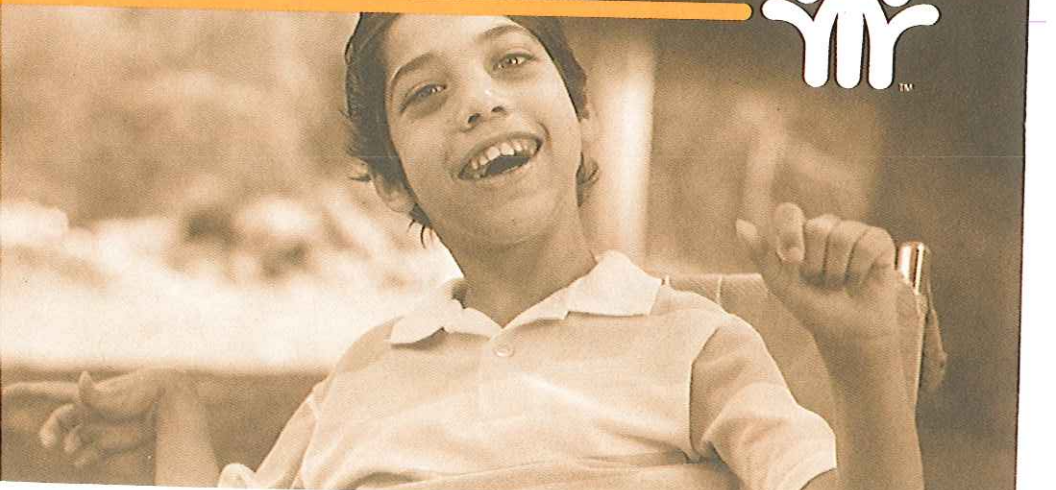


parenting children with disabilities

their special needs & yours



Your child needs your love and protection.

Did you know that children with disabilities are at a higher risk for abuse and neglect?

It's a fact. Although any child is at risk for abuse, children with disabilities are especially vulnerable. They often require greater personal care and a larger team of caregivers. But caregivers may experience more stress. And that can lead to family stress, conflict and even child abuse.

There's a lot you can do to keep your child safe.

You can set a good example for how to care for and love your child. And you can build parenting skills that will help keep your home loving, safe and happy!

This booklet can help you be the best parent you can be!



Prevent Child Abuse America Publications

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Learn all you can about your child's disability.

Understand how your child will grow and develop.

Every child is different. No one can predict what your child will be able to do and when.

- Spend time with your child and get to know him or her as a person.
- Read about your child's disability. Keep books and other resources handy.
- Keep a journal of your child's development. Share it with those who work with or care for your child.

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

The more you know, the better you can adjust to the changes around you.

- Prepare for appointments. Use a notebook to write down questions and answers. Save copies of all records.
- Learn ways to help your child with daily tasks (for example, activities that improve communication or helpful medical devices).
- Talk to other special needs parents. They can be a valuable resource for you and your family.



Important Notice

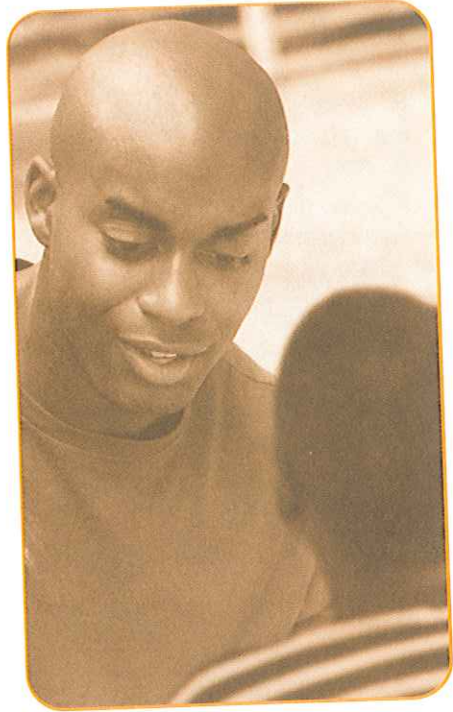
Please read: The information this publication contains does not necessarily describe particular situations you may encounter. You should ask a qualified expert or professional for advice about your particular situation.

