how you respond to the extra needs, especially in relation to time your child may need. Being able to give each other time away from home and the stresses and strains is also very important.

Most parents report that communication and debriefing between them is the key to coping with the changes. It is unlikely that you will feel the same feelings at the same time - so hearing each other out when one feels overwhelmed - the other may feel empowered. Acceptance of where 'each other is at' will help with feeling supported.

Sometimes talking through worries and fears can mobilise and free a couple up to work out ways forward and to problem solve the concerns. Arguing and conflict in relationships is typical of any relationship and of course the key is how the argument is handled - especially when you feel that you are under a lot of stress. Recognising this with each other can be really helpful. Also being prepared to sit down and hear each other out and discuss what your needs and wants might be can be useful. Asking how you can best support each other and learning about what has meaning for you and your partner. For example, being told, 'Why don't you take some time out to go to the gym', may not actually give one person the kind of break they need - it may be that being at home alone and having uninterrupted time can be more meaningful. Working out what these things are for each of you can be the key to feeling supported.

Family stories

Mark

There is a lot more stress in your life. Everyone has stresses but this is an extra one. You can't have the family you wanted or do the things you wanted. You don't do the things that other people do or things you thought you would have done. There is a lot of financial strain. No one has a charmed life and who knows what other stresses would have happened - you deal with your life as you can.

Sophie

With my husband, it has both strengthened the relationship as well as and weakened. Strengthened only because it has to. Weakened because all conversations are around our son, or interrupted by him. Most fights are over him, and most of our spare time is spent with him. It always comes back to him. It's hard because when you do have time together you are so tired and in a zombie like mode. We argue like most normal couples, but over different things. It's important to have time out - make sure that you each have time to relax and breathe.

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