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*In other words, I am here to empower you with information, and it is up to you to make the decisions that are right for your family.*

## **Day 6 The Whole Family**

### **Parenting Children with Health Challenges**

When we become parents, we can worry and project, hope and dream, make plans and speculate, but we never really know what we may experience until we have those kids and are full-on, neck-deep into parenthood. All we can do some days is fly down the hill and hope the brakes work!

I know that I didn't expect to be an unschooling mother or an attachment parent or that I would breastfeed my youngest until she was three. I didn't even know what those things were until my children were at the stages of life when those questions and opportunities arose. I didn't know that I would be teaching people about lifestyle medicine and running an online family health practice or questioning big systems such as the medical, school, and foster systems, and rallying for patient autonomy and becoming a children's health advocate. I didn't know that I would question circumcision or that there was such a thing as leaky gut or that antibiotics could harm my children. I didn't know that I would no longer believe in much of the things I was told when I set out to discover these things for myself, until I became a mother, and a fierce mama bear at that.

I certainly didn't know that I would be the parent of children who struggled with mood problems, eczema, anaemia, or that the teen years would both cause me great joy but break my heart at the same time and that one of my children would be diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, which would change absolutely everything I understood about health. I didn't know that my husband and I would



not grow old together but grow old *because of* each other, that handling all of those things could send a once insatiably energetic young mama into feeling old, tired, and beat down by life.

I didn't know that I would be torn down and have to build myself up, again.

But I also didn't know that my most joyful experiences would be the day my newborn, lost in the bliss of nursing, looked up, saw my face and smiled an enormous smile realizing that it was his mama there attached to that breast, those hours and hours we spent in my king sized bed reading books until well past bedtime, singing songs every night before falling into sleep, video recording ourselves singing to Weird Al songs, spending sunny afternoons on the river shore picking rocks, and that night when we lay on our backs blowing a single piece of fluff into the air in a beautiful, still moment of giggles and warmth when nothing else mattered in the world.

I also didn't know that a health challenge could give me more broadened and deepened empathy for others, a wisdom I could not have acquired had our lives been perfect, and an understanding of life only the constant possibility of my own child's death could show me.

### **Where Do Health Challenges Begin? Causes of Chronic Conditions**

The causes of childhood chronic illness are multi-factorial and involve the perfect storm of genetics and environment. It is the child's environment that determines genetic expression, and many of those environmental factors can be controlled through diet, lifestyle, and addressing both internal and external stressors. Causal factors are sometimes psychological, sometimes physical, sometimes emotional, sometimes relationship, and many have roots in family history and childhood experiences. All causes are due to the environment from which our children receive their information.

This is not to lay blame on parents or their parents before, but to recognize the causes can offer solutions and lead us toward improvement, healing, and recovery in whatever form that may take.

### **When it Gets Hard, and It Will Sometimes**

Parenting a child with a chronic health condition is no cakewalk. We love our children fiercely and completely, but even with the strength of the love of a parent for a child on our side, some days we would rather be *anywhere but at yet another* doctor's appointment or up late sorting supplements for the next day...again. Sometimes it feels tedious, and our patience runs short, especially since healing takes time. Change is sometimes hard to see when it is gradual, and our children are not always easy to care for.

I can't tell you how many times I see that look, the look of a person who has seen and been through a lot. It is not a look of wisdom or inner peace but almost as if they have some sort of insight into life that makes the rest of us look like we are living in an unrealistic Lalaland, a look that says, "I once hoped, just like you, but I don't anymore. I know better, now, and it ain't pretty."

I started to have that look. It took 4 years from diagnosis day, but it came. I could feel it on my face, see it in the mirror. I could feel the energy it exuded precede me in the rooms I would walk into. The positive, infectious energy I once had that people always said they could feel exuding from my spirit threatened to become a black hole. I did not want to be that kind of energy in the world, and I certainly did not want it to affect my children. And I do not want you to succumb to it, either.

So, I had to get past whatever it was that was draining the energy from me and take charge of my own power, happiness, and ability to lead my children in this whole health journey thing. And



instead of fighting it, I examined it and then knew how to move through the trauma and grief I didn't know I was denying.

