DOCUMENTARY

UNSEEN

How We're Failing Parent Caregivers & Why It Matters

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12 Ways to Support Parent Caregivers

1. Acknowledge and empathize.

> "Know that our life has both ups and downs, and a set point that we experience most often, just like yours." Lisa T.
>
> "I need people to try and see how hard life is." K.
>
> "Be the safe place for difficult emotions, but also the first one to celebrate our kids' wins with us." Lisa T.

2. Check in. Be a friend.

> "A check-in text or message is greatly appreciated. We just need to know we are thought of." Becky Z.
>
> "Texts and notes of encouragement mean so much to me." Chesna C.
>
> "Don't forget us! We're still here desperately longing for connection while we're in the trenches of everyday life." Jessica G.
>
> "I need friends who will stand by me, at my lowest and worst." Cheryl L.

3. Listen. Don’t give unsolicited advice.

> “I appreciate when people show a genuine interest and are open to just listening. Instead of offering unsolicited advice, it’s helpful for people to ask, ‘Do you want me to listen or do you want advice?’” Shelby A.
>
> “Be slow to speak.” Gina V.
>
> “Just listen without having a ‘logical answer’ for every time we need to vent.” Janeth K.
>
> “Stop with the unsolicited advice. Just listen and care without correcting.” Heather T.
>
> “Don’t act as though you know better. We are the experts on our child, please follow our lead.” Erin L.

4. Come visit.

> “Include us but understand we must host more than usual. Our homes are our children’s safe places. Stay after and help us clean up.” Melanie S.
>
> “I would love someone to just stop by and chat. Even for a little while.” Kristina M.
>
> “Bring me coffee so we can chat at my house, so I don’t have to take my child out of the house, but I can have a moment with friends.” Cheryl L.

5. Invite us, even if we can’t go.

> “Continue to invite us to things...even though 9 of 10 times we will back out or say no because something comes up. But it always feels nice to continue to be included or know that someone wants you there no matter what.” Matt F.
>
> “Keep inviting us even if we frequently decline. The invite alone helps to know we’re thought of.” Jessica G.

6. Offer specific help. Show up.

> “Please offer concrete help. ‘Let me know if you need anything’ is too hard for me to figure out.” Pat M.
>
> “Don’t ask how to help, just do it.” K.
>
> “It adds so much pressure to carers when you say ‘just let me know.’ We don’t want to feel like a burden and we don’t always have the time to reach out.” Deborah
>
> “Tell me you’re bringing a meal one night. Make it in a container I don’t have to worry about returning, and something I can put in the freezer or use immediately.” Cheryl L.
>
> “Offer help at any capacity possible. Even do a load of laundry!” S.

7. Be an advocate. Vote.

> “We don’t want to spearhead any more special needs programs.” Amy F.
>
> “Advocate for [accessibility] whenever you can. We are tired yet we are the ones advocating for change. Advocate for change in education, medical and social services sectors.” Lisa S.
>
> “Please be our voice. We are in the trenches and many times don’t have the energy to advocate.” Deb L.
>
> “Vote for people who will work to improve disability support systems and invest in those systems.” Whitney

8. Be encouraging.

> “Tell me something positive about how we are taking care of our children.” Darcy S.
>
> “Never stop verbally encouraging and supporting. It means more than anyone knows.” Lauren M.

9. Take an interest in my child. Engage with my child.

> “I appreciate how people talk to my son and play with him...because he is nonspeaking a lot of people just don’t interact with him and he misses out and gets ignored. So I really appreciate the people who give him the attention he deserves.” Sharna K.
>
> “Truly want to spend time with and get to know the child.” Jill G.
>
> “Participate in my child’s life the way [you] participate in the neurotypical children’s lives in our family.” Lori O.

10. Offer respite, even for short periods.

> “Entertain my child for 30 minutes, an hour, a day... just talking to her on the phone gives me some respite I so desperately need!” Christine D.
>
> “Even small breaks are huge for the mental health.” Kim P.
>
> “Offer to have the kids for a few hours or a night sometimes. Just a rest or sleep in would be great. Learn more about their disability and how to do things the way we do it with them.” Sharna K.

11. Take my child or their siblings out.

> “Ask the person with the disability to do things without the caregiver.” Maureen V.
>
> “Take my son for an outing now and again. He would love to go for a ride and get ice cream and watch trains. It’s so simple.” Kate S.
>
> “Take my neurotypical kids out...They need a break and to just have fun, worry free! They need to be seen and valued as their own selves...There’s a lot I don’t get to do with them, but I am so happy for them to have great experiences even if it’s without me!” Alison G.

12. Don’t judge. Trust us.

> “Assume that we are competent in caring for our child.” Heather B.
>
> “Believe that we really are doing the best we can.” Heather T.
>
> “Respect the “no.”...Let me not have guilt for skipping an event that will be a ton of unnecessary work.” Penny L.
>
> “Please don’t stare or judge us when we are in public.” Colleen R.