The persons whose photographs are depicted in this publication are professional models. They have no relation to the issues discussed. Any characters they are portraying are fictional.

Good parenting takes patience—and practice.

Use fair and consistent discipline.

- Never hit, shake or yell at your child.
- If your child misbehaves, try taking away a privilege. Relate this consequence to the behavior (for example, if your child plays with his or her food, don't offer dessert).
- If possible, use "timeouts." Have your child sit in a quiet, safe place while he or she settles down. Don't respond to a child who is acting out to get attention.
- Explain that the behavior is wrong, but never tell your child that he or she is wrong or "bad." Use a firm, but calm, tone. Explain rules and consequences using simple, clear language.
- Praise your child when he or she behaves well.



Learn about behavioral problems.

Your child's specialists can work with your child to improve any problems with aggression, attention and disruptive behaviors. Ask how you can support their efforts at home.

Teach your child to problem-solve.

Allow your child time to figure things out on his or her own. Use puzzles and games to encourage this.

Foster independence and confidence.

Show your child what to do. Then give him or her time to try it, instead of doing it yourself. Offer choices. For example, can he or she choose what foods to eat? Activities to do? Clothes to wear? Chores to do? Your child will feel that he or she is playing a more active role in everyday life at your home.

Set a positive example.

When you show kindness and patience, so will your child. If you feel angry, stay calm. Try taking deep breaths and leaving the room until you've calmed down. If you're afraid you might harm your child, take your child to a safe place and call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453).

Tell your child you love him or her.

Tell your child often—even if he or she doesn't always behave the way you want. Praise his or her accomplishments and improvements.

No parent is perfect! If you want to improve your parenting skills, consider taking a parenting class.





Talk openly.

Share your feelings and emotions.

Expressing how you feel is healthy for you—and for your family. Don't be afraid to let others know what's going on inside. Showing emotion is a sign of strength, not weakness! Every day, talk with your spouse or another adult about:

- your feelings, even less positive ones
- ways you can help each other
- your child's achievements and struggles
- new information you've learned (for example, what you've learned during an appointment).

And, talk to your other children and extended family members. They need support and understanding, too. Sometimes, just listening is all you can do, and that is OK. Try family counseling or daily meetings to talk about feelings.

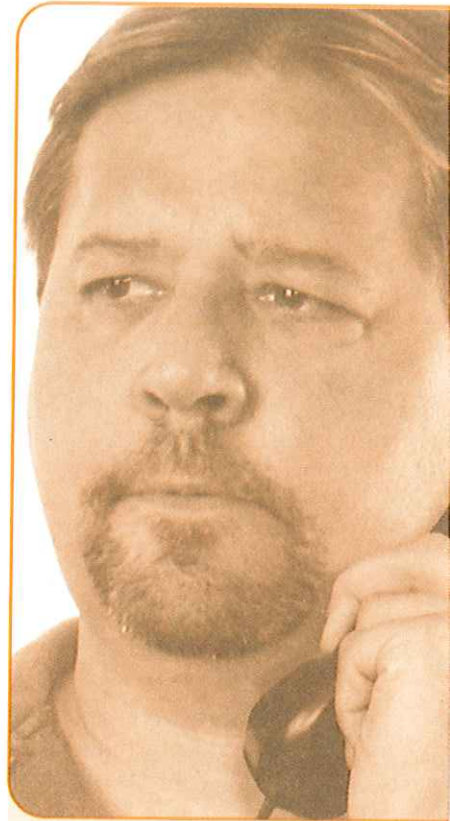
Take steps to reduce stress.

