



Barriers and Facilitators to Motherhood with a Disability

The Disabled Parenting Project (DPP) hosted two Mother's Day Twitter Chats. In 2016, 152 people participated and there were 900 tweets. In 2017, 83 people participated and there were 377 tweets. Each Twitter Chat lasted an hour and revealed many key themes. Among the important discussions was a dialogue about barriers and facilitators to motherhood with a disability. The following are the key themes and example quotes.

Bias and Stigma

Several participants have encountered pervasive bias, stigma, and speculation concerning their parenting capabilities, from medical professionals, schools, family, and strangers. Many noted these negative experiences as a significant barrier to motherhood.

- *"Mothers with disabilities face societal stigma and sometimes isolation from peers (other disabled moms)."*
- *"I think there's a lack of understanding from others. People assume we need/want help, and that can get pretty intrusive."*
- *"Attitudes are [the] biggest barrier. Assumptions that disability means inability [to be] a mother or effectively care [for]/raise kids."*
- *"The biggest challenge remains society's barriers-many of which are attitudes. Self-doubt is sometimes a barrier too."*
- *"A four letter word for fear is bias. MUST end antiquated views about disability."*
- *"Opinions of [able-bodied] folks including medical and social service providers, but also those closest to us."*
- *"I think it's the criticism of people that are able bodied."*

Services and Supports

Services and supports are both barriers and facilitators to motherhood, depending on the availability. Many noted the need for more services and supports.

- *"Finding in-home support, fear of losing children because of negative assumptions, financial security + more."*
- *"Any service that can listen to what the mother thinks she needs rather than dictating her needs for her. Hard to find."*
- *"My biggest challenge has always been transportation since I am a non-driver."*
- *"Finding a support network, adaptive equipment, sensitive medical personnel."*
- *"The universal design of SO much technology helps [with] the option to outsource services- even online grocery shopping."*
- *"Ignorance and availability of services and supports to meet our unique needs."*
- *"I think the biggest challenge facing moms with disabilities is a lack of readily available resources to assist and support."*
- *"It depends on your disability. As a blind mom I get support and in home training from the NY commission for the blind"*
- *"Having a post-delivery nurse who 'got me' was [important]. I actually asked to have the same nurse with my 2nd [caesarian section] as my 1st."*

Peer Support and Information

Many of the participants found peer support and access to information on parenting with a disability a facilitator to motherhood. Others noted that lack of peer support and information was a barrier.

- *"The low expectations of society and lack of strong [role] models w/ disabilities who can serve as mentors."*

- *"We have a listserv [for] parents @ nfbnet.org; just launched blindparents.org [with a] mentoring program available."*
- *"I have a tight knit mom crew that I talk to daily. I also talk to trusted teachers who are able to think outside the box."*
- *"Fortunately now there are online resources/disabled parents groups [because] when my daughter was younger [it] was hard to find any."*
- *"I go to other members of the disabled community who are supportive-some moms [are,] some not."*
- *"I go to <http://disabledparenting.com> for all resources disability & parenting"*
- *"Support groups of other disabled mothers for relatability, swapping tips/resources/best practices/sharing frustrations!"*
- *"Peer support is crucial. Disabled moms need access to same supports and connections nondisabled moms have!"*
- *"My biggest support has been from other moms with dwarfism. Peer support/mentoring is critical."*
- *"I found few bloggers, but mostly I felt like I was writing my own rules."*
- *"Other [people with disabilities] moms on the internet and in real life, general internet searches, but mostly I've figured out things on my own."*

Informal Supports

Some participants described informal supports, such as family, friends, and partners, as facilitators to motherhood.

- *"I had a great playgroup. A strong village is key. My mom who always said I could do it all."*

- *"I also recruit family and friends to give my daughter experiences she's wanted that aren't accessible to me (ice skating)."*
- *"Natural supports often come from an integrated, inclusive community. These help all families."*
- *"Honestly, a supportive parenting partner. Having someone who knows my needs and helps support me."*

Adaptive Equipment

Several of the participants described adaptive equipment as a facilitator to motherhood.

- *"My wheelchair, ironically. My power chair is crucial [to] facilitating my ability [2] care for 2 young children."*
- *"I find it helpful to keep up with mainstream parenting gadgets and programs to see how we can make them fit."*