



**verywell** family

advice resource for parents  
partner of



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**Special needs** is an umbrella term for a wide array of diagnoses, from those that resolve quickly to those that will be a challenge for life, and from those that are relatively mild to those that are profound. It covers developmental delays, medical conditions, psychiatric conditions, and congenital conditions that require adaptations so children can reach their potentials. **Special needs** is a very broad term and every situation is unique. No matter the reason, the designation is useful. It can help you obtain needed services, set appropriate goals, and gain an understanding of your child and the stresses your family may face.

Special needs are commonly defined by what a child *can't* do. However, you will find that your child's challenges make triumphs sweeter and that weaknesses are often accompanied by amazing strengths.

- A **physical disability** may affect a child's mobility, dexterity, speech, sight or hearing and will require specific arrangements, logistics and skills.
- **Medical issues** for children include serious conditions like cancer, heart defects, asthma and diabetes, congenital conditions like cerebral palsy and dwarfism, and health threats like food allergies and obesity. A child may need frequent medical testing, hospital stays, equipment, and accommodations for disabilities.
- Children with **behavior issues** may not respond to traditional discipline. Diagnoses like ADHD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and Tourette's syndrome require specialized strategies. These issues can increase the risk of problems at school.
- **Developmental disabilities** can change your visions of the future and provide immediate difficulties in caring for and educating your child. Diagnoses like autism, Down syndrome, and intellectual disabilities often cause children to be removed from mainstream schools.
- Children with **learning disabilities** like dyslexia, dysgraphia or dyscalculia struggle with schoolwork regardless of their intellectual abilities. They require specialized learning strategies to meet their potential and avoid self-esteem problems. There is no "cure" for learning disabilities. Special education programs can help people cope and compensate for these disorders, but the learning disability will last a lifetime.
- Realizing that your child suffers from **mental health issues** like anxiety, depression or anorexia is always unexpected, and it is important to find the right professionals to help.

Out of necessity, parents of children with special needs are often more flexible, compassionate, stubborn, and resilient than other parents. While it may not be something you had hoped for or expected, you can take comfort in the fact that you're not alone, so feel comfortable reaching out for support.