



Respite Options for Your Family

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What is Respite?

Respite means getting a temporary break from caregiving responsibilities. Respite is a time to relax, rest, and rejuvenate. It is well-deserved time for parents so they can provide a caring and loving environment for their families.

A period of respite could be as simple as five minutes of quiet to drink your cup of coffee in the morning while your spouse gets the kids ready for school... or two hours of care by a friend or neighbor while you take a nap, run errands, or take a walk... or it could involve longer periods of time so that parents have time to nurture other relationships, gain perspective, or engage in other activities.

"I find that I'm much happier and a better parent when I've had some time for myself, even if it's only for a little while."

Often parents of children with special needs have a more difficult time finding ways to get respite breaks. Sometimes they may have difficulty finding the right person to provide care for their child, or they may feel that it isn't a good time to leave the child with another person. Taking respite breaks isn't always easy, but it's important to think about what will work for you and your family.

Why is Respite Important?

Taking a break from caregiving can benefit your whole family. Respite can:

- Provide a chance for your child to meet and spend time with other children and adults outside of your family, and to develop independent leisure and social skills.
- Offer a time for parents to have time with each other to strengthen their relationship as a couple and provide time to communicate about their children.
- Give parents a chance to spend time with other children and family members.
- Provide parents with a time to rest and gain perspective on difficult parenting issues.

"In many ways, finding someone to provide respite is just one more task to do - but for me, the break is worth it!"

What respite options will work best for your family? Respite can occur in a variety of different ways and is not limited to specialized programs. Some of the best and most frequently used respite happens in the community

through friends, neighbors, relatives, and organized groups. Respite can be arranged through agencies or arranged by you. Respite is varied and flexible and no single respite option is likely to work for all families all of the time.

Spend some time thinking about what type of respite will work best for your family. Do you want care provided in your home or in a community setting? Do you need occasional care or a regular time each week when you can count on a break? Do you want your child to learn new social or recreational skills? What respite option will be the best "fit" for your child's needs? Then use your answers to guide your search for respite.

Exploring Respite Options...

Talk with local professionals, parents, advocacy groups, and disability agencies about what respite services and options are available in your community. Remember that ultimately you will need to find and prepare anyone who provides care for your child - you know your child best, and can convey important information about how to best care for your child during your absence. It is often helpful to have someone spend time with your family observing daily routines, behaviors, and mealtimes, so that care can be consistent with your parenting style and preferences.

"I have a cousin that we visit regularly who has always been really nice to my kids and supportive of us. Finally one day I asked her, "Would you ever want to come over and babysit for us?"

Getting Started - Creative Strategies for Finding Respite in Your Community

- Reach out for help from someone who has ongoing involvement with your family and whom you trust - your child's pediatrician or nurse, service coordinator, case manager, therapist, teacher or teacher's aide - ask them if they know of anyone interested in providing respite care.
- Provide reciprocal care for another family who would like a break.
- Ask for support through your neighborhood place of worship.
- Explore whether your local senior center has volunteers with experience with children and youth with special needs.

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- Find a teenager in your neighborhood or through a teen service organization that might be willing to offer care a few afternoons a week.
- Talk with other parents or your local parent support group to see if anyone can offer suggestions or ideas for respite or babysitting.
- Contact area family support and parent advocacy programs such as your local Parent to Parent group or Parent Resource Center in the public schools.
- Call local disability organizations to see what respite, family support, or financial assistance they can provide (Arc chapter, community services board, early intervention program).
- Contact area child care centers or family child care providers to see if they are interested in providing some part-time care for your child.
- Enroll your child in a recreational or extra curricular activity that they enjoy.
- Plan ahead for summer and explore summer camp experiences for your child including day camps and overnight programs.
- If you want to hire your own respite provider, consider placing an ad at your local college or university. Social work, special education, psychology, and physical therapy students are always looking for experience with children with special needs.
- Be creative with your work and family schedules so that you and your spouse each have some time to do individual activities, as well as spend together as a couple! ■

This article was excerpted and adapted from A Practical Guide to Respite for Your Family (1996) by Molly Dellinger-Wray and Monica Uhl, Partnership for People with Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia.

Respite Web Resources

Virginia Respite Directory and Summer Camps
www.vcu.edu/partnership/Respite2

ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center
www.archrespite.org

Parent to Parent of Virginia
www.ptpofva.com

The Arc of Virginia
www.arcofva.org

VA Association of Community Services Boards
www.vacsb.org