Stress at home can affect children.

No parent is stress-free—but stress affects children more than you may realize. It may affect your child's happiness or even the way you treat your child. Know the common signs of stress:

- feeling sad a lot
- worrying a lot
- not sleeping well (or sleeping too much)
- gaining or losing weight
- not being able to focus on everyday tasks.

Learn ways you can reduce stress, including relaxation techniques, proper diet and exercise. (Be sure to consult your health-care provider before starting any exercise program.) Contact your health-care provider if any of these signs last for more than 2 weeks—you may have depression, an illness that can be treated.



Get help with personal problems.

Contact local counseling centers to help with problems, such as:

- alcohol or other drug problems
- financial stress
- partner abuse
- child abuse or neglect
- past history of violence.



Get your child started with an IFSP.

The law protects children with disabilities.

IFSPs (Individualized Family Service Plans) are provided for all families and their children with disabilities from birth to age 5. Usually, the process begins when a child is an infant or a toddler.

Generally, parents contact their local disability office or Programs for Infants and Toddlers With Disabilities office. There, they set up an evaluation and assessment of their child (provided at no cost to families). If your child is eligible to receive intervention services, you will be assigned a service coordinator who will oversee all of your child's care. Most states also cover the cost of intervention services and programs, but check with your state's policies.

To contact a disabilities office near you, ask your child's health-care provider or contact the National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities (1-800-695-0285 or www.nichcy.org).

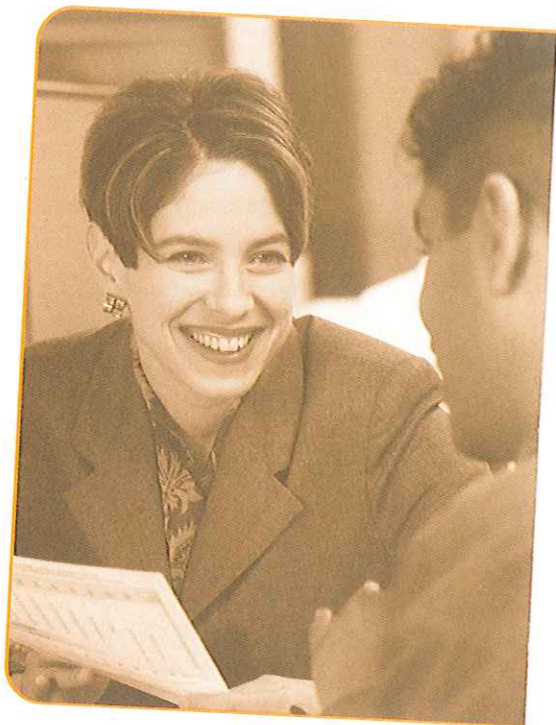
*An IFSP is a family plan, and you're
the most important part of it!*

Be involved with your child's IFSP.

Your family's IFSP can be a great tool for you and your child. Your IFSP team will use the strengths of your family to outline:

- your child's abilities
- major goals for your family and your child
- what services will be provided (and when and where they will be provided)
- steps that will be taken to ease your child's transition into other programs.

