

Chosen Families

Parenting a Child with a Hidden Disability

By Shannon Royce

Hidden disabilities — anxiety, asperger, ADHD, autism, bipolar disorder, depression, learning disabilities, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Tourette syndrome, and others — are neurological disorders that might not be obvious to the general public but that affect every area of a child's and a family's life. As a mom of a child who has been diagnosed with a hidden disability, I know the challenges your family is facing.

Practical Advice

If your child has a hidden disability, keep in mind the following tips.

1. *Learn all you can about the diagnosis.* Sometimes diagnosis of hidden disability takes time. Do

your research. Ask hard questions. Be determined in your pursuit of the truth.

2. *Allow yourself to process the grief when you hear a final diagnosis.* This is a very real loss and it is important to process it well.

3. *Ask for help.* When you come to the place that you recognize your need, ask for help from family, friends, colleagues, clergy, or counselors.

4. *Trust God and pray.* Raising a child with a disability can draw you closer to God if you turn your heart to Him. I have found that the Serenity Prayer is the nutshell. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

5. *Take on the challenge.* Become your child's best advocate. Many of these disabilities are accompanied by other characteristics such as learning differences. Engage in your child's education in order to address any needs.

6. *Listen to the experts.* Understand that some of these diagnoses are spectrum disorders. Some may be addressed with behavioral or nutritional changes; however, some diagnoses may require that you consider medication as part of the overall treatment plan.

7. *Guard your marriage.* View your spouse as a partner. If you work as partners instead of adversaries when you have disagreements, you will

strengthen your relationship and make better decisions.

8. *Understand your own limitations.* You cannot do everything. Set priorities and do what you can. Remember what Jesus said of the woman in Mark 14:8: "She has done what she could."

9. *Take care of yourself.* It is important to get your rest, eat well, exercise, and stay connected to others. You are better able to care for others when you are doing well.

10. *Try to help your other children understand.* This is part of the daily journey of living with a hidden disability. Explain to your children in age-appropriate ways what the disability means for your family.

11. *Take the long view.* Let's be honest. There can be moments when the circumstances seem overwhelming. I find in those moments that I need to take a deep breath and remember to take the long view. Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes that life comes in seasons. This is no less true with a child who has a disability. There will be good days and bad days. If you are in a bad season, hold on tight. It will pass.

12. *Don't give up.* The only thing that guarantees you will fail in this challenging journey is if you quit.

13. *Embrace the journey.* I tend to be a goal oriented person. I am into destinations, not journeys. But in my experience as a mom of a child with a hidden disability, I am learning that it is the process that is so important. I have to trust the destination to God. I am learning to embrace the journey along the way. ®

For more information about hidden disabilities, visit www.ChosenFamilies.org.

