

The old adage “Parenting is the toughest job you’ll ever have” rings true for most of us who have raised children. Even with my 22 years’ of experience, I continue to wonder how I get through some days. Each day with my three young boys is definitely a hands-on lab in parenting! I keep thinking it will get easier, that I’ll know all the answers, or that I will feel totally competent only to hit another bump in the road or dodge another pothole. What I have accomplished, to some degree, is to accept that parenting is a journey, not a destination.

The truth is, my husband and I are still learning, still making phone calls to family and friends, and still second-guessing some of our parenting decisions. By the time we launch the last of the three boys, *maybe* we’ll have it figured out. Parents need to know that they don’t have to be perfect. They need to be willing to love unconditionally while doing the best they can. They also need to be willing to reach out for help when needed.

Even experienced parents cannot fully train or prepare another individual for this life role. Why? Each child is unique. Each child requires their own specialized parenting skills to meet their needs. Each child has their own personality, individual needs for how love is expressed, how anger is displayed, and how they build relationships with others.

Even when your child has all ten toes and fingers, is growing and developing as we recognize children should, and they reach their milestones at the predicted times, parenting is nothing short of challenging!

However, it becomes even more difficult if you are parenting a child with a special need. There are many different types of special needs a child can have. Understanding what the daily needs of these children are can be overwhelming. Additionally, what works one day may not work the next so the adaptations are ongoing.

What kind of additional efforts are required of a parent who has a child with special needs?

In an article published by Boston University, several compounded challenges were identified for these parents:

- Learning about the disability
- Researching, locating, and accessing the resources that will help both the child and parent(s) in effective ways
- Coping with the incredible emotional and physical burdens of caring for a person with a disability

- Organizing and navigating that many different appointments with doctors, therapists, school staff, and other support professionals
- Advocating for their child in the school setting
- Managing the additional financial challenges brought on by using the effective resources available to the family. This often times includes added expense for traveling to where the resources are located.

For those parents who have not been responsible for this type of parenting, there is often a lack of awareness, understanding, and compassion for families of this nature. However, knowledge and understanding is the first and foremost way we can support these families.

Here's one example of a social challenge that children with special needs face and ideas for how other individuals and families can help:

In a recent post on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services blog (<http://www.hhs.gov/blog/2015/06/08>), authors Angelika H. Claussen and Rebecca H. Bitsko addressed a challenge children with Tourette Syndrome often face: Bullying.

Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a condition of the nervous system that causes people to have tics. The theme this year is "Everyone Can Play a Role!" It is in this context that they explained how important it is for people to know what Tourette Syndrome (TS) is as well as the tics that accompany this disability. Tics are sudden movements, twitches, or sounds the people do repeatedly and involuntarily. Much like hiccups, they may want their body to stop, but their body does it anyway. Some people can control the tic for a short period of time, but eventually the person has to do the tic.

The tics can seem rude, disruptive, or offensive. When people don't understand or accept the involuntary nature of tics, they deem the person with TS as different. Children who seem 'different' are often the targets of bullies. According the Claussen and Bitsko, *"children who have tics are more likely to be bullied than children without tics, and those with more severe tics are a greater risk for being bullied."* They offer some suggestions on what friends and family can do to help stop the bullying of children with TS:

- 1) Don't be just a bystander. Help the victim get away, be their friend by telling a trusted adult, and set a good example.
- 2) Learn more about Tourette Syndrome so that you can respond supportively.
- 3) Advocate for children with TS. Explain that harassment (bullying) violates the rights of the person being targeted.

Parents of children with special needs are under a significant amount of stress. If you have a friend or neighbor who is caring for a child with special needs, do some research and learn about the disability so that you know what they are challenged with. This research will also help you become a better friend or neighbor and equip you to respond supportively.

For more information about parenting, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!