

AT for Parenting with a Disability

Having children is an important milestone for many individuals. While the new addition to the family can be exciting, finding resources as a parent with a disability can be challenging. In the



United States, more than 10 million families include at least one parent who has a disability. While parents with disabilities have been successfully raising children for generations, there are assistive technology (AT) products and “Do-It-Yourself” tips that can help make day-to-day tasks like feeding, changing, transporting, and monitoring your child easier. It is also important to know where to turn if you are looking for a little extra information or help. There are community resources, publications, online resources, and organizations that specialize in parenting with a disability. Both AT products and informational resources can be vital tools to help you.

Feeding and Changing a Young Child

An important part of feeding is proper positioning of the child so both parent and child are comfortable. For those with limited upper limb mobility or who have prosthetic arms, there are adapted nursing pillows with soft sleeves. The pillow holds your baby and the sleeves assist in helping to secure them with minimal use of your limbs or prosthetics. There are adjustable highchairs on the market that allow you to raise or lower the chair to a comfortable position for yourself which can be helpful if you use a wheelchair.

If you are a parent with limited wrist mobility or grasp, there are splints for the wrist designed to assist you in holding items such as feeding utensils or bottles. Anti-slip adapted feeding bowls, utensils, and cups can help prevent slipping for those with grasping disabilities or tremors. Utensils with built up handles can also make holding them easier for those with grasping difficulties. For those who may only have the use of one hand, bowls with higher lips help push food onto eating utensils more easily.

If you are blind or visually impaired, feeding your child can also be a challenge. One tip for young children is to use finger foods. Another is to use a feeding bib with a food catcher. A bib with a food catcher is often made of silicone or plastic with an upward tilted bowl shape (i.e., the food catcher) at the bottom. This can aid you in maintaining cleanliness by minimizing any foods that spill from the spoon or from your child's mouth. The bib catches any extra mess and can be easily washed after use.

If you have a cognitive disability, there are some useful tools that can help you organize your day. There are memory aids and appointment reminders that can be set to alert you when it is feeding time. Pill dispensers with timers to prompt proper administration of medicine may also assist you. These small reminders can be helpful so that you can feed, change, or administer medicine to your child as needed.

Changing diapers is a frequent occurrence, so it is important to find helpful adaptations for you. If you have limited dexterity, you may find diapers with finger loops or Velcro easier to fasten. If you use a wheelchair, you will want a lower changing table. There are many adapted baby changing tables available for purchase or that can be made with instructions online. Some examples include tables that can be wall-mounted, are height-adjustable, include a rotating platform for easier transfer, include straps to help maintain the position of the child during changing time, etc.

Transporting and Monitoring a Child

Another common obstacle you may face as a parent with a disability is how to transport your child. If you use a wheelchair, there are different types of wheelchair attachments available. For example, you can secure your baby in a sling seat and tray attachment if you use a power wheelchair. The sling wraps around your baby and the tray attaches to your wheelchair. Another option is a safety belt to attach your child to your lap so he/she can sit comfortably and safely in your lap without sliding off while in your wheelchair.

For those with upper mobility disabilities, there are harnesses that allow you to lift your child with forearm support or mouth. These harnesses are designed to evenly distribute your child's weight across your arms, head, neck, and/or trunk. If you have limited use of your arms, a sling can be used to keep your child strapped to your upper body. There are a variety of slings on the market as well as instructions online on how to make them yourself. For some parents, a stroller that is designed to be taller can take the place of a walker.

Baby monitors are very helpful tools for all new parents and come with a variety of features. They can be set to flash if you are hearing impaired or sound an alarm if you are blind or have low vision. When children start moving on their own, a tether may be a useful tool to monitor them if you are blind or have a visual impairment. Another trick is to put audible indicators on

Did You Know?

- ✓ You can search childcare products by category on AbleData (bit.ly/1pmk6yE).
- ✓ Our "Do-It-Yourself" section includes at-home adaptations for your childcare AT needs (bit.ly/1oqLYS7).

your child – like bells or a bracelet that makes a jingling sound – so you can hear where they are.

Where to go: Community and Online Resources

“Through the Looking Glass” (www.lookingglass.org) is a nonprofit disability community whose focus is on families with a parent, grandparent, or child with a disability. They provide links to local and national services on their website as well as a resource section that features relevant articles and publications.

“Parents with Disabilities Online” (www.disabledparents.net) is another helpful resource. It offers a parents network, publications and articles, aids, and a list of relevant organizations.

You can find the products discussed here on (<https://abledata.acl.gov/>) and you can call AbleData Information Specialists for more help finding these or other products to fit your individual needs.

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This publication was written and produced by AbleData. AbleData is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) under contract number ED-OSE-13-C-0064 and operated by New Editions Consulting, Inc.

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