

## Early Childhood - Accessing Support

# HOW DOES HAVING A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY AFFECT A FAMILY?

The impact of having a child with a disability goes beyond the affected child to impact the entire family. In fact, parenting a child with a disability can present a unique and complex set of challenges.

Parents and carers of children with a disability have a greater need to advocate for their child, as they often experience difficulty and uncertainty when negotiating medical and support services. For school aged children, these difficulties may extend to the school setting. Parents have additional pressures in negotiating education options and managing their child's learning support plans i.e. mainstream schools, support classes, specialist needs schools, public education versus private education, independent school, or home schooling.

In addition to these considerations, having a child with a disability is likely to place a significant financial strain on families. If the child is eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) some of these costs may be provided for, but rarely are all costs covered and this can be compounded by a loss of income.

These practical concerns often overshadow any emotional stresses associated with parenting a child with a disability. Emotional stresses include insecurities regarding parenting competence, grieving for the future that parents had anticipated for their child and guilt around the wellbeing of siblings. It is no surprise then that the parents of children with a disability report higher levels of stress than other parents.

Research suggests these pressures place family members at an increased risk of developing mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, as well as placing significant stress on familial and social relationships.

Access to services and support are critical for both children with disabilities and their families.

It is vital to foster positive family relationships and build support networks to enable the entire family unit to manage life with a child with a disability.