### **Illness As a Traumatic Event Your Child's Feelings When Diagnosed and Beyond**

When your child is diagnosed with a chronic health condition, the event can be traumatic for both you and your child. Children can experience a wide array of emotions such as confusion, anger, and most likely, fear. For a child, understanding what this might mean for them and how it might affect their current life situation is difficult, as are the many changes they will have to make in their once carefree lives as a child or teen. I will never forget the moment when my then 11-year-old daughter turned to me from her hospital bed and stated with such clarity and maturity: "mom, I am going to have this forever, aren't I?"

Sometimes they adjust well, and things get easier and become routine (I would tell my daughter that taking her supplements is like brushing her teeth, just something you do every day to care for yourself), but sometimes children can get tired of the weight of it all. They can get burnt out and daunted, just as any adult can, right at that point when they start to see that their illness is either permanent, not going to go away entirely, or that their recovery will not be as fast as they want it to be.

The diagnosis, itself, can be a traumatic event as can be many events thereafter including hospital stays, emergency room encounters, health scares, poor treatment by insensitive doctors, working through the everyday ins and outs of caring for the health condition, things that happen or are said in schools and social situations – even eating in restaurants can trigger anxiety for children with food sensitivities or allergies, and fights between stressed parents can cause withdrawal and depression in both the parents and the children.

In their book, *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*, authors Peter A. Levine, PhD, and Maggie Klein say that,

"Many "ordinary," everyday happenings that we take for granted as inevitable facts of life can become traumatic, and the younger the child, the less obviously harmful those occurrences need be in order to leave a traumatic impact. A "minor" fall, for example, can become traumatic if the child is not supported in processing it in a healthy way and especially if she is shamed for "over-reacting" or labeled as "too sensitive." An elective medical procedure can also have long-term negative effects if the child is not adequately supported and prepared, and if his reactions are not empathetically received" (Levine and Klein, *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*, Foreword by Gabor Mate).

A diagnosis of a serious chronic health condition is a far cry from a seemingly normal event; therefore, it would not be uncommon for both children and their parents to experience some degree of trauma because of it. Knowing how to recognize when you or your children are showing signs of trauma will enable you to take steps to have that trauma end its cycle.

### **How Children Experience Trauma**

Symptoms of trauma in children and teens range from emotional shut down to regression to anxiety to impulsive behavior to sleep problems, depending upon the age of the child and the child, herself.



Children can also experience trauma due to things that we adults may not perceive as traumatic, so their trauma can sometimes be undervalued or even dismissed, entirely. Parents can also be very stressed, distracted, burnt-out, and/or trying to juggle work, financial difficulties, lack of support, and other children, therefore, can find it difficult to help their child to work through their trauma to its completion. Trauma in children is also not always identified as such, therefore, it is very important to be aware of the signs and symptoms.

The single-most important take-away from Levine and Klein's work on childhood trauma is that people are not supposed to be locked into traumas; children and adults can move through trauma and back into normalcy if that cycle can be completed successfully. Therefore, do not minimize your child's feelings regardless of whether or not you believe they should feel the way that they do or as strongly as they do. Validating their experience is a very important part of the cycle a trauma needs to complete that will bring closure to that event so that they do not have to go through it over and over, again (Levine, *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*, Foreword by Gabor Mate). Understanding how to move your children through repeated traumas will be of utmost value when parenting a child who may experience more opportunity for trauma than children who do not face such added challenges.

### **Parents' Feelings When Children are Diagnosed**

Parents can go through a roller coaster of emotions when their child has a chronic health condition. Trauma is certainly one of them. Feelings of frustration, anger, guilt, pain, sadness, fear, shock, worry, and anxiety also take hold. They can experience profound depression and even experience nervous breakdowns. Depending on how long they have been caregiving and how well they have been coping and taking care of themselves while caregiving for others, parents can feel determined, strong, and more resolved than ever all the way to feeling powerless, worn down, exhausted, hopeless, bitter, and resentful. Parents can feel confused as to what to do and why this is happening, they may blame themselves or others. And they might ask the question: Why me, why my child? And wish that they could carry the load for their children.

I have felt almost each and every one of those things. Yet what I have concluded is that, whatever combination of emotions we parents experience, we must recognize and process our own difficulties in order to help our children.

Handling big health challenges changes the lives of each and every family member, and parents experience some major life changes and need to make decisions based on their new reality. Parents face added financial responsibility and strain, and the constant stress of knowing that their children are not optimally thriving, that they may not be able to live the lives they hoped their children could live. The hopes, dreams and aspirations they have for their children may have to change, as do the things they saw themselves teaching their children or experiencing with them, as well. Our beliefs and attitudes may change, for better or worse, and parents may find that they are no longer compatible or share the same worldview as their communities, extended families, and spouses. Divorce rates are high in such families, and feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression are not uncommon among parents of children with chronic health challenges.