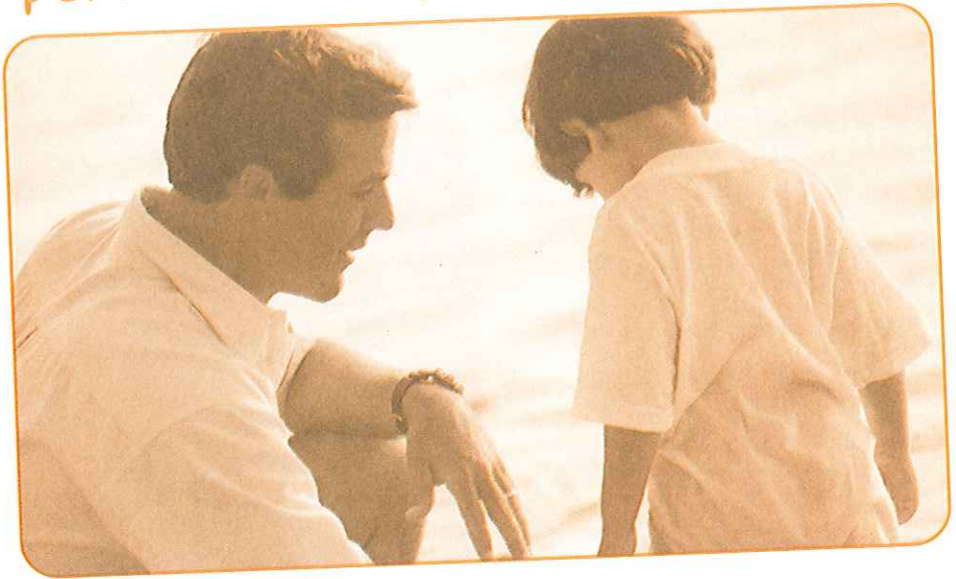
You can also find out about other services that may help your child and your family. These may include financial assistance, medical services, therapy and home visits. To learn more, contact the resources listed on page 14.



Older children have rights, too.

If your school-age child is eligible for special education, a team of specialists will work with you and your child's teacher(s) to create your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). In the IEP, they will describe the educational programs that will be provided to meet your child's needs.

Teach your child about personal safety.



Help your child understand what abuse is.

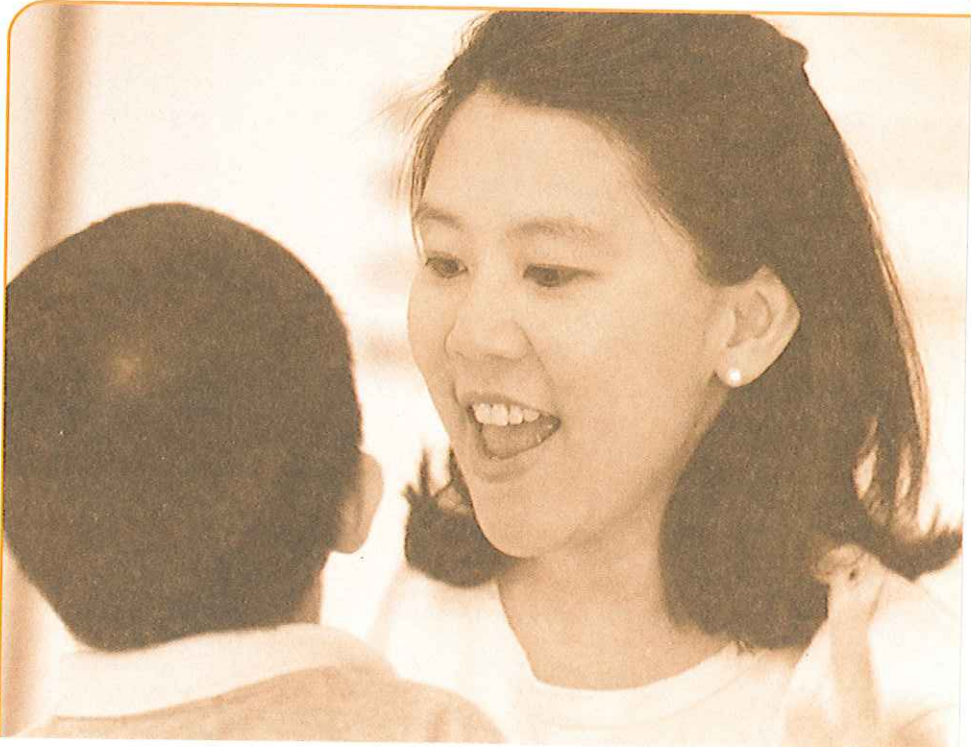
If possible, teach him or her how to tell you if he or she has been mistreated.

