



# THE EXCEPTIONAL EXPRESS

Fall 2025 Newsletter



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## SUCCESS SUPPORT

- Unseen, Not Unheard:

Advocating for Your Child's Invisible Disabilities

Featuring helpful tips, inspired by an article by Teacher Plus Magazine

- Disability & Identity:

Helping Children Build Self-Esteem and Pride

Three powerful examples to help parents support their child's identity in positive, meaningful ways.

### Awareness Article: Sensory-Friendly Fun: Events & Activity Ideas

- 3 ways to have low-budget and sensory-friendly fun with the whole family!



Florida Diagnostic & Learning  
— RESOURCES SYSTEM —

## This issue:

Using Assistive  
Technology to Support  
Your Child's Homelife

Exceptional  
Encouragement

Resource Highlight

## AT-HOME TIPS:

Feeding Without  
Pressure: Mealtime  
Strategies That Work  
for Sensory Needs

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# Using Assistive Technology to Support Your Child's Homelife

Smart speakers like Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Nest/Home (Google Assistant), and Apple HomePod (Siri) can be a powerful tool for children with disabilities and their families, not just for convenience, but for communication support, structure, learning, and independence.



## Function Ideas:

- Encourages articulation and pacing in speech while trying to be understood by the device.
- Set reminders for brushing teeth, taking medication, feeding pets, etc.
- Use custom routines: One command (e.g. "Good morning") triggers a series of actions: lights on, weather report, to-do list read aloud.
- Play calming sounds/music on command for de-escalation (e.g., rain, ocean, white noise).
- Listen to audiobooks or podcasts for kids who struggle with reading fluency.
- Timers & alarms: Useful for homework, screen time limits, or transition warnings.

## Exceptional Encouragement

### The Invisible Work You Do Is Powerful-

Much of what you do may not be seen or praised. This is especially true in the world of special needs parenting. It's not just therapies and appointments; it's reading between the lines of behavior, staying up late researching, and celebrating victories that others might overlook. That quiet, invisible work is powerful, and it's shaping the world your child lives in. Don't underestimate it.

## Resource Highlight

### The Autism Dad Podcast

A heartfelt and no-nonsense resource by a dad raising three autistic sons.

Rob shares real-life experiences, including his family struggles and triumphs, such as navigating IEPs, meltdowns, sensory challenges, burnout, and self-care.

Weekly episodes feature expert interviews covering topics like telehealth autism evaluations, neuroinflammation, financial planning, grief, and comorbid diagnoses, alongside his personal reflections.

The site includes blogs and tools on special-needs parenting, sensory issues, caregiver burnout, transitions, and technology tools.

The blog has been featured by ABC, CNN, BBC, and is a go-to for realistic, supportive guidance.

<https://www.theautismdad.com/>



# Success Support

Invisible disabilities are medical or neurological conditions that aren't immediately noticeable to others but can significantly affect a person's ability to function day-to-day. These conditions may involve chronic pain, fatigue, cognitive challenges, mental health disorders, or sensory issues such as impaired hearing or vision. Despite being unseen, they can greatly influence a person's quality of life and ability to engage in everyday activities.

Here are a few tips for advocating for your child's invisible disability:

Birwatkar, P. (n.d.). Silent struggles: Invisible disabilities in educational spaces. Teacher Plus.  
<https://teacherplus.org/2024/2024/august-2024/silent-struggles-invisible-disabilities-in-educational-spaces/>

## UNSEEN, NOT UNHEARD: ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD'S INVISIBLE DISABILITIES



### Find Your Support Network:

You're not alone. Connect with other parents, support groups, or advocacy organizations in your area. They can offer encouragement, share experiences, and help you navigate complex systems.

### Understand the Diagnosis:

The first step is being informed. Learn as much as you can about your child's condition, how it affects their daily life, and what strategies or accommodations can help. This knowledge helps you speak confidently and clearly when working with schools, doctors, or support teams.

### Communicate Proactively:

Build a strong relationship with your child's teachers, counselors, and specialists. Share insights about what helps your child succeed and keep an open line of communication. Don't wait for problems to escalate—early collaboration often leads to better outcomes.

### Request an Evaluation

If your child is struggling in school due to their condition, they may qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan. These legal documents ensure your child receives accommodations such as extra time on tests, sensory breaks, or modified assignments.

## DISABILITY & IDENTITY: HELPING CHILDREN BUILD SELF-ESTEEM AND PRIDE

### Use Positive Language

- Why it matters: The words we use shape how children see themselves. Using identity-affirming or person-first language (based on what the child prefers) helps build pride and confidence.
- Example: Instead of saying "suffers from autism," say "is autistic" or "has autism," depending on the child's and community's preferences. Model respect by celebrating differences, not minimizing them.

### Help Children Own Their Story

- Why it matters: Children benefit from knowing the truth about their diagnosis in a developmentally appropriate way. It helps them self-advocate and feel in control.
- Example: For a child with ADHD, a parent might say: "Your brain loves to explore lots of things at once. That's part of having ADHD. It's why you're super creative, and why we use tools like timers to help with focus."

### Celebrate Strengths Alongside Challenges

- Why it matters: Focusing only on what's "hard" can leave kids feeling defeated. Balancing honesty about challenges with recognition of strengths builds resilience.
- Example: If a child struggles with reading but excels at building with Legos, affirm both: "Reading takes work, and we're proud of how you're sticking with it. Your engineering mind is incredible!"





# AT-HOME TIPS:

## Create a “Yes Plate”

A “Yes Plate” includes 2–3 foods your child reliably eats and feels safe with. Optional- add 1 “learning food” (a new or less preferred item), placed nearby but not required to be eaten.

Example: For a child who loves crackers and strawberries, you might also place a tiny portion of mashed sweet potato in a separate section or small dish nearby.

This keeps the plate predictable and safe, while slowly introducing variety.

## Use Choice

- Give your child a say in what and how they eat. This builds autonomy and reduces anxiety.
- Offer two food options: “Would you like apple slices or banana wheels?”
- Involve them in preparation: washing veggies, setting the table, or choosing a plate.
- Avoid asking “Do you want broccoli?”—which invites a no. Instead, give two options with the same goal.

## Use Control

- Use Routine, Not Rigid Rules
- Serve meals at roughly the same time each day so hunger cues align.
- Let kids know what to expect (e.g., “We’re having chicken and rice tonight. I’ll also have carrots in case you’d like some.”)
- Create visual menus or meal schedules if predictability helps.

## Awareness Article: Sensory-Friendly Fun: Events & Activity Ideas

### Museums Featuring “Sensory Hours”:

Children’s museums, science centers, and aquariums often host low-sensory hours with fewer visitors, dimmed lights, and quiet zones. Check local listings or call ahead to ask.

### Staycations with a Twist:

Transform your home into a sensory haven for a weekend! Create a pillow fort, set up a mini sensory bin station, or turn the bathroom into a “spa room” with bubble lights and lavender-scented water play.

### Utilize Your Local Library:

Many local libraries embrace sensory-friendly story times with smaller groups, movement breaks, and sensory-friendly materials like felt boards or fidget toys.