

# SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



## Coping with stress and developing resilience

The extra demands of caring for a child with a disability or special educational need can mean that parent carers are much more likely to suffer from stress, anxiety or even depression. We don't pretend to have a magic wand that can make your life stress-free but there are things you can do to help you to cope, which may increase your chances of managing stressful times more successfully in future – this is often called developing resilience.

## Recognise the signs and symptoms of stress

One of the most important steps to building your resilience is noticing when you are stressed. These can be some of the common signs:

- Feeling irritable and emotional
- Eating more or less
- Avoiding social situations and being more withdrawn at home
- Feeling unable to enjoy activities such as family time, even when you've had a break
- An inability to concentrate and lacking motivation
- Aches, pains, headaches, dizziness, digestive problems, frequent colds
- Feeling worn out and not feeling refreshed after a good night's sleep

Don't ignore these signs – they can be a red flag that your own needs must be prioritised.

## Talk to someone

If you notice you are showing signs of stress, tell someone you trust. This could be your partner or a friend or family member. Or if you find it hard to speak to your nearest and dearest, you could talk to a professional such as a counsellor, your GP or social worker. Just speaking about your state of mind can help to relieve stress and may lead to practical solutions that prevent problems getting more serious.

## Ask for help

It can be very hard to admit you need help and, even when someone offers their support, you can find yourself saying, "It's OK, I can manage," or worse still, accepting 'help' that in reality makes your life more difficult. Remember, there's nothing to be ashamed of in asking for help and many people feel touched if you choose to ask them to support you.

It can help to spend some time thinking about the things that would really make a difference to you – perhaps someone to do the recycling, someone to babysit your other kids while you go to the doctors – and identify people who you think could do them. This also means you have some specific examples to hand whenever someone offers to help out of the blue.





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### Remember the basics

We all know we function better when we eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep and a bit of exercise though it's not always easy to do. If possible, try not to neglect these simple things and remember to appreciate all the things you do to make sure your kids have got their basic needs met too.

For many couples, parenthood brings them closer together, but looking after a relationship takes time and attention, something parent carers struggle to find. Stress can also get in the way of open communication and mutual encouragement. Take time to do shared activities with your partner outside the family if you can and keep talking.

If you are single parent, try and make time to maintain your friendships if you can. Not only can you draw on their support when you need help but sharing fun times can be crucial for general wellbeing. You could also see if there's a single parent group or network in your area.

### Join a support group

Getting to know other parent carers can be a life-saver. Just being able to talk to someone who's going through the same sort of thing as you or who has been there before you and lived to tell the tale can make a world of difference and you may make lasting friendships. There are lots of local parent support groups, some for families with children with specific disabilities and some for any condition. Look at the 'Ask about' section below for details. If your child has a rare condition, **Contact** (0808 808 3555 or <https://contact.org.uk>) may be able to put you in touch with a group. They also have an online forum called **Making contact** ([www.makingcontact.org](http://www.makingcontact.org)) where parents can chat to each other.

### Ask about

- **Carer's allowance** – you may qualify for Carer's Allowance, a state benefit to help you look after someone with a disability. See: [www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/overview](http://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/overview).
- **Carers Health and Wellbeing Fund** – a grant of up to £300 available to support a carer's health and wellbeing. It is available through **West Sussex Carers Support** who also offer support groups across West Sussex and a wide range of other services including training sessions & counselling. For further information visit: [www.carerssupport.org.uk/carers-health-and-wellbeing-fund](http://www.carerssupport.org.uk/carers-health-and-wellbeing-fund), email: [info@carerssupport.org.uk](mailto:info@carerssupport.org.uk) or Tel: 0300 028 8888.
- **Direct payments** – if your child gets help from social services, you may qualify for direct payments, which can be used to employ a carer for a certain number of hours a week. See: [www.gov.uk/apply-direct-payments](http://www.gov.uk/apply-direct-payments).
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – your child may qualify for DLA, a state benefit that will help with their care. For further information visit: [www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children](http://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children).
- **Online forums** – if you're not ready or able to meet other parents in-person there are many online forums that allow you to interact with other carers of children with SEND. Reaching Families' Facebook group is the largest of its kind in West Sussex connecting parent carers for discussion and advice on a range of SEND-related topics [www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/fbgroup.html](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/fbgroup.html). Scope has an online community for all people connected by a disability at <https://forum.scope.org.uk>, and parenting sites Mumsnet [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) and Netmums, [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com), also have SEND areas within their forums and websites.
- **Reaching Families** – provides training, information & other fact sheets related to this topic. (See especially our *Making Sense of Wellbeing* workshops which focus on providing strategies parent carers can use to improve their resilience & wellbeing). We also offer in-person and online *Umbrellas* support groups in a range of locations in West Sussex, a befriending service, benefits advice, a Facebook group & handbook (see below) for parent carers of children & young people with SEND in West Sussex. See [www.reachingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk) for our full range of services.





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- **West Sussex Children's Services** – support from health and social care. They can assess the needs of the whole family and do a Carer's Needs Assessment for you. If your child is under 18, contact the Integrated Front Door (IFD) for West Sussex Children's Services. Tel: **01403 229900** or email: **WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk**. For social care for over 18s call the Adults' CarePoint: **01243 642121**, or email: **socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk**. Online referral forms for children's and/or adults' social care are available via: **www.westsussex.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/social-care-support**.

### Further information and useful links

- **Making Sense of it All: From Birth to Adulthood** – Reaching Families' handbook for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex. This provides essential information on money matters, including claiming DLA and PIP, as well as social care, health, leisure, travel, education and employment. It also contains directories of local support groups as well as national organisations that can provide information and advice. Go to: **www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/guides.html**.
- **Contact** – is an organisation for families with disabled children and has a 'Listening Ear Service' offering 1-1 telephone appointments for parent carers seeking emotional support, practical advice, or help to link with local support groups. Visit: **www.contact.org.uk/help-for-families/listening-ear** or Tel: **0808 808 3555**.
- **Family Fund** – you may be able to get help to pay for activities and short breaks. Go to: **www.familyfund.org.uk** and fill in their online enquiry form.
- **Five Ways to Wellbeing** – developed by the **New Economics Foundation**, these five steps have been proven to enhance wellbeing. See: **www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing**.
- **Reading Well Books on Prescription** – borrow books that can help you cope with stress, anxiety and depression. Also has a list of mood-boosting books recommended by readers. See: **https://reading-well.org.uk**. Most can be borrowed for free from any West Sussex Library. Go to **https://arena.westsussex.gov.uk/welcome** and search the library catalogue.
- **Relate** – low cost relationship counselling for couples. See: **www.relate.org.uk**.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to: **https://westsussex.local-offer.org** for local services, support and details of *Short Breaks* providers for children & young people aged 0 - 25 years with SEND.
- **West Sussex Mind** – a community mental health organisation offering mental health support, information and training in a wide range of locations in West Sussex and online. Visit: **www.westsussexmind.org**, tel: **0330 303 5652** (Mon-Fri 10am until 4pm) or email: **helppoint@westsussexmind.org**. West Sussex Mind is a local Mind group affiliated with Mind – the national mental health charity, which also has useful resources on mental health & wellbeing. Visit: **www.mind.org.uk**.
- **West Sussex Wellbeing** – run by West Sussex County Council offers a range of generalist services focused on improving health and wellbeing for individuals and families, such as support with healthy eating, stopping smoking, getting active or making your home healthier & warmer. Some offer wellbeing checks to help you identify ways to feel better. To find your local wellbeing hub, visit: **www.westsussexwellbeing.org.uk**.