Parents go through a great deal alongside their children and have an even greater role to play that requires even greater strength than that of the children who actually have the condition, at least until those children are grown and fully responsible for their own health. And as we all know, you never stop being a parent even when your children are grown, so this desire to protect and be concerned about our children never goes away. Therefore, the only thing to do is to work through our own traumas and our own experiences with our challenges. And, fortunately, there are many very effective and liberating ways to do this.



## When You and Your Child Collide

Some children can be really horrid when ill. They can lash out, be mean, be uncooperative, retreat, regress, or shut down. Sometimes they have control over their actions, and sometimes, for instance, in the cases of severe brain chemical or hormonal imbalances and infections that cause neurological fallout such as PANDAS, they can be literally out of their right minds.

In addition to the main health challenge, these children may have comorbidities or other troubles that *are caused by* or that *accompany* their main health challenge such as eating disorders, mood dysregulation, body image problems, or Oppositional Defiance Disorder. They can refuse to do things essential to their healing such as eat right, sleep, rest, take supplements, and can be downright self-destructive and sabotage their parents' efforts. They might have tantrums, exhibit defiance, refuse to eat or sleep or turn off their electronics, especially children who have sensory issues.

And even if they don't act out, even the more well-adjusted children get tired sometimes, cry, get despondent or hopeless.

It is extremely difficult at times to cope with these behaviors, to get past the emotions they trigger within us. We can slip into yelling, engaging in fights with older children, engaging in power struggles or wanting to punish them. Some days we don't even *like* the children who seem to be putting us through such hell.

Yet, we have to remember that our children don't always have the capacity to be reasonable and logical at times, whether it be because of their stage of development as children's and teen's brains are not yet mature or that they are chemically imbalanced in some way due to their health challenge. Sometimes empathy is not at the forefront of their minds, they are not in control of their actions or thoughts due to an unconscious program or high stress situation, they are locked in a trauma, or they are simply hurting.

Parents don't always see that. We are taught that ill behavior and strong emotions need to be suppressed, that our children need to be "good," and we don't want to give them license to behave badly or treat other people badly. It is when we *do not* let them have their process in a safe and calm manner that they become locked into stress patterns and trauma, which only serve to exacerbate their struggles.

There seems to be a fine line between letting our children act up and understanding their struggles, limitations, and capabilities. Yet, it is important to let our children feel their emotions, validate them, and then encourage a better coping strategy when the child feel safe, again. This process must be respected, even if it happens at grandma's house or in a public restaurant. It *is* possible to manage through and remove yourselves from the scrutiny of others while being respectful of your child's difficulty.

Actually, this process is much more than important, *it is essential* if we want to ensure that, although they will experience pain in their lives, that they will not become locked in it, will process it effectively, get over it, and then return to their natural state of happiness and ease that we human beings are meant to be in most of the time. We are animals, after all, and our primal biological processes will always trump logic and restraint when we are scared, hurt, frightened, or threatened. We can allow children to move through these processes and respect their right to do so.

It is not up to you as a parent to please everyone around you or make them comfortable or to make a situation perfect for those around you or for your child. These situations can be embarrassing, and you can receive all kinds of criticism from those around you about how you choose to handle it. It can even cause some discontent between you and your child's other parent, but remember that how you handle such situations can profoundly affect your child, not only in that moment, but in a more lasting way, as well. You can choose to shame, silence, and potentially lock in a stress pattern, or you can validate, diffuse, and release the hold that emotion has on your child.

The status of your child's health and their ability to cope can affect their life, in general, by altering or tainting their experiences in social situations such as eating in restaurants, attending social events, potlucks, and school, and making travel difficult or impossible.

Teens with chronic health challenges may rebel, and young children may shut down.

Siblings may be forgotten or be overlooked, and yet experience many of the same effects their parents and siblings experience along with their own set of challenges due to having a sibling with a chronic health challenge. They may feel ignored, unimportant, or resentful, or on the flip-side, overly responsible, or any combination of these emotions and more.

Relationships between your family and your extended family and broader community of friends will and do change as you make adjustments to your own lives (grandma can no longer bake cookies for your child to show her love because your child can no longer eat them, or your child is left out of sport team meals because they always order pizza).

