



Looking after yourself when your child's behaviour is difficult to understand

When a child's behaviour is difficult to understand, this can be really hard for all those involved in their care. It is really important that we look after ourselves to help us look after our families.

This Parent Tips resource will offer some points for you to consider to look after yourself.

First experiences

- When your child has behaviour that can be challenging or difficult to understand, this can be really difficult and isolating for you. You may not be sure of the full extent of their needs, disability, or related health problems, or what to expect your child to be able to do or not do.
- It can feel like being on an emotional roller coaster, with feelings of sadness, guilt, regret, fear of the unknown and even embarrassment (what will others think). If your child has a diagnosis, this can bring a sense of relief, but you may still feel overwhelmed and feel no relief at all. Support from professionals can be helpful or, in itself, overwhelming, as this parent describes:

“Looking at it from the family perspective, from the very beginning when we had gone through diagnosis, we were inundated by professional assessments - whether that is social services, education, a benefits assessment... all these assessments seem to be separate to one another.”

(Source: The Challenging Behaviour Foundation Information Sheet - available: <https://bit.ly/3ut2gVU>)

[More information on Page 2](#)

For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 08/08/2022.

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- Navigating the system of professionals and services can feel overwhelming and, at times, feel out of your control. Long term, these difficult situations can affect you and your family's well-being.
- Everyone responds to situations in a different way and this will depend on a wide range of things - for your child this maybe how old they are, their personality, and their development, all of this can affect what you see, and your child may not behave in the ways you expect. This might be because they demonstrate:
 - withdrawal – such as loss of interest in activities, loss of confidence, not wanting to talk, or regressing ways of behaving
 - preoccupation – your child may be overly worried about the possibility of future events or may have nightmares
 - anxiety – such as problems with concentrating or paying attention, clingy behaviour, separation anxiety, sleep problems, and irritable behaviour
 - physical symptoms – such as headaches and stomach aches.
- Remember that some children seem to cope well at first, but can experience reactions to the stress days, weeks or even months later. This is a normal way for children to process information and you should not worry, but just remember this is how your child reacts to situations.

Looking after yourself

- None of this is easy, especially when you are tired, stressed or worried. We all need time to relax and take care of ourselves. Parents are often so busy thinking about everyone else that they can find it very hard to set aside time to do something they really enjoy for themselves. But remember, if you are tired, anxious, low or depressed, it will make it harder to look after your family. As with your child, think of simple things which help you feel relaxed and happy, such as having a bath in peace, reading a book, or seeing a friend.
- Keep a focus on:
 - Sense of purpose (having goals and something to aim for makes you better equipped to deal with difficult times)
 - Positive mental attitude (having a positive but realistic approach to what you can achieve/ manage)
 - Connection with others (asking for help, sharing,

talking)

- Determination (being proactive and not giving up)
 - Taking control (recognising what we can do something about and what that action might be)
 - Looking after yourself (having a healthy lifestyle, taking time to relax)
 - Please talk to friends, family, your health visitor or GP
- It may be helpful to think what a good day or situation would look like and what you need to have this good day. Talk this through with your family or healthcare professional, for example your health visitor.
 - Whatever you are facing, we know what a lengthy and difficult process it can be. There are times when you will carry on and other times when progress will seem painfully slow, or it will feel you are going backward. This may make you feel it's easier to 'stay the same' rather than try to change things. Don't give up! Ask for help if you need it.
 - Remember it's ok not to be ok. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, everyone needs help from time to time. Talk to others and ask them to just listen - you do not always need a response but being able to off load to another person can be so beneficial.
 - Self-care is so important, even if it's having a hot bath for 30 minutes by yourself! Remember to look after you.

Further information:

- [Affinity Hub](#) - signposting to organisations and professionals who provide emotional support to family carers. Articles on feelings, wellbeing and trauma
- [Carers Trust](#) - a charity for carers offering a variety of help and support. This link is for help and support with health and wellbeing
- [Contact](#) - supports families of disabled children whatever their condition or disability, they also offer peer support
- [The Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#) - provides information and support for family carers of people with severe learning disabilities and behaviours described as challenging. This link is about family wellbeing
- [Samaritans](#) - 24-hour emotional support for anyone in emotional distress or suicidal
- [SIBS](#) - supports brothers and sisters of disabled children and adults. Including local groups
- [SupportLine](#) - provides a confidential telephone helpline offering emotional support to any individual on any issue

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