

# 10 SPECIAL NEEDS OF SPECIAL NEEDS PARENTS

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By Gillian Marchenko

- ❖ **We need you to bring it up.** Ask us our stories. Ask questions. We prefer that you ask about our kids directly, rather than avoiding the topic. A smile or friendly “Hello!” is an easy icebreaker.
- ❖ **We need our kids to have friends.** If your child wants to have a play date with my kid, encourage it. Call me and say, “How can we make this work?”
- ❖ **We need you to share your concerns.** If you are concerned about something regarding my child, by all means, tell me about it. I may not have an answer for you, but I will appreciate the conversation. Just know we don’t always need your advice. Talk to us about a new therapy or diet you’ve heard about. Just be aware that we’ve probably already heard of it/tried it.
- ❖ **We need you to make an effort.** Effort goes a long way. Educate yourself about my child’s special need. For instance, learning simple signs so that you can better communicate with a child who is deaf (and uses sign language) would be appreciated.
- ❖ **We need you to prepare your kids to hang out with our kids.** If you know you will be spending time with my child, talk to your kids about it beforehand. Talk about behaviors, and ways your child can play with my child. Need ideas? Ask!
- ❖ **We need you to be considerate.** Consider the age of the child with special needs. If it is a new baby or a younger kid, I may not be ready to talk yet. But that doesn’t mean I won’t ever want to talk about it. Follow my lead. I’ll let you know.
- ❖ **We need your tangible help.** Offer to bring over a meal, or help at a doctor’s visit. Or hang out with my child with special needs so I can take my other kids to a matinee.
- ❖ **We need you to treat us like other friends, too.** Talk about other things with me besides my child with special needs. Believe it or not, I may just want to gossip about Angelina and Brad and their globe-trotting kids.
- ❖ **We need validation.** Don’t dismiss my concerns by saying “oh, my typical child does that”, or my favorite “well, then my kid must have a disability too, because he/she does XYZ also”. When I open up about a struggle, I want validation, not to be blown off.
- ❖ **We need invitations.** Don’t assume I’m too busy. Ask me out to eat or to a movie. I may not be able to get away as easily as other friends who don’t have kids with special needs, but I’ll go if I can, and if I can’t, your invitation will make my day. And ask me again!