- Your child is probably very dependent—emotionally and physically—on his or her caregivers. However, tell your child never to comply with a caregiver's requests if it makes him or her feel uncomfortable in any way.
- If your child is able to communicate, reassure him or her that telling you about abuse is always the right thing to do, no matter what.
- Work with your child's specialists to improve your child's communication skills.
- If your child is unable to communicate, learn the subtle ways that your child lets you know he or she is uncomfortable, upset, scared or physically hurt.

You can help protect your child.

Because your child may need close care, help teach him or her about sexual abuse.

- Explain that your child's body belongs to him or her.
- Talk to your child about sexuality and appropriate social behavior.
- Tell your child the correct names for body parts and functions.
- Talk to your child's health-care provider about other ways you can help your child understand (for example, there may be books on sexuality written for children with disabilities).

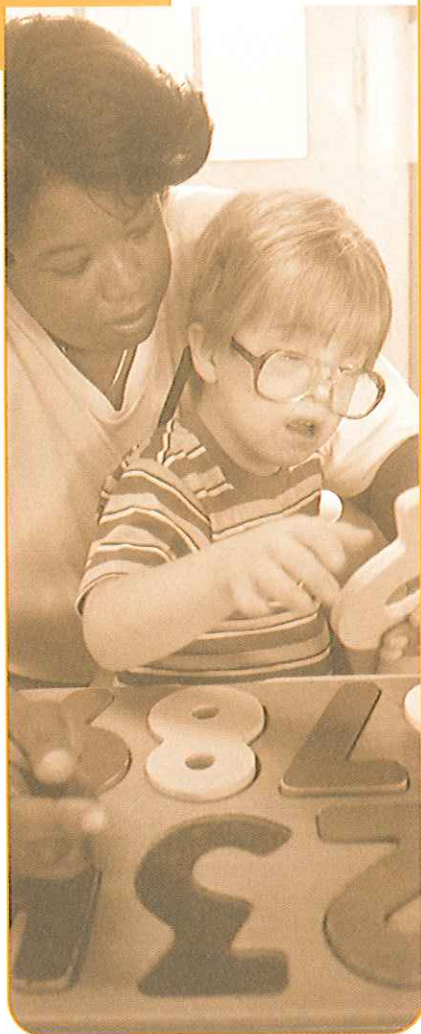


Know your child's caregivers.

Only let those you trust spend time with your child.

It can sometimes be difficult to find trained caregivers for your child. But don't just pick the first person who gets along with your child.

- Form relationships with local groups who work with families. They can provide the names of reputable caregivers.
- Talk to other parents who can recommend caregivers they trust.
- Choose caregivers who are trained in the medical care and other needs of your child. Get to know them and be involved with their care.
- Your child may not be able to let you know if something doesn't feel right. Observe how other people treat your child and how your child responds.
- Inform caregivers that you have talked to your child about abuse prevention.
- Choose school and therapy programs for your child that welcome family visits.



If you ever feel that your child has been harmed or is at risk, call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453.

Build a strong support system for you and your child.

Let others know what you need and how to help you.

Work with your child's school.

Stay in close touch with your child's teachers. Attend meetings, conferences and social events.

Find other social outlets for your child.

Ask your child's specialists about local programs such as play groups and group therapy. These can help your child build friendships with other children and allow you to meet supportive parents.

