Circle of Parents Support Group - Discovering Possibilities

Raising children with special needs can be challenging at times. Many times I question myself on how to properly meet my children’s emotional, behavioral, and special physical needs. The Parent to Parent FSN-HC support group that I attend weekly helps me with this. They are resourceful, considerate, and always pointing me in the right direction. I feel that having good solid support for my family is a major key in having success in raising my children. Parents need support from all directions. This is a group that listens and is concerned about my family. They have strengthened my parenting skills, help cultivate positive relationships with others that have special needs children like mine and provide ongoing trainings to help me grow as a parent. Overall, I feel I have started to develop a sense of control over what was once such frustration from not knowing how to deal with some of the special needs my child has. Parents of typical children do not deal with many of these issues in life. That is why this group is much needed for parents like me. Just knowing that other families deal with disabilities and special needs and can cope and find answers for the problems they face encourages me and gives me hope when times get tough-like when my son had his shunt replaced this past year. I am grateful that my Parent to Parent support group has helped me develop inner strength that helps me daily to fulfill the needs of my children.

The Parent to Parent FSN-HC support group that I attend every Thursday has helped me in so many ways. After a busy stressful week, it is my time to de-stress while talking to other parents that I have grown to know and care for; knowing my children are being taken care of, and they absolutely love going. I feel not only have I been taught different strategies on parenting my special needs son, I have been able to help other parents with what I have learned throughout the years.

When we were told that Parent to Parent FSN-HC was going to offer a special needs support group it was an answer to many prayers. My son’s diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder was still very new to our family and to be honest I wasn’t handling it well. I was thrown head first into the world that is special needs parenting. All of a sudden I was managing therapy sessions, IFSPs, IEPs, and numerous other things I had never heard of. I became overwhelmed very fast with everything that was happening in my life. I could feel the pressure of my son’s future on my shoulders. The stress of dealing with everything myself was taking a heavy toll on me. I felt that I was all alone in this journey and that no one could possibly understand how I was feeling. We didn’t know any other parents of special needs children to reach out to. Then we attended the first Parent to Parent support meeting. The first meeting was an instant blessing for me in so many ways. I found a place to connect with other parents who knew the burdens I felt first hand. We didn’t all have children that shared the same disability, but we all shared similar struggles. In our meetings I’m able to receive wisdom from other parent’s experiences, resource information from our community, and take advantage of special training workshops. I’m able to get a wealth of information about my son’s disability and use the new information to help him. I’m thankful for all those things, but the most valuable part has been the support itself. I found a new family in our support group that has been instrumental in my life. I can’t wait until we meet each week so I can share my struggles and triumphs as a special needs parent. I go into each meeting knowing that I can express my heart without judgment and leave renewed for whatever comes along. The support group has become a crucial piece of my life. I’m a better mother to my son thanks to the love and support of my group. I needed a place to share and sympathetic people to listen. My journey is no longer a solitary one and that is all thanks to Parent to Parent’s support group.
Support Groups

- **Watauga County**: 2nd Friday of the month; 6pm-8pm at the Unitarian Fellowship House. Supper and childcare with RSVP. Contact Kaaren Hayes 828/262-6089 or hayeskl@appstate.edu.
  - June 13th we will have a potluck at Valle Crucis Park 5:30pm-7:30pm.
  - July no meeting.
  - August 8th back to Valle Crucis Park for another potluck! 5:30pm-7:30pm.

- **Wilkes County**: Thursday evenings at Wilkes Family Central (focus is families who have children with special needs). Supper and childcare provided with RSVP. Contact Norma Bouchard 336/838-0977 or email bouchardnj@appstate.edu.
  - Meeting dates in summer will change. Check with Norma.

- **Mitchell/Yancey**: Please check with Teresa Emory for more information via email (emorytd@appstate.edu) or office number: 828/685-4772, Toll Free: 1-866/448-5781, or Cell Phone: 828/284-2287.

Thoughts on Support Groups by Norma Bouchard

When my child was born in 1996 and diagnosed with cerebral palsy, the last thing I wanted to do was go to a support group and listen to other parents tell me how bad it was going to be. Fast forward to 2014 and I find myself facilitating support groups. What I realize is that rather than whining and complaining these parents are so uplifting, encouraging, and sharing great possibilities.

One thing that I will forever remember is one doctor explaining, “Take your son home and love him because love and sheer determination will change the outcomes of many diagnoses! Don’t accept anything until you have to!” She was so right. Instead of my son having severe intellectual developmental disabilities and a vegetative state that was predicted, we have a bright, funny, encouraging, resilient 18 year old that has far out passed any “poor” diagnoses. Yes, he does have developmental disabilities and he uses a wheel chair but “poor” is far from what he really is.

This is what I try to encourage the parents to envision—the possibilities of what their children can become. Support groups allow the parents an opportunity to breathe, take a break, and renew for another week. Don’t give up! The possibilities are endless!

Tips for moving into... Summer

Get a big calendar and post daily plans. Get your child to help. Use pictures or words or both.

Prepare your child in advance. Review your plans with your child before they happen. It may be important to add more details than you could post. Ex. After we get up and have breakfast, we will pack our picnic lunch, get out swim suits and sunscreen...etc. Remember to talk about the plans for coming back home or ending an activity. The less surprises the better!

Want to be spontaneous but need a structure? Brainstorm a list of fun activities and post them at the bottom of your calendar so that you have ideas that you have already talked about to add into those free days.

AND remember to encourage learning. Go to the library, take pictures, collect items from hikes or trips, visit museums, keep a journal of adventures, make up silly stories as you drive in the car, cook healthy recipes...the possibilities are endless.

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