

Relationships between Parents who have a Disabled Child: A survey of over 2,000 parents in the UK

Contact a Family asked parents of disabled children what effect they thought having a disabled child had had on their relationship. The views of over 2,000 parents with disabled children were collected through a postal survey, a web-based survey, conference and workshop during 2003. This is a summary of the finding. The full report, priced £5, can be purchased via our online store.

Respondents

84% female, 12% male, 4% no answer

85% white, 3% Asian, 2% Black African, 1% Black Caribbean, 5% other, 4% not given

Families

67% of children were being brought up by both parents

17% by a single parent

10% in a stepfamily

3% in another situation

3% no response

Census figures suggest that there is an overall rate of 23% of children being brought up in single parent families, 65% live with both parents and 10% in step families

Current relationships

43% of parents described their relationship as very good

16% as quite good

17% as variable

6% as not very good

Less than 0.5% said it was very poor

14% had little or no contact with their child's other parent

4% no response

The effect of having a disabled child on a relationship

23% thought that it had brought them closer together

19% thought it had little effect

31% felt that it had caused some problems

13% felt that it had caused major problems

9% felt that having a disabled child had led to separation

5% no response

Experience of counselling

24% had experienced professional relationship counselling. Of the remaining 76%, 38% would have liked to have had counselling. 70% of those who had experienced relationship counselling had found it very or quite helpful.

Problems experienced since having a disabled child	% of those linking it to having a disabled child
76% stress or depression	88%
72% tiredness/lack of sleep	84%
51% financial difficulties	66%
32% problems at work	71%
22% housing problems	69%
10% domestic violence	55%
8% drug or alcohol problems	67%
8% none of the above	
4% no response	

What helps relationships?

Ranked for importance

1. Time away from the child to be with their partner
2. Ability to communicate openly
3. Sharing the care of the child between the parents
4. Support of family and friends
5. Local and national support groups
6. Lack of money worries
7. Support from professionals (e.g. GP, therapist)
8. Work, either staying in or giving up work
9. Having other, non-disabled children
10. Child going to full time school

What could have helped?

Ranked for importance

1. A break or more breaks, or more flexible breaks
2. Emotional support/counselling
3. Support and information around diagnosis

4. Fewer financial worries
5. Help and support from family and friends
6. Professional support
7. Support for the father
8. Recognition of the needs of the whole family
9. Practical help at home
10. Information about services and entitlements