



Fathers of children with disabilities or special health care needs make a difference every day through care, support and connection.



Dads Make a Difference

Your role matters

Fathers often support their children in many ways, including helping with daily care, medical needs, school planning, emotional support and family routines. You may also be supporting a partner, balancing work and caregiving, and trying to understand systems that are not always easy to navigate. Many fathers of children with disabilities or special health care needs also report feeling excluded by providers or isolated from other caregivers. Your role is important, and being included, informed and connected can help you better support your child and family. Here are a few ways to stay connected, informed and involved:

- ▶ Take part in appointments, meetings and planning.
- ▶ Share what you know about your child's needs, strengths and routines.
- ▶ Keep track of services, supports and resources that may help your family.
- ▶ Connect with other fathers who understand the experience.



You bring an important perspective

You know your child's strengths, needs, routines and personality. That knowledge matters in appointments, school meetings, service planning and everyday decisions. Fathers should be part of conversations about their child's care and support, especially when decisions affect the child's health, development, education or future.

Connection can make caregiving less isolating

Relationships with other fathers can provide emotional support, reduce isolation and strengthen family well-being. Talking with other dads can also help you learn about resources, build advocacy skills and share practical ideas from people who understand what it is like to raise a child with a disability or special health care need.

You do not have to figure it out alone

There are organizations in Washington that help fathers and families connect with support, services and information. These resources can help you meet other caregivers, learn about systems and find tools to support your child and family.

- ▶ **Washington State Fathers Network:** Connects fathers raising children with special health care needs or disabilities through chapters, resources, partnerships, advocacy, events and activities. sherwoodcs.org/wsfn
- ▶ **Washington Fatherhood Council:** Works to increase fatherhood access and belonging, improve state services and promote father-friendly policies and practices. dcyf.wa.gov/services/engaging-fathers/washington-fatherhood-council
- ▶ **Washington State Parent to Parent:** Matches parents with trained, experienced parents for one-to-one support and helps families with systems navigation and resources. arcwa.org/parent-to-parent/
- ▶ **Informing Families:** Shares trusted news and information to help individuals and families plan, build support, and learn about opportunities. informingfamilies.org
- ▶ **PAVE:** Provides support, training, information and resources for individuals, youth and families impacted by disabilities in Washington. wapave.org

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Supporting your child's development through the lifespan

Fathers support their children through every stage of life, from early childhood through adulthood. You help your child build skills, develop independence, feel secure and learn through strong relationships. As your child grows, your role may include learning about early supports, school services, transition planning, employment and long-term support.



- ▶ Learn about supports for each stage of your child's life.
- ▶ Take part in school planning, including IEP meetings.
- ▶ Explore transition supports before your child leaves school.
- ▶ Look for tools that support independence, employment and community life.

Lifespan Resources

- ▶ **Early Support for Infants and Toddlers:** Early help for children from birth to age 3 with developmental delays or disabilities. dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-development-supports/esit
- ▶ **OSPI:** Guidance on Individualized Education Programs, also called IEPs. ospi.k12.wa.us
- ▶ **Office of the Education Ombuds:** Information on the IEP process and what families can expect. oeo.wa.gov/en
- ▶ **DSHS School-to-Work:** Support for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they move from school to work. dshs.wa.gov/dvr/school-work
- ▶ **Wise:** Training, resources and tools that support employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. gowise.org

Taking care of your well-being

Fathers and male caregivers may go through times of stress, anxiety or burnout while caring for a child with a disability or special health care need. It can help to have a place to talk, connect with others and get support when things feel heavy. Support may come from other fathers, family members, caregiver support groups, mental health organizations or trained crisis counselors.

Resources that may help include NAMI Washington support groups for local mental health support, Perinatal Support Washington for new parents, and the Psychology Today therapist directory to search for therapists in Washington state. If you or someone in your family feels overwhelmed or in crisis, call or text 988 for free, confidential support anytime.

- ▶ NAMI Washington: namiwa.org
- ▶ Perinatal Support WA: perinatalsupport.org
- ▶ 988 Crisis Line: 988lifeline.org
- ▶ Psychology Today WA Therapist Directory: psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/washington

Resources to explore

- ▶ **Developmental Disabilities Administration:** Information about eligibility, case management and service coordination. dshs.wa.gov/dda
- ▶ **Home and Community-Based Waivers:** Services such as respite, community inclusion and therapies. dshs.wa.gov/dda/home-and-community-based-waivers
- ▶ **Washington Assistive Technology Act Program:** Help with selecting and using assistive technology. watap.org
- ▶ **The Arc of Washington State:** Services and programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities of all ages, and support for their families. arcwa.org
- ▶ **Lifespan Respite Washington:** Mini-grants for unpaid caregivers who do not receive respite from another program. wapave.org/lifespan-respite-wa/
- ▶ **Apple Health for Kids:** Free or low-cost medical, dental and vision coverage for children under 19. hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/apple-health-you

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