Our busy Western lifestyle does not lend itself to healing or to a slower pace necessary to make taking care of children with chronic conditions easy. In fact, it is the modern conveniences that make this journey harder with packaged foods, lack of downtime, unhealthy lifestyle habits, being the odd one in your community (as we live in a sick society), and our societal belief that children should be busy to be fulfilled. Where is the time to fill supplement sorters, check blood sugars, attend appointments, make healthy meals and get adequate sleep when we live in such a world? In fact, it is becoming more and more clear that it is these practices that actually create most of our illnesses in the first place. It is that epiphany that parents of children with health challenges can have that can alienate them from their communities and families who are still living in ways that are potentially harmful for their own families.

These experiences can be traumatic for the parents, and depending upon how we handle them, can significantly slow progress, traumatize the child, and alter the quality of the whole family's life. Yet, with all of these things that seem to be stacked against us, the purpose of recognizing these challenges is not to throw our hands up and declare, "we're doomed," but to uncover the tools we can use to recover ourselves, our families, and our canary children.

### **Moving Past Our Own Trauma to Help Our Children How Working on You Can Help Your Child**

My dear parents, you have been through a lot. You have held yourself up and kept your children safe. And you are doing the very best you can. And now that we have been honest about the great challenges our families have been facing and will continue to face in the future, it is time to move ahead with the business of recovery.



**First, always start with yourself.** It is important to deal with our own traumas, baggage, defeatism, and fear. All of the obstacles that exist in our minds, thoughts, beliefs, and subconscious patterns hinder us from being present for our children and make us less prepared to guide them through difficult times. This is a process that is never fully complete, but *there is*, however, a level of awareness we can attain that can tell us when our emotionality is taking over and we need to step back and get a handle on ourselves in the moment. Then we can reflect on what caused that emotion or thought to surface in the quiet times when we can be alone and nurturing ourselves. Parents, self-care and self-awareness are pivotal components of not only your own health but that of your children's.

**Languaging** is of utmost importance, and words have massive power: when you talk about your situation, your child's health challenges, or your experiences, be very mindful of the language you use. For instance, when talking about how much work you have to do in regards to your child's care, try to talk less to your support about how much work it is and try to voice the discoveries you are making that is improving your life more. It doesn't mean that your feelings get stuffed, but that you process them faster and re-focus on the good things your life experiences are bringing you. Ask that doctors talk to you in private if they have something to say about your child's condition, and always try to elevate the conversation with things that will help you and your child move forward, not rehash pain and discomfort.

**Observe yourself.** Your tendencies may reveal to you your own negative mindset and how you can improve your own self-talk and belief system, and when you decide to look at life and your experience of that life in a new light during times of challenge, you actually shift your actual experience. Your practice of rephrasing how you want your children to see their own experiences as blessings (or just plain old experiences) as opposed to burdens will actually change the way you *actually do* feel and how they feel, alleviating stress and reducing all of the negative emotions that may have been plaguing you and causing you some of the ill-effects we have previously discussed.

The same goes for **Labeling**. I would encourage parents of children with diagnoses to acknowledge the conditions they are dealing with but actually *avoid labeling their children* at all costs. Let me explain. It is very important to encourage your children to be open about what is affecting their health and not afraid to discuss their health challenges when needed, but it is equally important not to label them. Being a kid who is affected by ADHD-like symptoms is different than having ADHD, and being a kid who has diabetes is not the same as being diabetic or referring to the disease as "my diabetes."

Children have an amazing capacity for recovery, so any time a child owns an illness, their future health is affected, as they may feel limited because of their current condition or they may not even know that the limits generally set for a child with their condition are never their personal destiny. They don't own any disease, and no disease defines them.

Indeed, the challenges that *affect* them need to be acknowledged as part of their existence, part of their life experience, and never be denied, but they are not *who they are*. These children are not bubble kids or non-athletes or autistics. They are people who have their own set of circumstances just like every single other person on this earth, and theirs just so happens to have an affixable label.

Defiance has now been labeled "Oppositional Defiance Disorder," and the ill effects experienced by children who don't get enough outside time in nature has been named "Nature Deficit Disorder." We can coin new labels for every ailment known to affect human beings and beyond, and that may



be helpful to an extent. These labels do give us the language to identify a problem. Heart Disease is Heart Disease with a set of physiological markers that make it a disease with a set of therapies that can aid in healing. But be mindful that some conditions are not so cut and dry, and the criteria for diagnosis are not always consistent and can be highly subjective.

