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**Supporting parents who have children with special needs**

Charene Pillay, *RECE*

Parenting is both rewarding and challenging, and parenting a child with special needs comes with unique challenges. Sometimes support groups can help.

Support groups can involve everything from formally established to informal meetings with other parents, which allow for a range of flexibility. Parents might meet in one another's home or even at a favourite restaurant. The frequency of meetings will depend upon family schedules and preferences. Chatting with other parents in a relaxed environment will provide a sense of comfort and support in an otherwise often hectic life.

Not finding the time to network in person with other parents?

1. Go Online

Online support groups can be beneficial for parents who have less flexibility in their schedules, are required to be at home with their children, or live in more isolated areas. Social networking websites, like Facebook and Twitter, can make it a bit easier to find other parents who can relate to and are involved with the special needs community.

2. Support by Phone

Phone support groups offer the relief of other voices while providing access from the comfort of your own home. This also results in flexibility of time, as participants can prearrange the best time to engage in a conversation over the phone. This can be beneficial as you will know the specific times that are convenient to contact other parents, allowing you to schedule uninterrupted conversations. This could be in the evening after children have gone to sleep or first thing in the morning to help motivate you throughout the day.

Resources for support:

- [Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services](#)
- [Centre for Parent Information and Resources](#)
- [SickKids, About Sick Kids](#)

**Editorial**

*Bernice Cipparrone McLeod, Executive Director, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development*

Sufficient resources, a variety of accessible programs and services along with skilled qualified staff are imperative when supporting children with exceptionalities and their families. High levels of funding accompanied with policies to promote inclusion are also critical. Yet it has been my experience while employed in the sector of children's mental health that these factors are often at the mercy of government. Funding for parent support, staff and services fluctuated with each change in government. Admittedly, each administration believed they were making improvements by addressing what sometimes appeared to be a duplication of services and other inefficiencies, yet their efforts often served to strain the already over taxed array of resources. Repeatedly I hear all too often party leaders espousing the notion that parents have a right to choose. What they neglect to admit is that true choice only occurs when parents are presented with an array of quality options. This is especially critical to parents making every effort to secure the much needed services whether it be an inclusive early childhood program or a specialized program. Choice means publically funded programs and services where parents are not expected to dig deep into their pockets, where they do not need to make unreasonable sacrifices to secure a better future for their children...our future. When you go to the polls this year consider our civic responsibility to protect the rights of children and their families.

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**Charene Pillay, RECE**

Charene has a diploma in Early Childhood Education from George Brown College. Throughout the program Charene has worked with children from ages 2-7 and their families in various settings including full day

kindergarten. Charene is devoted to continuing her education as a full time student in her third year of the Early Childhood Leadership Bachelors of Arts program.

**Bernice Cipparrone McLeod, Executive Director, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development**

Bernice McLeod is the Executive Director of the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the University of Toronto. She is cross-appointed to the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College. She completed her graduate studies at the University of Toronto's Institute of Child Studies with a focus on assessment and counseling. She has been engaged in the field of early learning and care as well as children's mental health with a focus on promoting healthy child development through parent-child relationships, community engagement and capacity building.

Her interest in contributing to creating inclusive accessible communities has been approached through collaboration with researchers, practitioners and policy makers as well as the training and education of early childhood educators.