

Parent Blocks

NEWSLETTER

"Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia"

Volume 22, Issue 4



When Parents Lead and Providers Support: A Team Approach to Special Health Needs

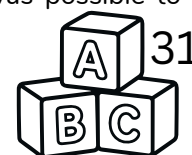
By Kelly Amos, RN, West Virginia Child Care Nurse Health Consultant

I'm one of the Child Care Nurse Health Consultants in WV. In my 12 years working in the medical field, as an EMT and then as a registered nurse, I've had the privilege of caring for children in a variety of settings and situations. If I think back on all those memories, my favorite and most meaningful moments as a nurse have occurred in the more relaxed setting of a child's home as a Private Duty Nurse. There is something about being engrossed in a child's world and the close collaboration with the family, learning their routines, listening to their concerns, and watching the incredible expertise they develop while caring for their children every day. As much as I care about the children I've cared for as a nurse, I'll never care as much about them as their own parents do, I'll never know them as well. The parents of the kids I've worked with have earned my respect, and have been a joy to collaborate with.

While working in these home settings, I had to navigate my professional role while listening to the parents' wishes. Sometimes, having to find compromises or unique solutions to concerns. While I brought nursing knowledge and skill to the table, the parents were the experts on their own child. It was possible to truly create a partnership for the care of children, with parents leading, and me bringing my professional experience as a tool to be utilized.

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That same philosophy applies beautifully in child care settings. When families and child care providers work together as partners, children thrive.

Every Child Deserves to Belong

Children with special health care needs can enrich the classrooms with their unique personalities, strengths, and perspectives. Some children have asthma or food allergies. Others may have diabetes, seizure disorders, feeding tubes, hearing or vision impairments, mobility challenges, developmental disabilities, or chronic medical conditions. The care you provide may include administering daily medications or preventing an allergic reaction by being knowledgeable and vigilant about allergen exposure. Some of the sick children I've cared for have developed wisdom beyond their years due to the trials of life they have experienced. They navigate stress with grace and have a real appreciation for the simple joys of life.

Regardless of the diagnosis, every child deserves to participate safely in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Creating that environment begins with one simple principle: There is a publication called *Caring for Our Children*, the

national health and safety standards developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. It is considered the go-to resource for health and safety in education and child care settings. These standards encourage individualized care planning, ongoing communication with families, staff training, and, when appropriate, coordination with the child's healthcare team.

Parents Are the Experts

When a child has a chronic medical condition, parents become remarkably knowledgeable, and they are the historians who have witnessed every struggle and milestone throughout their child's life.

They know:

- What a "normal day" looks like,
- The earliest warning signs that something is wrong,
- What calms their child,
- What medications have worked (or not worked),
- and often, subtle changes that others might miss.

As child care providers, one of the greatest gifts we can offer families is to recognize and respect their expertise. Instead of asking, "How do we

do this?"

Try asking, "Can you show me how you care for your child at home?"

That simple question communicates partnership rather than authority.

Communication Is the Best Safety Tool

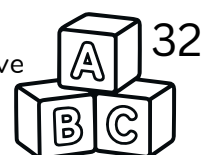
Many medical emergencies are prevented—not by extraordinary interventions—but by excellent communication.

Before a child with special health care needs begins attending your program, schedule time to sit down with the family. Learn about the child's daily routine, medical needs, strengths, favorite activities, communication style, and any accommodations that support the child's success.

Some highlights to include in this discussion include:

- Medical diagnoses
- Daily medications
- Allergies
- Feeding needs
- Mobility or positioning assistance
- Medical equipment
- Activity modifications
- Emergency symptoms
- Emergency contacts
- Comfort measures
- Behavioral or sensory supports
- Communication methods

This conversation should feel collaborative—not intimidating.



Families should leave feeling heard, respected, and confident that their child is entering a caring environment. And you, as the child care provider, should leave the conversation feeling prepared, knowledgeable, and free to communicate anytime you have a question about the child's healthcare needs.

Every Child's Plan Should Be Individualized

No two children with the same diagnosis are exactly alike. For example, two children with asthma may have completely different triggers. I once had two girls in my care who had asthma attacks within 20 minutes of each other. Their lung sounds, symptoms, and response to emergency medications everything was different! One recovered within 5 minutes and one medication dose, the other needed multiple medications over 15 minutes, and we almost had to send her to the ER.

Two children with diabetes may have different insulin schedules, with different medical devices to administer the insulin.

Two children with autism may communicate, learn, and regulate emotions in entirely different ways. That's why individualized care plans are so important.

Whenever applicable, programs should have:

- A Medical Action Plan or Individualized Health Care Plan
- Emergency Action Plan
- Medication Authorization Forms
- Emergency Contact Information
- Instructions for medical devices
- Documentation of required staff training

These plans should be reviewed whenever the child's needs change and kept accessible to staff responsible for the child's care, while protecting the family's privacy. Caring for Our Children recommends individualized care planning and staff preparation for children with special health care needs, and West Virginia licensing requirements also require emergency planning that addresses the individual needs of children, including those with special needs.

Training Builds Confidence

Many child care providers worry about caring for children with medical needs because they simply haven't had much experience.

That is completely understandable.

The good news is that confidence grows through education and practice.

