



BUTTERFLIES WITH BROKEN WINGS: EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND BEYOND IN RAISING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



ABSTRACT:

Parents of children with special needs create their own world of happiness and believe in possibilities that others cannot yet see. They often tell their child, "I wouldn't change you for the world, but I would change the world for you." Children with special needs are equally entitled to an exciting and fulfilling future. Parents raising such children also have special needs of their own. They require greater knowledge than the average person, more patience than the average parent, and much more besides.

This paper highlights some of the key challenges faced by families nurturing children with special needs, with special emphasis on educational dimensions.

KEYWORDS: *families nurturing children , special needs , special emphasis , educational dimensions.*

INTRODUCTION :

Parenting is always challenging, but the difficulties reach new heights when raising a child with special needs. It is often said that "God only gives special children to special parents." Parents of children with special needs share the common concerns of all parents regarding upbringing, nurturing, and education. However, they also face additional, valid worries related to their child's specific requirements.

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(1) Accessibility of Resources for Special Needs

Unfortunately, many families encounter a world that is not designed to accommodate their child's needs. Issues such as lack of ramp access, inadequate toilet facilities (e.g., Changing Places toilets), narrow or uneven footpaths, and many others create significant barriers. Poor accessibility often isolates families and prevents them from visiting places they love. This remains an arduous challenge.

(2) Empathetic Attitude from Others

Many parents experience a lack of understanding and empathy from others regarding the challenges of raising a child with special needs. This may involve misunderstanding their child's behaviours or sensory issues. It could mean being unable to attend a birthday party because it is too loud, inaccessible, or overly structured. Or it might be the stares from strangers when their child has a "meltdown" in a supermarket. Empathy and understanding can make a profound difference. Kindness truly wins.

(3) Finding Suitable Vacation Destinations

Coping with a child's special needs while away from home can be extremely difficult. Factors such as travel distance, accessible accommodation, and family-friendly activities that everyone can enjoy present significant challenges.

(4) Adapted Clothing and Disability Aids

Finding adapted clothing that suits a child's specific needs is often difficult. Such clothing is rarely available in regular stores and must usually be

purchased online. Parents must carefully select appropriate solutions—from seamless socks to elastic-waist leggings, pants, or easy-care garments—tailored to their child’s requirements. Making these choices is always challenging.

(5) Behavioural Issues

Children with special needs may not respond well to traditional discipline methods. Conditions such as ADHD or Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) require specialised strategies tailored to their unique needs. Behavioural challenges can also increase difficulties at school. Parents must remain flexible, creative, and exceptionally patient.

(6) Meeting Other Parents

Connecting with other parents of children with special needs can be difficult, although it is not essential. However, sharing experiences with those who truly “get it” can be incredibly helpful. Advice from parents who have faced similar situations is invaluable. Since many children use dedicated school transport, opportunities to interact at school gates are limited. Parents are encouraged to join online forums, Facebook groups, or local SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) clubs—such connections can be life-changing.

(7) Communication

Communication poses a major challenge for parents whose children have communication difficulties. Children may exhibit selective mutism, be non-verbal, or have behavioural/sensory issues that affect how they express themselves.

Imagine the daily struggles: guessing what your child wants for Diwali or their birthday, not knowing what is wrong when they are unwell, or understanding simple preferences like dinner choices or how their school day went. Parents work tirelessly to understand and support their child’s communication needs.

(8) Social Impact

In many cases, children with special needs attend specialised educational programmes that separate them from typically developing peers. This can hinder the child’s social development and also isolate parents from other families. Such isolation can negatively impact the emotional and psychological well-being of both parents and the child. Parents are encouraged to seek support groups within these programmes to connect with others facing similar challenges.

(9) Stress and Depression

Families raising children with special needs face serious challenges that can make them appear “unfortunate” in the eyes of society. However, these parents should not be viewed as less fortunate. They must be empowered to meet their children’s basic needs and provide proper care. The government and private sector should collaborate to provide the necessary support and resources.

(10) Financial Burden

Raising a child with special needs often imposes a substantial financial strain on families. Costs associated with specialised therapies, medical care, adaptive equipment, transportation, and modified housing can be overwhelming. Many families face reduced household income when one parent must reduce working hours or leave employment to provide full-time care. This economic pressure can lead to long-term financial insecurity and limit access to essential services.

(11) Educational and Advocacy Challenges

Navigating the educational system presents another major hurdle. Parents must frequently advocate for appropriate Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), inclusive placements, and necessary

accommodations. Many feel overwhelmed by complex bureaucratic processes, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate support services in mainstream or special schools. The constant need to fight for their child's rights can be exhausting and emotionally draining.

(12) Long-term Planning and Future Concerns

As children with special needs grow older, parents grapple with anxiety about their child's future independence, employment, housing, and continued care after the parents are no longer able to provide support. Planning for adulthood involves legal guardianship, financial trusts, and transition services—areas where many families feel under-supported and uncertain. This forward-looking worry adds a persistent layer of stress throughout the family's journey.

(13) Physical Health Impact on Caregivers

The intensive daily caregiving demands often take a toll on parents' physical health. Many experience chronic fatigue, musculoskeletal pain from lifting or assisting their child, sleep disturbances, and other health issues due to prolonged stress and physical exertion. These physical challenges can compound emotional strain and reduce the caregiver's overall capacity to provide sustained support.

CONCLUSION

Although these challenges are significant, there is always a silver lining. Children with disabilities are like butterflies with broken wings—equally beautiful, but needing extra help to fly. Parents bravely take on the role of helping their “butterflies” spread their wings and soar to new, seemingly unreachable heights.

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Web Resources:

- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
- <https://cae.edu.sg/the-challenge>
- <http://www.grin.com>
- <http://www.family-friendly-fun.com/disability-support/challenges.htm>