

## **Assessment of Coping Strategies Adopted by Parents of the Children in Kwara State School for Special Needs**

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### **Abstract**

Parents of children with special needs have to deal with unique challenges that require special strategies to cope with. Therefore, this study assessed coping strategies among parents with children with special needs in Kwara State. Five research objectives were raised and translated to research questions. A stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting a total of 100 respondents from the study area. The instrument used was a questionnaire. Data were analyzed using a mean, standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that parents of special needs children face different challenges associated with parenting, such as financial implication ( $\bar{x}=1.50$ ), accessibility of suitable school ( $\bar{x}=1.63$ ), and securing appropriate educational resources ( $\bar{x}=1.73$ ). Some coping strategies they adopted include learning about the child's special needs from child healthcare providers ( $\bar{x}=2.34$ ), praying and believing in the child ( $\bar{x}=2.69$ ), cooperating with school staff on special need education ( $\bar{x}=2.38$ ). It can be concluded that parents adopt adequate coping strategies that effectively manage their special needs children and greatly influence the academic and social outcomes of their special needs children. It was recommended that the government should provide funding to local community centers to create and maintain support groups for parents of children with special needs.

**Keywords:** Special needs children, Parents, Challenges, Coping strategies, Child outcome.

### **Introduction**

Special needs children are the children who, for some developmental or acquired challenges, cannot benefit from regular school and are provided with special education (Lateef, 2019). These challenges often stem from disabilities, which refer to physical or mental impairments that significantly affect a person's ability to perform daily activities. Such disabilities can limit children's self-help capacity, necessitating tailored educational approaches. Children with special need are categorized into three major classes, viz: visually disabled, hearing disabled and intellectually disabled. These categories of children are to be educated, hence their presence in the school system in to equip them

with skills and knowledge that will enable them to be useful to themselves, their parents and society at large (Umar, 2022).

The school majorly organized for people with special needs is referred to as the school for special needs. Special needs schools play an important role in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for children with disabilities. These institutions are designed to offer specialized instruction and resources tailored to the unique learning needs of each student. The benefits of these schools include enhanced access to individualized education plans, adaptive technologies, and trained professionals who are equipped to address the various needs and wants of their students.

This specialized support helps to mitigate the risks of social exclusion and bullying, often encountered by children with special needs in mainstream settings. For instance, a study by Vyrastekova (2021) found that the social inclusion of students with special educational needs was not affected by the type of school they attended, but rather by the school's inclusive characteristics, suggesting that special schools can provide a nurturing environment that promotes social integration. Furthermore, special needs schools can serve as a safe haven from discrimination by peers, groups, family members, or schoolmates, which not only impacts the morale of the children but also affects their families. Children with developmental disabilities, who might otherwise socially exclude themselves, and those with learning difficulties, who are prone to socio-emotional behavioral disorders, can find a sense of belonging and understanding within the specialized setting of a special needs school (Estogero, 2022).

According to Sharief (2014), as cited in Borah & Bogoi (2021), parents find it quite stressful to accept the disability of their child and if they had a severe impairment, greater dependency and discomfort are felt among parents. Parents face a lot of questions from others and may become socially isolated in different groups they belong. These parents tend to suffer from higher levels of stress and lower levels of well-being than parents of children without developmental concerns. Society's attitudes and beliefs towards disability may also intensify the level of stress in parents (Neely-Barnes & Dia, 2008).

To manage the challenges they face, parents may actively seek information about their child's special needs and available resources to better understand how to support their child. They may also focus on the positive aspects of their child's abilities and strengths, rather than dwelling on the

challenges and limitations (Whittingham et al., 2009). Parents cope by getting assistance from institutions and professionals working with special needs children. They pray and put their faith in God that their child will recover over the years (Borah & Bogoi, 2021). Study by Chang et al. (2019) concluded that parents use coping strategies such as advocating for their child's rights and needs, seeking educational resources and support, and using technology to manage their child's behavior and communication. According to Ravn and Smith, (2018), parents' coping strategies can have a significant impact on their children with special needs. When parents exhibit effective coping strategies, children with special needs benefit and experience fewer behavioral problems. Conversely, when parents exhibit ineffective coping strategies, children with special needs experience multiple behavioral problems, including aggression and depression (Demšar & Bakracevic, 2021).

