

Press release

Valentine's Day not always red rose-y for families of disabled children

Research shows that parents of disabled children are more likely to experience relationship difficulties and this can have a significant impact on a child's wellbeing and behaviour.

With an endless array of doctors' appointments, juggling work and caring commitments and the need to book alternative care months in advance there is little time for making a partner feel special this Valentine's Day.

There are 770,000 disabled children in the UK, whose parents are affected by these issues. The majority of parents say that respite care is the key to the survival of their relationship.

The government has recently announced 21 areas which will receive extra funding to pilot improved respite care for families with disabled children in England. These areas have an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of these families according to leading charities Contact a Family and One Plus One.

Jill Harrison, Contact a Family's External Affairs Director, said: "It's important to remember on Valentine's Day that relationships are not only about romance, they are also a vital source of support and protection against life's stresses and strains.

"Parents of disabled children are under considerable and varied pressures and need support especially in the form of short breaks to help meet the challenges they face."

According to a Contact a Family survey, more than half of parents report some or major problems in their relationship after having a disabled child. The reasons are put down to stress (76%), tiredness (72%) or financial difficulties (51%).

A recent One Plus One publication, "Growing Together, or Drifting Apart? – Children with disabilities and their parents' relationship", found that parents of disabled children were more likely to divorce and less likely to remarry. This means that a greater proportion of children with disabilities live in lone parent families.

Penny Mansfield, Director of One Plus One the charity dedicated to strengthening couple and family relationships, said: "Parents of disabled children are more likely to experience poorer relationships. For many this leads to separation and family breakdown, and impacts significantly on their children's physical and mental health."

Despite parents repeatedly saying that short breaks are essential to keeping healthy family relationships, 78% who care for a child with profound and multiple learning disabilities currently receive no support or less than two hours per week.

Contact a Family and One Plus One have published a guide to help parents of children with a disability strengthen their relationship and meet the challenges they face together.

The guide – Relationships and caring for a disabled child - has been produced using the evidence of 2,000 parents of disabled children surveyed by Contact a Family and research from One Plus One.

To order a copy of the guide telephone the Contact a Family freephone helpline 0808 808 3555.

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For further information telephone the press office on 0207 608 8741.

Notes to Editors

- The guide - Relationships and caring for a disabled child - is available from Contact a Family's helpline, 0808 808 3555, and can be downloaded from either <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/relationships.html> or <http://www.opo.org.uk/SFR/Downloads.php>
- The government recently announced 21 local authority areas which will receive extra funding to pilot improved short breaks services for families with disabled children in England. The 21 areas will launch the first wave of a £340 million investment into improving the provision of short breaks. – with a roll out to all English local authorities by 2009. Those areas are: Bradford, Bolton, Bournemouth-Dorset-Poole (joint pathfinder), Brighton, Dudley, Derbyshire, Enfield, Gloucestershire, Gateshead, Halton, Kent, North Yorkshire, North Tyneside, Nottinghamshire, Norfolk, Sutton, Sunderland, Telford & Wrekin.
- In 2004 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. <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/relationshipsurvey.html>
- The review of research by One Plus One, published in 2007, 'Growing Together, or Drifting Apart? Children with disabilities and their parent's relationship' brings together a range of evidence exploring the impact of caring for a child with a disability on couples' relationships. The full report can be found at www.oneplusone.org.uk/publications/growingtogether.pdf