Labeling can be cause for limitations. I just have ADHD so I can't learn, he has autism so it's ok not to expect anything more from him, she has allergies so don't invite her to the birthday party, he has diabetes so he can't go out for the basketball team. Labels can cause beliefs about that child that can limit their lives in every capacity.

Labels can help parents to understand a set of symptoms and give us insight into how to recover or treat that particular challenge – they are indeed a starting point and help us to form a roadmap toward how we can move forward. They can validate our concerns and give us a reason for what we instinctually knew was wrong. But just remember that they are not the end result. Be aware of how you talk about your child's challenges both in front of them with doctors and officials, as well as how you talk about it at home and with them.

**Protect and nurture your seedlings of hope:** when you are newly starting out handling a health challenge or when you feel particularly tired after years of coping with your child's health challenge, it may be a time to protect yourself. Now may not be the time to worry about social faux pas such as skipping extended family dinners that tend to create stress and arguments or taking a break from visiting friends who like to drink a lot or complain about their spouses. Minimizing time spent with critical people, people who are not on the same path as you or who don't share your world view, or people who are just non-believers can be exhausting and deeply impact the healing process.

Avoiding difficult people and situations at times when you need less stress, more space, more encouragement, understanding, and gentle self-care is not a bad thing. In fact, it may be the best thing you can do for your child's health. You have a right to decide what will elevate you and your children and what will not and can choose to be in the company of people who will support you in the ways you need support.

Fill your life with positive people and thoughts, and steep your mind and heart in the messages and encouragement that take you in the direction that you want your family to go. Stop reading the celebrity gossip and turn off the stress-inducing nightly news and listen to podcasts, read books, join positive support groups, research, and attend social events that make you more empowered and inspired. Seek out and surround yourself with other people on the same path or that are a few steps ahead of you. Seek out joy and positivity, if that is your goal. Be open to positive possibilities, and they will reveal themselves to you.

**Have high hopes but set reasonable expectations and celebrate every single success.** What is success, really? Is it a complete cure of your child's condition or is it in the revelation it has given you today about a life situation you couldn't navigate before, is it in a strength that was discovered in you or your child that your challenges have brought about, is it in a deepened family connection or a decision to stop doing something or seeing someone who was not good for you or your child? Is it in just having a good day or a good meal? We have smaller successes every single day, and your entire life is not all about one single goal. Celebrate what is and look forward to what might come.





**Practice gratitude and self-care.** These two things have a profound effect on your mental, emotional, and physical states of health and will allow you to lead your children by example while being able to be there for them standing in your most magnificent power as their parent. And teach your children to be grateful and to practice their own self-care.

**Don't take it personally.** If your child is acting out or if you are confused as to why life just got a lot harder with your once-adoring child, whatever you do, don't take it personally. Your child is dealing with some big issues and is not always in control of their own actions. And you can be their safe place. I don't at all mean that you need to take abuse. You should clearly define your limitations and boundaries, but it is also your job to ride it out with them while doing your best to guide them without judgment, punishment, and emotional reaction. This process will rarely, if ever, be perfect, but *it can* be healthy.

**Plan healing and recovery time for when you will have the best chance at success.**

Whenever possible, when you are making a change to your lifestyle or eating habits or need to attend therapy appointments and the like that will take a lot of time, focus, and attention. Unless you are completely prepared or the change is an emergency, don't do things like remove gluten and dairy when you are just about to go to your parents' house for the holidays. Although many people go cold turkey or make drastic changes with one full swoop, for many others, it is in your best interest to prepare for such changes, as some of them are difficult to make. Sometimes it is more difficult for the children, yet at other times, those changes are harder for the parents who have already lived many years potentially with the same habits and expectations. Since setbacks are inevitable, too many may diminish hope and motivation, therefore, regardless of how that looks for your family, it is important to set yourself up for your best chance at success.

