

Faith Inclusion Network
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How Churches Can Strengthen the Marriages of Couples Caring for Children with Disabilities

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No single solution is going to help strengthen the marriages of all couples caring for children with disabilities. The best way to help them is to get to know their needs and see how your church can come alongside to support and love them.

Profile of a typical Disability Parenting Couple:

Question for you: Put yourself in their place. What challenges do you think they are struggling with? What are their lives like?

Feelings that we have experienced, ourselves, and heard from other couples:

- Overwhelmed
- The daily stresses in life are tremendous
- Lots of feelings beneath the surface like pain, grief, anger, etc.
- It's hard to look at the future and see the big picture in life
- Daily life feels like survival and all efforts are just to make it one more day

Once you better understand their needs, you can start to find ways to support and love them. We believe there are four key areas that you can address as a church. You don't have to do them all, but start somewhere and do what you can. Consider collaborating with other congregations to support these couples.

1. Spiritual Health of Couples

Fact- These couples often struggle with their faith and their understanding of God. They may have questions like, “Am I being punished?” “Is God sovereign?” and “How can God be good and do this to our child?”

Question for you: How could you help them engage with and explore these questions? _____

One Idea to get you started: Start a Small Group specifically for these couples.

- This creates a space for them to have some time to engage in these topics.
- It creates a safe place for them to explore doubts, fears and questions.
- They can receive validation and support from other couples
- They can feel value and worth as they listen and pray for other couples.

Keys for small group success:

- Provide specialized child care during the time
- Split the time 50/50 to give time for the topic and for sharing and praying together
- Find an experienced leader

2. Mental Health of Couples

Fact: Couples with children with disabilities deal with more intense stressors in their marriages and life and often need additional help in managing these challenges.

Question for you: What stresses have you seen in couples you have talked with? _____

One idea to get you started: Talk about the counseling resources that are available and provide a written guide or webpage to help couples.

Keys to help couples find the support they need

- Normalize the need for counseling and reduce the stigma
- Make a list of what your church offers or what community resources are available.
- Break down the concern over cost—let them know about insurance copays, sliding scales, and scholarships
- Provide an option for child care so they can go together.
- Use the skills of professionals in your congregation. You likely have someone in counseling or social work or in a related field that can help lead and organize this process.

3. Financial Health of Couples

Fact: Most couples struggle with how to meet their increased financial needs and this often leads to more stress and arguments.

Question for you: What additional financial stresses do you think a couple might face as they raise a child with disabilities? _____

One idea to get you started: Help relieve some financial stress by providing some kind of support.

Keys to making a financial gift useful and meaningful:

- Give it in person so that you can express an extra level of care.
- Say it's for something specific like gas money to help with all the doctor appointments they are driving to. That shows insight and care for them.
- Give them something that will encourage them to be more united—like a restaurant gift card so they can go eat together.

4. Relational Health of Couples

Fact: The amount of time available for a couple to spend alone together is often slim to none. When there is time, it's often short or in the midst of exhaustion.

Question for you: What fears or worries do you think a couple would have about getting out together? _____

One Idea to get you started: Find a way to give them alone time—at least two hours and maybe even a night away together.

Keys to helping a couple build and rekindle their relationship:

Reduce their worries and fears of leaving:

- Provide in-home care
- Hire a specialized caregiver
- Hire a second sitter for the other children
- Involve their support system—other family and friends

Help reduce how much they have to prepare to get away.

- Order Pizza or bring dinner for the family
- Give them a gift card to a restaurant
- Plan an orientation/practice session before the actual getaway night to meet the child and go over the long list of instructions and details that need to be communicated to a caregiver. This can easily take an hour or more and leave them exhausted before they ever leave the house.

One of the best ways that your congregation can love and support these couples is by doing whatever it takes to relieve their stress and get them out of the house together where they can remember for at least a little bit, what it's like to build and enjoy their relationship.

We'd love to hear from you! Please email us with questions and your ideas.

Blessings on your ministry,

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