Parents are often excellent teachers. They can demonstrate how to:

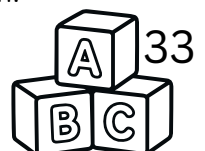
- Use an inhaler with a spacer,
- Clean a nebulizer,
- Administer an epinephrine auto-injector,
- Check blood glucose,
- Recognize seizure activity,
- Operate feeding equipment,
- Or use other medical devices safely.

No one is expected to know everything on the first day.

The goal is preparation and an open door of communication for future training.

Daily Communication Matters

It is easy to get into a routine in the care of a child with special healthcare needs. I'm guilty of becoming too used to a rhythm in a child's care and feeling frustrated when new treatments or schedules are introduced. Health needs can change quickly. A medication dose can be updated, and a medical device may malfunction, leading to an entirely new treatment regimen. So don't get too comfortable with a child's treatment plan!





Regular communication can help prevent errors from occurring.

Many programs find success using:

- Daily communication sheets
- Secure messaging apps
- Brief conversations during drop-off and pick-up
- Scheduled conferences for significant updates



Even a one-minute conversation can prevent misunderstandings and improve safety.

Inclusion Benefits Everyone

Sometimes providers worry that accepting a child with special health care needs will require "special treatment."

In reality, inclusion is simply providing each child with what they need to participate successfully.

- Some children need glasses.
- Some need inhalers.
- Some need extra time.
- Some need visual schedules.
- Some need adaptive equipment.

Meeting individual needs is simply part of quality child care. It is an important lesson in the realities of life, and can give children perspective. When children grow up learning alongside peers with different abilities, everyone benefits through increased empathy, understanding, kindness, and acceptance.

Last Thought

Families are not asking those who care for their children to know everything; they just want their precious child to be safe, to be seen, and to matter to those who care for them.

They're asking us to become trusted partners.

When we listen carefully, communicate openly, follow individualized care plans, and recognize parents as the leaders of their child's care, we create environments where children are not defined by their diagnosis—they are simply children, free to learn, play, grow, and belong.

That partnership is one of the greatest gifts we can give a family.

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Special Health Needs Checklist: Parent

PARENT	
SPECIAL HEALTH NEEDS CHECKLIST	
BEFORE ENROLLMENT	☐ Meet with the child care provider.
	☐ Share your child's diagnoses and healthcare needs.
	☐ Provide a current Medical Action Plan or Individualized Health Care Plan.
	☐ Provide an Emergency Action Plan, if applicable.
	☐ Complete medication authorization forms.
	☐ Provide medications in original labeled containers.
	☐ Supply necessary medical equipment and supplies.
	☐ Demonstrate how medications or medical devices are used.
	☐ Explain emergency warning signs.
	☐ Fill out Medical Release Form allowing communication to doctors, pharmacies, or any other entity.
ONGOING COMMUNICATION	☐ Review dietary needs, allergies, and activity considerations.
	☐ Notify the program of medication changes.
	☐ Update emergency contacts.
	☐ Replace expired medications.
	☐ Inform staff of changes in health status.
	☐ Inform staff of current weight.
	☐ Share strategies that help your child succeed.
	☐ Review the care plan at least annually or whenever changes occur.

Special Health Needs Checklist: Provider

	PROVIDER
	SPECIAL HEALTH NEEDS CHECKLIST
BEFORE ENROLLMENT	☐ Meet with the family.
	☐ Review all health and emergency plans.
	☐ Verify emergency contacts.
	☐ Ensure medication authorization forms are complete.
	☐ Learn each medication's purpose, dosage, timing, and possible side effects.
	☐ Receive training for required medical procedures or equipment.
	☐ Know where medications and emergency supplies are stored.
DAILY CARE	☐ Follow the child's individualized care plan.
	☐ Observe for changes in symptoms or behavior.
	☐ Administer medications according to authorization, physician orders and program policy.
	☐ Document medication administration and significant health events.
	☐ Communicate concerns promptly with parents.
	☐ Protect the family's confidentiality.
	☐ Encourage full participation whenever safely possible.
	☐ Review and update the child's plan with the family as needed.

Supporting children through holidays and celebrations

West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association | www.nurturingwvbabies.org



PREPARING CHILDREN FOR HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

The crowds, the scheduled events, family and community gatherings! Whew! Celebrating holidays can be exciting, and overwhelming, especially for children who are often off of their regular routine, and around larger groups of people. Be accepting, patient, and kind during these times—not only to children—but to yourself. Let go of preconceived ideas and focus on creating memories, not having the “perfect” holiday.

READING CUES

Children can tell you a lot about how they are feeling, if we are willing to read their cues. It's important to remember, especially during the holidays, that children aren't “mini-adults”. Cues that children are feeling overwhelmed include: crying, fidgeting, whining, rubbing eyes, or feeling irritable. It's ok for children to have downtime, take a nap, or leave the event early. Encourage them to participate, but don't force them.

A WORD ABOUT RELATIVES

Try to prepare children before meeting with relatives they may be unfamiliar with. Don't force children to give hugs and kisses to relatives they don't know. While children won't be able to sit for long periods of time and listen to family stories, they do like to participate as part of the group. By bringing books or small toys, the child can share and play.

TIPS AND TRICKS

- Bring a snack for the child, especially if you will be gone for a while.
- Try to stick to routines as much as possible, but allow for fun opportunities that may come up.
- Social stories can help in preparing children for family gatherings or holiday celebrations. [Here are some examples.](#)