Parents of special needs children often have a more stressful life than parents of children with normal development. They go through a variety of stressors resulting from their child's disability. It is observed that parents having children with special needs are affected in many ways which may persist throughout their life (Borah & Gogoi, 2021). Parenting a child with special needs can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience. Parents of these children face unique challenges that require specific strategies to manage (Cheng & Lai, 2023). Despite the growing awareness of special needs education and the availability of resources to support parents, little is known about the coping strategies that parents use to manage their children's special needs in schools. It is in the light of this that the study examined the coping strategies adopted by parents in dealing with their children's special

needs, evaluated the effectiveness of the coping strategies used by parents, and determined the influence of parents' coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs.

### Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to assess the coping strategies adopted by parents in dealing with children in Kwara state school for special needs. Specifically, the study:

1. examined the challenges faced by parents in coping with their children with special needs.
2. identified the coping strategies adopted by parents in dealing with children with special needs in Kwara state;
3. evaluated the effectiveness of the coping strategies used by parents in managing their special needs children;
4. assessed the perceived influence of parents' coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs;
5. determined parents' satisfaction with the level of support received from school staff and the community in coping with their children's special needs

### Methodology

**Research Design:** The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey research design. This is an approach concerned with seeking relationship between two or more variables as they existed. Survey method of research is concerned with generalized statistics resulting when data are obtained from part of a large number of populations and used to generalize (Wiśniowski et al., 2020).

**Study Population:** The population for the study comprised 471 parents of children in Kwara State school for special needs. The school has three units; hearing unit with 369

students, intellectual unit 63 students and visual unit with 39 students.

**Study Sample:** In this study, stratified random sampling was employed to ensure that each subgroup within the population was adequately represented in the sample. The population was first divided into three strata corresponding to the units within the school; the hearing the intellectual, and the visual units. A proportionate sampling technique was then used to determine the number of respondents to be selected from each stratum based on their relative sizes. This approach allowed for the selection of a representative sample that reflects the diversity of the entire population. Random sampling was subsequently conducted within each stratum to select the final respondents, resulting in a total sample size of 100 students-parents pair.

**Instruments for data collection:** The data for this study were collected from primary source with the use of structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. Section A contains demographic information of the respondents such as age, religion, education level, type of child need, and gender. Section B elicited data on the challenges faced by parents of children in special needs schools. The items rated on a "4 -point scale ranging from (3 = Severe challenge SC; 2 = Mild challenge MC; 1= challenge C and 0=Not a challenge NC. Section C contained information on the coping strategies adopted by parents of children in school for special needs. The responses of each item were rated on a "4-point scale ranging from 3= Always; 2 = occasionally 1=rarely; 0 = never. Section D obtained data on the effectiveness of coping strategies adopted by the respondents. The items were rated on a "4-point scale ranging from 3 = Very effective; 2 =sometimes effective; 1= rarely effective; 0= not effective. Section E elicited data on the influence of parents coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children.

Each item was rated on a “4-point scale ranging from 3 = to a large extent; 2 = to some extent; 1= to a lesser extent; 0= not at all. Section F Find out the level of support received by parents from staff and community and was measured by subjecting the respondent to a list of Support that may be available. Responses of each item was rated on a “4-point scale ranging from (3 = Extremely satisfied; 2 = Very Satisfied; 1=Satisfied; 0= Not satisfied.

**Validity of Research Instrument:** To ensure that the instrument gets relevant information required, it was subjected to face validity. The face validation measured the appropriateness of the items by mere looking at the appearance whether it measure what it sets out to measure for instance, appropriateness of language, relevance of suitability of the items and extent of coverage. The instrument was validated by three experts in department of Home Economics, University of Ilorin.

**Reliability of the instrument:** To ensure the reliability of the instrument a trial testing was conducted. Twenty (20) questionnaires were distributed to parent of children with disabilities in another school outside the local government where the research was conducted. The questionnaires were subjected to Cronbach alpha statistics and an acceptable reliability coefficient of 0.796 was obtained.