**Be reasonable about responsibility.** Parents, in general, have a great sense of responsibility, and this can be heightened when our children face health challenges. We can sometimes want to take their pain away or shoulder it for them, or we can feel responsible for things that are out of our control, creating guilt or shame and stress. Parents usually understand that they feel overly responsible and that they should not blame themselves, but this knowledge does not always move from their heads into their hearts. We often continue to feel these painful feelings even though we know we should not. What might help is to give more responsibility to our children, as they are able to handle it. Avoid doing everything for your child that they can do for themselves as taking over everything that may be difficult for them will only steal their own sense of empowerment and can potentially make you the enemy when things don't work out or if their task is unpleasant to do. It will also give them less chance to develop their own sense of self and empowerment and resilience. Be kind, giving, and supportive, but do not underestimate your children, and they will be less likely to underestimate themselves.

**Love, and love some more, both yourself and your children.** Love them in their bad times and when they are at their best. I can sometimes look at my daughter when she is being particularly difficult or mean or oppositional and love her so deeply that it makes me smile instead of want to blow with emotion, because in that moment, I saw her fierceness, a fierceness that is part of who she is, a part of her power that I cheer for when I see it arising in the times that will serve her the best. I know it is my job to see that in her and to help her to make good use of it, to help her to be more appropriate in her expression and to use her superpowers for good and not evil. May you see the best in your own children in the times when you could reject them the most, see their expression of power as a strength that can be cultivated for their better good.



**Address your fears of death, loss, and grief.** Loss can be had on a number of levels, and one can lose a great many things, but the things that are feared most in parents of children with chronic conditions are loss of the future, loss of health, loss of possibilities, loss of your hopes and dreams for your child, and loss of life.

A child is not supposed to leave this earth before her mama or papa. And what drives a lot of what we parents do for our children is the desire to prevent that from happening. We are responsible for other people's lives, and although it is a privilege and an honour, it is also a massive responsibility. As does the act of becoming a parent and bringing new life into the world, illness reminds us that life is fragile and there are no guarantees. It reminds us of the depth of the love we have for our children and how painful it would be to be without them.

There is absolutely nothing I can say to take that fear away from parents but can only acknowledge it and honour the parent-child bond. I can only say that you will do the best that you can and those children will only be better for it. Just don't get locked into an existence that is so focused on fearing death that you forget to live.

**Find meaning in health challenges, find meaning in recovery.** We parents will mourn, process, and have every right to do these things when our kids are not well – as we have discussed, it is in going through these processes that we can better move on and not become locked in our emotionality or past experience. And then it can be a time to find meaning in it all. Existential angst is a major stressor in life when we don't know our purpose or when we feel at the mercy of the "bad" things we encounter. But by exploring what you may have learned and what you can draw that is positive from your experience, it simply makes life that much more rich as well as the life of your child. Ask yourself, what has this challenge taught me? What can I do with those lessons? And what can I take from this and teach my children? What will my legacy be?

### **Helping Our Children Through**

"...the adult's first task is to attend to his or her own emotional state as it is in the adult's calm, competent, and reassuring presence that children find the space to resolve their tensions. Who we are being is more important than what we are doing. More accurately, who we are being when facing an upsetting situation will dictate both the form and the impact of what we do" (Levine and Klein, *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*, Foreword by Gabor Mate).

Once this step is made or the process is simply started, then parents can use other methods that will help their children through the rough stuff and beyond into a life of health and happiness.

Listening, storytelling, music, play, and soothing language are techniques that Levine says are most helpful as is preventing trauma by preparation. He asserts that trauma can and should be healed because it is not intended to be relived but to be completed as a natural response to the inevitable challenges in life.

Some more ways you, as a parent, can help your child are to:

Assess what you need (sometimes with the help of a practitioner or your doctor), then reassess whenever necessary. There will always be times when a routine or protocol needs to be adjusted according to your child's needs, so be prepared to make changes when needed.

Know that your child's healing path may not be your own and that there are many ways to recovery that may work better for them. For instance, my children don't enjoy yoga, which is one of my go-to methods, but they enjoy ice-sports as a way to access and care for their physical bodies.

Find a good team of support by way of receptive doctors, caregivers, and practitioners who align with your values and can help you toward your goals.

Find what works, and give it a good trial. Resist the urge to bounce around from therapy to therapy without a proper trial. Do your research before you begin anything, get clear on what you decide to do, then give it the time it will take for you to see improvement. Then if it is not the right therapy or protocol for your child, reassess and adjust.

Be realistic about your goals, but shoot for the stars – be open to the possibilities, but be happy with every little success along the way. Hang on to hope, but let go of expectations. What we start out thinking will be the best outcome, may be, in the end, not what you even want or need. What you may end up getting may be even better.

