

Heroic Parenting

Dealing with a Special Needs Child

THERE JUST AREN'T ENOUGH THANKS GIVEN to the parents of children with challenges. Parenthood is not an easy job under any circumstances. Parenting children who are disabled or sick is nothing short of heroic. As a speech language pathologist that has seen many parents throughout the years deal with difficulties associated with raising children with special needs, I wanted to share my observations of their fortitude, resilience, determination, and humanity.

Instead of or in addition to shuttling their children to soccer, school and piano lessons, these parents are also driving to speech therapy, occupational therapy, neurologists, physical therapy, psychologists, and numerous other doctors and professionals. They don't complain because they know they are helping to make a difference in their child's life.

How many times do people avert their eyes because a child is not deemed typical? These are the parents that deal with the uncomfortable reaction of others when they peer into the baby carriage. They disregard these looks because they can see the beauty that others may be too blind to see. While many of us are unhappy about sitting near a screaming child on a plane or in a restaurant temporarily, these parents deal with these situations on a daily basis through no fault of their own. They often miss meals and trips. Often they approach teacher conferences with trepidation on what will be said and how they are going to be able to deal with the information that will be given. They know they will be given more things to do and more problems to solve. While other parents are talking about their children's achievements in sports or music or school many of my heroes remain silent. They wonder if their child's achievements will be equally acknowledged. Sibling dynamics are redefined in these families. Situations arise that are not explained in too many manuals. Doing homework or just enforcing daily routines such as brushing teeth, getting dressed, or going to sleep can be monumental achievements. Think about how many of these parents feel during a conversation about growing into adulthood. These heroic parents are working out plans for their children when they aren't around to take care of them. How about the efforts involved in just finding a babysitter? The stress of situations others take for granted is mindboggling. All parents dread their child being bullied or getting lost or getting hurt. These heroic parents deal with these and many other fears all the time.

These are just a few of the hurdles these courageous people are confronted with and there are so many more. But the wonder of these parents is that they don't give up. They always work to do more for their children. Because they strive to do more for their children, these children become productive, happy adults. Their energy and love transforms these youngsters into "can do" people instead of people defined by their disabilities. Thank you parents for all your hard work and love. It doesn't go unnoticed.