**Method of Data Collection:** The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher with the help of two (2) trained research assistants. The research assistants were trained on the rudiments of questionnaire administration, distribution and collection by the researcher. Completed copies of the questionnaire were collected and checked in order to ensure their completeness by the participants. The questionnaire was administered to the parents during Parent Teachers Association meeting. This thorough process resulted in a return rate of 100% (100 copies of questionnaire), indicating a very

strong engagement from the participants and providing a robust basis for data analysis.

**Data and statistical analysis:** Data collected were analysed with the descriptive statistics such as, frequencies, percentages, mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (SD). The mean of 1.5 was the benchmark. All items with a mean score  $\geq 1.5$  were accepted and items  $< 1.5$  were not accepted.

## Results

### Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The results of the socio demographic characteristics reveals that 39.0% of the respondents were within the age range 20 and 30 years, fewer proportion 33.0% were in the range of 31 and 40 years, 28% were within the range of 40 and above. Many (66.0%) of the respondents were females while less than half 34.0% were males. Data also reveals that 60.0% of the respondents were Muslims, 40.0% were Christian. Some (46.0%) of the respondents were HND/B.Sc. holders, 21.0% were OND/NCE holders, 19.0% were Secondary School leavers and 14.0% were M.Sc./PhD holders. The result also reveals that 53.0% of the parents had children with hearing needs, 27.0% have intellectual needs and 20.0% had visual needs.

### Challenges faced by parents in coping with their children with special needs

Table 1 presents the challenges faced by parents of children with special needs. From the table, the respondents agreed to all the items as challenges they faced as parents of children with special Needs. This means that all the listed statements had mean responses that were higher than the mid-mean score of 1.50. The challenges faced by parents include Balancing my child's needs with my other responsibilities and obligations is a constant struggle ( $\bar{x}=1.79$ ) the high cost of educating

children with special needs ( $\bar{x}$ =1.50), difficulty finding an accessible and suitable school placement for special needs children ( $\bar{x}$ =1.63), and difficulty securing appropriate educational resources and accommodations for special needs children ( $\bar{x}$ =1.78).

**Table 1: The challenges faced by parents of children with special needs**

Challenges	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
High cost of educating children with special needs.	1.50	0.66	Agreed
Difficulty finding an accessible and suitable school placement for special needs children.	1.63	0.66	Agreed
Difficulty securing appropriate educational resources and accommodations for special needs children,	1.78	0.71	Agreed
Securing appropriate educational resources and accommodations for my child with special needs poses significant challenges	1.73	0.76	Agreed
Transitioning my child to a new school or educational program presents notable difficulties	1.69	0.74	Agreed
Advocating for my child's needs within the school system is often challenging	1.55	0.67	Agreed
Balancing my child's needs with my other responsibilities and obligations is a constant struggle	1.79	0.71	Agreed
The emotional impact of my child's special needs significantly affects our family life.	1.62	0.70	Agreed
Feelings of isolation or social stigma associated with having a child with special needs are tangible and impactful	1.54	0.66	Agreed

Field Survey, 2023

**Coping Strategies adopted by Parents with Special Needs Children**

Table 2 below presents coping strategies adopted by parents in dealing with their children's special needs From the table below, the strategies employed by parents including

learning about their child’s special need from child healthcare providers ( $\bar{x}$ =2.34), seeking financial support from friends and relatives ( $\bar{x}$ =1.79), prayer ( $\bar{x}$ =2.69), working with school staff on special needs education ( $\bar{x}$ =2.38).

