

DisabilityCampaign.org

10 Positive Things to Say to an Expectant Parent of a Child with a Disability

1. “Congratulations!”

Every new parent wants to hear these words, so make sure to congratulate your friend on the arrival (or soon-to-be) arrival of his or her child with a disability. And don't just say it; show it with a card or a little gift just as you would do to any other friend having a baby without a disability.

Image: Madamenoire.com



2. “How are you feeling?”

Don't assume your friend is distraught or terrified about his or her child's diagnosis — or that he or she is exuding joy or hope. The truth is, your friend is probably experiencing a mix of emotions — all while processing the news that his or her child has a disability. Simply ask how he or she is feeling and lend a listening ear. Your friend may or may not be willing to talk about it in detail and that's ok; all you need to do is listen and **acknowledge your friend's feelings**. Let your friend be transparent and don't be too quick to try to “fix” any negative feelings. Avoid saying phrases like, “I know how you feel,” or “If I were you, I would” Remember, every pregnancy and parenting experience is unique, especially when it comes to having a child with a disability.

3. “You are not alone.”

Most parents who first hear the words, “Your child has a disability,” had hardly ever considered the possibility of having a child with special needs. For some, this child may be their first, personal encounter with a person with a disability; others may not even know a single parent of a child with a disability. For these and other reasons, expectant parents of children with special needs can feel alone and helpless. This is where you, as a friend, can really make a difference. Let your friend know you care about him or her and the baby, and reinforce it throughout the pregnancy and the child’s life. Involve other friends or relatives who can also be there to create a network of support to your friend.

Image: Parenting.com

4. **“A disability can feel overwhelming at first, but I want to work alongside you to find the best resources available.”**

If your friend is open to it, offer to help find a good pediatrician, research books on parenting children with disabilities, look for local support groups, or obtain more information on adapted toys. Avoid assuming what’s best for your friend and the baby; rather, if your friend permits, share these options and leave it up to your friend to decide.



5. **“Friend, I know you’re going to be busy with extra medical appointments ... why don’t you let me pick up your kids from school and run a few errands for you — it’ll be my pleasure.”**

If your friend is not a new parent, she already has other children to watch after, drive to school, pick up from soccer practice ... on top of all of that, she’ll likely have to visit the hospital for more frequent ultrasounds and bloodwork. Offer to help in practical ways, such

as by picking up the dry cleaning, making a meal, or helping with the kids. You don't have to commit to doing it regularly, but extend the offer for days that you can.

6. **“Take a deep breath, friend, your capacity to embrace life’s challenges hasn’t failed you yet; you will get through this!”**

Have you ever experienced hardship or trials in life and felt like the burden was too heavy to carry, like you weren't capable of doing this, or you thought perhaps it would be best to call it quits? We all experience challenges, and often (with the help of others and the right resources) we find strength to persevere and succeed. Give positive reinforcement, highlighting your friend's strengths and personality traits that will make him or her a great parent, capable of caring for this special child.

7. **“Is it a boy or a girl?”**

Do you have a name?”

You're likely going to inquire about the disability, but don't forget to ask the questions we ask to any parent expecting a child. Why? Well, asking questions about the gender and name help to put things back in perspective. First and



Image: Pragnancymagazine.com

foremost, this baby is ... a BABY, not a disability. Be curious about the gender of the baby and inquire about his or her name.

Perhaps your friend has been so distracted by the disability, that he or she hasn't put much thought into this. For many parents, thinking about baby names can be a fun and

memorable experience. Helping your friend think about names and whether the baby will be a boy or girl can help develop a stronger bond between your friend and the baby.

8. “Friend, try not to think about a year from now, or even six months from now. Just take one day at a time.”

This may be all that your friend can do, especially if the diagnosis is severe and can affect the baby’s ability to make it to full term or live outside of the womb. But each day is an accomplishment: each day represents one more day of life for that child and one more day in which your friend is experiencing pregnancy and motherhood or fatherhood. Help your friend find ways to tackle today’s set of challenges as well as focus on today’s successes, rather than worry and fret about the future.

9. “May I go along with you to the next hospital appointment for your baby?”

Perhaps your friend’s husband cannot go to the next ultrasound, or maybe she has very little support from her family. If so, offer to attend the next appointment, be it to help take notes or to simply be a supportive presence in the room. If possible, plan ahead so you can take the rest of the day off to spend with your friend and do something a bit more lighthearted together, like go out for lunch, do some shopping, or watch a movie.

10. “You know, I am picturing the day when you’ll look back on this moment, and smile — not in spite of the challenges, but because of them.”



Image: Baby3d4d.com

Give your friend hope and courage. The road of disability is a challenging one, and though a diagnosis may provide a prognosis (a picture of what the future with this disability could look like), and resources can help prepare a special needs parent, there’s nothing like the reality of treading that trail. And sometimes, the mere thought of that can feel so intimidating. That’s where hope comes in — because there are so many joys and rewards in parenting children with disabilities. Encourage your friend to hold fast to hope. If your friend is religious, remind your friend of his or her spiritual hope and connect them with their place of worship.

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