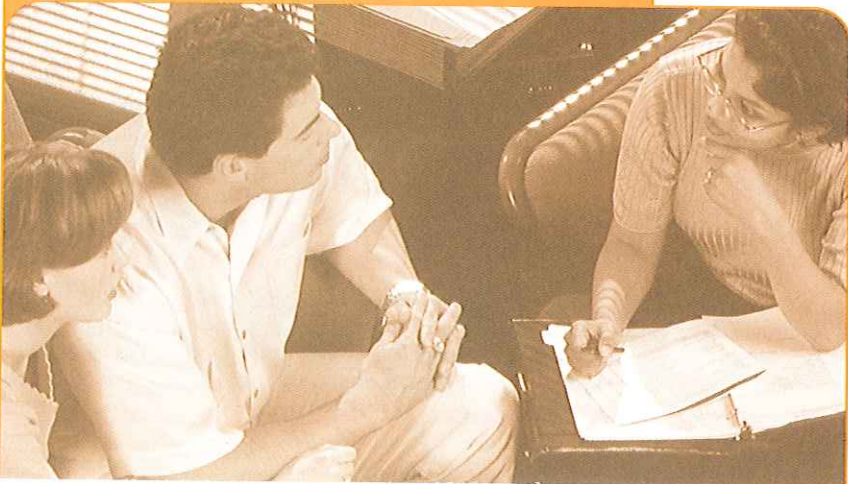
Join a parent-to-parent group.

It can be easy to feel isolated from other parents. Seek out parents who understand what you're going through. If there isn't a group where you live, try to start one.

Have fun as a family.

Spend time together and with other families. Do activities that are fun for everyone—for example, take walks, play games, cook a meal, tell stories or go on a day trip.

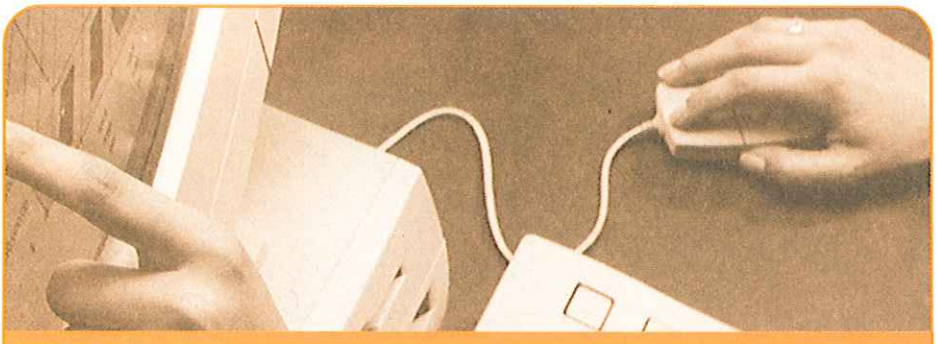
You are your child's greatest advocate—and you are not alone!



Find out more.

These organizations provide information on education, health, advocacy and child abuse.

- Children With Disabilities
www.childrenwithdisabilities.ncjrs.org
- National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd
- National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities
www.nichcy.org
1-800-695-0285
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
www.calib.com/nccanch
1-800-394-3366
- Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
- Prevent Child Abuse America
www.preventchildabuse.org
1-312-663-3520



Special notice to federal employees: You can make a donation to Prevent Child Abuse America through the federal government's annual fund-raising program, the Combined Federal Campaign. Designate your gift by writing Prevent Child Abuse America on the CFC pledge card you will receive during the campaign.

Stay positive about your life with your child!

Cherish your child and the special rewards that parenting brings.

How you feel about your child is the key to your family's happiness. Remember that your child has taught you many wonderful things, including:

- unconditional love
- patience
- sensitivity
- compassion
- hope
- inner strength
- not taking anything for granted.



A happy and healthy family is the greatest gift you can give your child!

Acknowledgments

Prevent Child Abuse America extends its appreciation to the members of the editorial committee who critically reviewed this work.



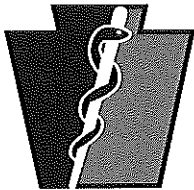
**Prevent Child Abuse
America**

For more information, write Prevent Child Abuse America, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 17th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604-2404, call (312) 663-3520 or visit our Web site at www.preventchildabuse.org.



*The Special Kids Network
System of Care*

Making Connections for Pennsylvania's Children with Special Health Care Needs



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