**Table 2: The coping strategies adopted by parents in dealing with their children's special needs**

Coping strategies	Mean	Std Dev	Remarks
I learn about child's special need from child healthcare providers.	2.34	0.77	Agreed
I seek help from family and share responsibilities in the house with family	2.21	0.92	Agreed
I seek financial support from friends, families and support groups	1.79	0.98	Agreed
I pray and have faith in my child	2.69	0.58	Agreed
I work with school staff on special needs education	2.38	0.90	Agreed
I engage in self-care activities such as exercise, relaxation techniques, or hobbies to deal with my emotions	2.29	0.84	Agreed
I use alcohol and drug to cope with the situation	0.74	1.09	Disagreed

Field Survey, 2023



**Effectiveness of the Coping Strategies adopted by parents**

Table 3 presents data on the effectiveness of the coping strategies used by parents in managing their children's special needs. From the table, the respondents agreed that all the items being effective strategies adopted by

parents in coping with their special needs children (means > 1.5). The table revealed that prayer ( $\bar{x} = 1.66$ ), communication with child's healthcare provider ( $\bar{x} = 1.74$ ), self-care activities ( $\bar{x} = 1.74$ ) and support from family members ( $\bar{x} = 1.56$ ) were effective strategies.

**Table 3: Effectiveness of the coping strategies used by parents in managing their children's special needs**

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
How effective is communicating with your child's healthcare providers about coping strategies and techniques for managing their special needs?	1.74	0.49	Agreed
How effective was prayer?	1.66	0.54	Agreed
Were self-care activities like exercise effective in coping with your child?	1.74	0.49	Agreed
Was working with the school staff on special need education effective?	1.52	0.63	Agreed
How effective is seeking support from family, friends, or other caregivers when managing your child's special needs?	1.56	0.57	Agreed
How effective is the level of support you receive when managing your child's special needs?	1.57	0.59	Agreed

Field Survey, 2023

**Perceived influence of the coping strategies on academic and social outcomes of children with special needs**

Table 4 presents the perceived influence of parents coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs. From the table, the respondents agreed to all the items on how they perceived the influence of coping strategies they adopted on

the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs (means >1.50). The respondents perceived that the strategies improved their children academic performance ( $\bar{x} = 1.78$ ), communication has helped their children make new friends ( $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ) and that the support from the family members enabled their children concentrate more in school ( $\bar{x} = 1.52$ ).

**Table 4: Perceived influence of parents' coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs**

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
The strategies I adopt have improved the academic performance of my child	1.78	0.46	Agreed
Communicating with my child has helped him/her in making new friends	1.73	0.47	Agreed
The support from the family members has enabled my child concentrate in school	1.52	0.64	Agreed
Self-care activities like exercise has made my child play with other children	1.60	0.57	Agreed
Monitoring from the school staff has improved my child's quality of life	1.76	0.45	Agreed
The coping strategies I employed make my child more independent and resilient	1.57	0.59	Agreed
Communicating with child's health care providers is helpful in improving my child's outcomes	1.72	0.51	Agreed

Field Survey, 2023

**Parents' satisfaction with the level of support received from school staff and the community**

Table 5 presents parents' satisfaction with the level of support received from school staff and the community in coping with their children's special needs. The respondents were satisfied with the special resources and services like

learning aids used by staff to support the children, the level at which staffs refer you to appropriate state advocacy organization ( $\bar{x} = 1.63$ ) and other training programs that focus on special need children ( $\bar{x} = 1.53$ ) They were dissatisfied with the financial and emotional support received from people in the community ( $\bar{x} = 0.83$ )

**Table 5: Perceived level of support received by parents from school staff and the community**

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
How satisfied are you with the staff support in special need child education?	1.52	0.57	Satisfied
How satisfied are you with the special resources and services used by staff to support your child e.g. learning aids?	1.63	0.62	Satisfied
How satisfied are you with school guardians of your special need child?	1.53	0.54	Satisfied
Are you satisfied with the level at which staffs refer you to appropriate state advocacy organization and other training programs that focus on special need children?	1.58	0.63	Satisfied
How do you feel when you seek advice from other Special need parent in the community?	1.57	0.67	Satisfied
Are you satisfied with the financial and emotional support received from people in the community?	0.98	0.71	Dissatisfied
Are you satisfied with level at which community advocate for child with special needs	0.98	0.72	Dissatisfied

Field Survey, 2023

### **Discussion of findings**

Findings from research revealed parents of children with special needs face various challenges in caring for their children. These challenges include high cost of educating children with special needs. Difficulty in finding an accessible and suitable school placement for special needs children. This is supported with findings of Leyser and Kirk (2004) which emphasized the importance of appropriate educational placements for students with special needs, as they can significantly impact their academic and social development. Inappropriate placements can lead to a mismatch between the child's needs and the educational services provided, hindering their progress and well-being. Difficulty in securing appropriate educational resources and accommodations for children with special needs can be a daunting task for parents. Soodak and Erwin (2000) noted that parents often face challenges in obtaining necessary services and accommodations for their children due to limited resources, lack of awareness, or bureaucratic obstacles within the educational system.

