

- Find local support groups that might be helpful and investigate them. Ask the family if they would like your research information since this task could be overwhelming at first.
- Start a library at your church to support families with disabilities.
- If you know other families with disabilities, help connect them. Start by asking permission.
- Invite the grandparents or other family members out for coffee and ask them how they are feeling. Pray with them. Bring supportive resources. Congratulate them!

Once you meet God's precious child ...

- Compliment the child and the parents. Everyone likes to hear how cute their child's nose is or how you notice the same curly hair as dad's. If you struggle with complimenting children, try talking straight to the baby. For example: "Hello, dear one." "We're so glad you're here." "Aren't you sweet." "You are a gift from God."
- Ask about the actual birth; most people like to share their birth story.
- Ask if you can hold the child.
- Provide meals or gift cards, grocery shopping, light cleaning, dishes, laundry, research; offer to walk the dog, drive other siblings to their game, sit with the baby while the parents nap.
- Offer to pray over the child and family.
- Offer to help plan and celebrate the child's Baptism.
- Don't disregard the disability; acknowledge it, but be aware of how the parents are feeling. Possible comments could be:

"I know it's not what you were hoping (or a typical situation), but you will continue to be great parents."

"Yes, it will be challenging, but God has a purpose for every child, including this one."

"I may say or do the wrong thing, but I am here for you. Help me help you."

"Even on rough days, I'm here for the long haul. I love you and I love the baby."

"Many new parents struggle with having a newborn; what can I do for you?"

Walking through the early stages of life with the family ...

- Babysit! If the child needs very specific support, learn how to babysit or raise funds to pay for a professional babysitter.
- Continue to offer practical, hands-on support.
- Continue to check in and pray for the family.
- Become the child's advocate at church. Start some programs for the family and your community: Sunday school program, companion system for worship, monthly respite program, support group.
- Don't let the family fall away from the faith. Get creative. Help them worship with success and continue to surround them with God's love.
- Work on getting the church accessible.
- Develop funds or find grants that help the family with assistive equipment needs.
- Continue to listen throughout the new stages of life. Show God's love for a lifetime.

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Thumbprint of God Series



# Supporting Families NEW to Disabilities

## *Fertilization to Year One*



*Uniquely and intricately designed by God in order to bring Him glory. He claims us as His own. We are His.*

**"I have called you by name. You are mine."**  
(Isaiah 43:1b)

## Look Who's Here! Praise God!

At **Lutherans For Life**, we praise God for the creation of all babies. We believe He made us in His image, and with purpose. We celebrate life!

We do, however, recognize the need for some guidance when certain situations arise, especially when supporting families new to disabilities. We offer this resource of ideas and considerations to encourage you to be a loving and faithful source of support.

**Of course, we do not have all the answers, but we do know your relationship with this child is key.** We believe as you grow together, you will find the best ways to show God's love to this family. But for now, we are hoping to help you unlock the sea of emotions they may be feeling and encourage open and honest discussions.

**So God created man in his own image, in the IMAGE OF GOD he created him; male and female he created them.** *Genesis 1:27*

**Behold, children are a HERITAGE from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a REWARD.** *Psalm 127:3*

## Prenatal Diagnosis or Arrival of a Child with Disabilities

Hearing a child has disabilities can lead to several different emotions. All are valid and should be acknowledged and supported.

Some mourn the loss of their "dream child," some are afraid and fear the life the child might face, some dive into every website and blog for advice, some worry, some are angry,

some cry, some laugh, some respond with an immediate love for the child, some are calm, some are not.

In reality, most of these emotions are typical of any parent. The best we can do as friends and family is:

be present, listen, listen some more, love, support, and pray.

**If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?** *Proverbs 18:13-14*

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.** *Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b*

## Research Tells Us What NOT to Say

Avoid certain responses ...

- "They don't look like they have ..."
- "Are you sure ...?"
- "I know how you feel; my [relative/friend] has ..."
- "It could be worse ..."

*Neither denial nor the comparison game are helpful. Each family's situation is unique.*

**For you [God] formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.** *Psalm 139:13*

Avoid platitudes ...

- "God doesn't give you more than you can handle."
- "God gives special children to special people."
- "God must think you're really strong to give you a child with disabilities; I could never do it."

*The Bible does not say any of this! What the Bible says is:*

**I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me.** *Philippians 4:13*

**God, the LORD, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.** *Habakkuk 3:19*

Avoid saying, "I'm sorry" "That's so sad."

- The majority of parents researched said these simple words did much damage to their hearts. As shocked as they were to receive the news of a potential disability, they yearned to hear, "Congratulations, you're having a baby!" or "Tell me more about that."
- There are several blogs and articles that remind us condolences are for death, not birth.

**And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."** *Luke 1:46-47*

Avoid using "they" when speaking about the child or anyone with disabilities.

*We are all the thumbprint of God, unique and wonderful! No one likes to be grouped as if their individuality doesn't matter.*

**I praise you [God], for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.** *Psalm 139:14*

## Helpful Hints for Supporting Families

Your personal relationship with and knowledge of this family should lead your conversations, but here are some ideas for you to consider. Start by listening ...

- Ask how they are feeling. Listen. Ask them to tell you more. Listen some more.
- Validate their feelings without giving opinions.
- Pray with them based on how they are feeling.
- Include GRACE in the prayer—for them and for you. Acknowledge that you will learn and make mistakes together.
- Congratulate them! They are parents!

Early-on support ...

- Ask about the actual pregnancy. Just like any typical pregnancy, let them talk about it!
- Be there. Don't disappear because you are unfamiliar with disabilities—call, check in, send cards, ask questions, bring snacks, visit.
- Learn about the disability or offer to learn with the family.