Trust what you know is right, and follow your instincts.

Stay connected to your children. Make sure to have one on one time with all of your children doing "normal" things. Have fun, play, release your own sense of joy and curiosity.

Don't panic and resist the "I want it to change now" quick fix mentality. It takes time to recover from health challenges, and patience.

Connect with yourself.

Connect with your partner if you have one and if you can.

Focus on reducing stress.

## **General Areas to Pay Attention To**

### **Address and Improve Physical Health**

Employing a Good Healthcare Team

Therapies and Protocols That Improve Physical Health

### **Address and Improve Emotional Health**

Social and Spiritual Wellbeing

Personal Wellbeing

Space for Imperfection

### **Address and Improve Social Health**

Positive Social Support

Cultivating Positive Relationships

Improving Family Bonds and Entering Into What Mary Pipher, PhD, calls "*The Shelter of Each Other.*"

## **Address and Improve Spiritual Health**

Gratitude  
Meditation  
Forgiveness  
Mindfulness Practices  
Purpose  
Motivation  
Prayer, etc.

By addressing all of these areas, you can address your child's health in its entirety for a more complete and deep recovery and sense of health and wellbeing on every level.

## **Don't Forget the Rest of Life**

Caring for a child with chronic conditions can be an all-consuming job. It can be what gets you out of bed in the morning after bad dreams and night sweats, be the thought that you collapse into a restless sleep with at night, and can dictate the happenings of every moment of the day you and your family live in between. If you have more than one child, those children can fall to the periphery. Your job can suffer, your career aspirations may change, you may hold different values than you did before or think differently than you once did. Financial problems can put a strain on you that is so bad that you stop answering the phone or checking your emails. You may move or get a divorce, meet new friends, or become closer to your spouse than you ever imagined. Your own health may suffer, or you may find new reason to take better care of yourself. The energy in a family may shift when one of our own seems to go down, causing us to look much deeper than that child's physical ailments for deeper ways to support their healing.

However, it is absolutely possible to integrate your new normal with a good and robust life full of joy, new experiences, and well, living! Whenever I write or say that parenting a child with chronic health challenges has changed my life, something about that statement is not quite complete. Yes, it has changed my life, most definitely, but what things in life don't change or influence what will come in the future? No, we parents cannot know what is to come: whether our children will have brown eyes or blue eyes, whether they will be artists or lawyers or both, whether they will never have a sniffle or will have some kind of significant struggle with their health. But we can know that life will happen and everything that happens is our story and is one more piece that informs us but does not define our future. We can only become adaptable to what may come, be open to what our experience of parenting can bring for us, do what we can, then let go of the rest.

## **The Tao of Parenthood**

*"Keep in mind the endless nature  
of being, and your journey will  
gain perspective."*

-Vimala McClure,  
*The Tao of Motherhood*

If you look at how far you have to go, then you may want to give up, but as the old cliché goes, if you take it one day at a time, you can enjoy each day of your life with your children as they happen. You will see what is around you when you slow down and let go of the pressure to go fast. The finish line is a mirage in the desert; it is ever changing and never in the same place you thought it was when you started out. And that is completely OK.

**Recommended Reading and Resources:**

Extreme Self-Care for Parents PDF

<https://healthyfamilyformula.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HFF-Curriculum-Extreme-Self-Care-for-Parents.pdf>

Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Self-Care to Your Children PDF

<https://healthyfamilyformula.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HFF-Curriculum-Meeting-the-Challenge-of-Teaching-Self-Care-to-Your-Children.pdf>

The Challenge of Teaching Self-Care to Teens PDF (similar document to the children's document but with slight differences in language)

<https://healthyfamilyformula.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HFF-Curriculum-The-Challenge-of-Teaching-Self-Care-to-Teens.pdf>

**CHS 4 Reference:**

Heather Korbmacher's CHS 4 Interview of Me: Coaching Your Family Into Health

Video [https://s3.amazonaws.com/childrenshealthsummit.com/video4/Korbmacher\\_Heather\\_1.mp4](https://s3.amazonaws.com/childrenshealthsummit.com/video4/Korbmacher_Heather_1.mp4)

Audio [https://s3.amazonaws.com/childrenshealthsummit.com/audio4/Korbmacher\\_Heather\\_1.m4a](https://s3.amazonaws.com/childrenshealthsummit.com/audio4/Korbmacher_Heather_1.m4a)