Transitioning a child with special needs to a new school or educational program can also present notable difficulties, as mentioned in the findings. Proper planning and support from both the sending and receiving schools are crucial to ensure a smooth transition process. The implications of these challenges can impact the child's overall development, academic achievement, and quality of life. Failure to address these challenges can lead to increased stress and burden on families, potentially affecting their ability to provide adequate care and support for their children.

Study of Borah and Gogoi (2021) revealed that parents having a child with special needs often experience a stressful life than those having a normally developing child. They go through a variety of stressors resulting from

their child's disability. They experience a higher level of stress in bringing up their child as they require more parental support and attention as compared to normally developing children. It is observed that parents having children with special needs are affected in many ways which may persist throughout their life. Raising a child with special needs can be expensive, and parents may face financial strain due to medical bills, therapy costs, and equipment expenses

In coping with these challenges, the findings of this study showed that parents sought help from child healthcare providers, and financial support from friends, families and support groups. They also pray and believe in the capacities of the children. They also engage in self-care activities such as seeking emotional support from groups, practicing relaxation, compassion and mindfulness techniques, engaging in physical activities, maintaining healthy diet among others. These claims are also supported with the studies of Dykens et al., (2014); Benn et al., (2012); Hartley et al., (2010); Whittingham et al., (2009), which posited that Activities such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, yoga, or progressive muscle relaxation can help reduce stress, improve focus, and promote a sense of calm; Joining support groups, either in-person or online, can provide a sense of community, understanding, and shared experiences with other parents going through similar situations; Regular exercise, such as walking, running, swimming, or joining a fitness class, can be an effective way to manage stress and improve overall physical and mental health; Being kind and understanding towards oneself, acknowledging the challenges faced, and celebrating small victories can help parents maintain a positive outlook and prevent burnout Fortunately, they do not use alcohol and drugs to suppress their emotions. These findings have agreed



with the study of Borah and Gogoi (2021) which posited that parents cope by getting assistance from institutions and professionals working with special needs children. They pray and have faith in God that their child will recover over the years. Also, they enhance their coping strategy through relaxation techniques such as yoga meditation.

The finding of this study further showed that the parents believe their strategies were effective in managing their special needs children. The most effective strategies were communicating with the healthcare professionals, training the child in self-care activities, and engaging in prayers. Other strategies that showed effectiveness include seeking help from family and sharing responsibilities in the house with family, seeking financial support from friends, families and support groups and working with school staff on special needs education. Communicating with healthcare professionals is crucial for parents as it enables them to better understand their child's condition, access necessary resources, and develop appropriate care plans.

Pelentsov et al. (2015) noted that promoting self-care skills can foster independence and autonomy in children with special needs, positively impacting their self-esteem and overall well-being. Additionally, equipping children with self-care abilities can alleviate some of the caregiving burdens on parents.

Engaging in prayers, as mentioned in the finding, is supported by research on the importance of spiritual and religious beliefs in managing stress and adversity. Tarakeshwar and Pargament (2001) found that religious coping can provide parents with a sense of meaning, comfort, and emotional support, which can be beneficial in dealing with the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

The finding also highlights the effectiveness of seeking help from family members, sharing household responsibilities, and seeking financial support from friends, families, and support groups. These strategies align with the concept of social support, which has been consistently identified as a crucial coping resource for parents of children with special needs (Ekas et al., 2010). Social support can provide emotional, instrumental, and informational assistance, buffering the negative impacts of stress and improving overall well-being.

The findings revealed that the strategies adopted by parents in managing their children behavior are very effective. It agrees with the study of (Al-Kandari et al., 2017) and (Alnemary et al., 2017) which stated that coping strategies are crucial for parents of children with autism because of the challenging behavioural problems that the disorder presents and it can have a significant impact on the quality of life for the parent as well as the child. Coping strategies can turn what was originally a very difficult process, which is the child-rearing process, into an enjoyable experience for all the family.

The findings further revealed the perceived influence of parents coping strategies on the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs. Effective communication with the child can foster positive social interactions and friendships. Open and patient communication can help children with special needs develop social skills, express their needs, and form meaningful connections with peers. Implementing appropriate strategies can improve academic performance and promote independence. Tailored educational approaches, such as individualized instruction, assistive technologies, and positive reinforcement, can enhance learning outcomes and foster self-reliance in children

with special needs. Engaging in self-care activities can positively impact a child's social interactions and play. When parents prioritize their own well-being through self-care practices, they may have more patience, energy, and emotional resources to support their child's social development and encourage interaction with peers. Collaboration with school staff can improve the child's overall quality of life. This is also supported with the study of Zeitlin and Curcic (2014) which posited that effective communication and cooperation between parents and school professionals can ensure that the child's needs are adequately addressed, leading to better educational and developmental outcomes.

Effective communication and engagement between parents and their children can foster stronger relationships, enhance social skills, and create a supportive environment for learning and personal growth. Training the children in self-care activities was also found to make the children more independent and resilient and have enabled them to play with other children. This finding is consistent with the benefits of promoting self-care skills in children with special needs. Pelentsov et al. (2015) highlighted that developing self-care abilities can foster independence, autonomy, and overall well-being, which can positively impact the child's social interactions and participation in various activities. These findings imply that by adopting effective coping strategies, such as open communication, promoting self-care skills, and collaborating with educational professionals, parents can positively influence the academic and social outcomes of their children with special needs. These strategies not only help manage the challenges faced by families but also contribute to the overall development and well-being of the children. Epstein (2019) corroborated this observation

and said that since parents know the capabilities of their children, they, therefore, attend activities primarily to assist their kids physically and provide proper care.

Furthermore, findings from research also revealed that the parents of special needs children were satisfied with the level of support received from school staff and the community. These include the support received from the staff, the availability of special resources for training the children, the level of advocacy, and other training programs within the state. They also benefit from the advice from other parents of children with similar disability. The respondents' satisfaction with state advocacy organizations and training programs focused on special needs children suggests the availability of valuable resources and support systems within the community. Some states or communities offer training programs specifically designed for parents of children with special needs. These programs can help parents develop skills and strategies for managing their child's specific condition, fostering their development, and advocating for their rights (Hume et al., 2021). Seeking and obtaining advice from other parents with similar challenges highlights the importance of a collaborative and supportive ecosystem involving educational institutions, community organizations, and peer networks for families of children with special needs. It also underscores the need for continued investment and improvement in these support systems to ensure that families receive the necessary resources, guidance, and encouragement throughout their caregiving journey.

### **Conclusion**

Parents of children with special needs in Kwara state face numerous challenges, including emotional stress, financial strain,

and increased demands for parental support and attention. These challenges can persist throughout their lives, making it crucial for parents to develop effective coping strategies. The coping strategies adopted by parents in this study include seeking help from healthcare providers, financial support from friends and families, engaging in support groups, relying on faith and prayer, and practicing self-care activities. These strategies have proven to be effective in managing their children's behavior and needs, aligning with previous research highlighting the importance of adopting adequate coping strategies for parents of children with special needs. These strategies positively influenced the academic and social outcomes of their children. By providing extra attention, time, and care, parents play a vital role in their children's education and overall development. This finding emphasizes the significance of parental involvement and the effectiveness of coping strategies in enhancing the well-being and progress of children with special needs. Furthermore, the study revealed that parents are generally satisfied with the level of support received from staff, the special resources and services utilized by the school, and the advice and guidance provided by other parents of children with similar disabilities. This satisfaction with available support systems and resources is crucial for helping parents cope effectively and providing the best possible care and assistance for their children.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. The government should provide funding to local community centers to create and maintain support groups for parents of children with special needs.

2. The government should create a tax credit or other financial incentive for families with children with special needs.
3. Parents should advocate for the needs of children with special needs.

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