

Angels in Special Needs Parenting

By **Melanie K MILICEVIC, BA**

HERE IS HOW ONE MOM DESCRIBES SPECIAL NEEDS PARENTING, ENCOURAGING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS WHO UNDERSTAND.

We all need a circle to be part of in the world. If we feel tethered to something, we thrive.

When we are young, our core family and family of birth is our beginning and our end. If you came from a two-parent home and have siblings, you

had a system built to uphold you. It's a tremendous gift to have this support, and most of the time, we are unaware of how precious it is to be loved and supported. I tell both of my kids this often. "You are loved and supported by both of your parents in your home. You have everything."



As we age, life throws obstacles at us, we encounter trauma much more frequently, and we grow up and leave our homes, starting lives of our own. We attempt at adulting, and sometimes we fail. Resilience is learned. We grow emotionally as we age.

We leave our families behind at some point and grow in different directions. We form new families and communities with people we bond with. It's not always realistic to think we will be close with blood relatives forever. This is a reality for many of us, and though it is hard to accept, it is the truth.

There is a Serbian saying which translates to, "When you are under the same roof, all can be contained. Once you leave your siblings and you each have a roof of your own, things will forever be changed."

As a mother, I have experienced these changes myself. Life isn't always what we expect, but we must somehow remain flexible and open.

We must also accept that everyone has a different journey, and sometimes, the people who can't love you in the way you desire are caught up in their own storms. We must have empathy and forgiveness in our hearts for them. Life can be difficult, and we can't always see someone's internal struggles.

This is why authentic friendships are such a gift. When you have people who would bend over backward for you, love you at your worst, and have an understanding of your special needs life, it truly is a blessing.

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I believe in angels, and as a person of the Eastern Orthodox faith, I like to call these chance meetings or friends my angels.

Special needs parenting can be an arduous journey. It's especially turbulent at the beginning when you are learning all about your child's needs. You are trying to solve a puzzle medically, neurologically, and emotionally. Who is my child? What am I getting right? Where can I improve?

Parents of special needs children want nothing more than to understand their children and to help them overcome any suffering. When our kids cry, it brings about the worst pain within.

I had a very difficult time listening to my son's screams, and when he cried as a baby, I did everything possible to make it stop. I could not tolerate his discomfort or pain. What that says about me is another story, but in those early years, he really did have physical and emotional struggles I could not understand.

It took years of work to try and make sense of it. Most people around me could not relate to my agony, but occasionally, I encountered an angel, and they looked at me and saw inside.

As my son has aged and become a more communicative and [independent](#) being, I now understand him. I understand how he moves, what he needs, and what triggers him. I know his likes, dislikes, and what is outright totally uncomfortable.

That is such a gift for both of us. He is now beginning to comprehend his own needs, which tells me I'm doing my job pretty well.

Special needs parents need to socialize with other special needs parents. When we listen to each other's successes and even failures, it forces us to consider our own approaches to parenting. It allows us to gain an understanding of other neurodiverse children so we can troubleshoot solutions to often very complex problems.

We must [connect](#) with others who relate to our lives because that allows for truthful, comfortable, authentic friendships to form. When you know someone "gets it," you don't need to spend hours explaining yourself.

There are commonalities among us, even when comparing non-speaking and speaking children. We find areas where we relate to one another, bringing about emotional relief. I am not alone. You are not alone. I don't have to expend energy to explain my existence. There is no judgment, and this is a safe space.

Adult friendships can be tricky, so finding people who are compassionate towards you, understand your children, and want to be near you is essential. Keep looking out for those families. Continue

meeting other parents who understand what you are doing.

The peace that comes from those connections is soothing to our sensitive souls. Those friendships are something to cherish forever. I keep a watch out for my angels, and so far, they've never let me down.



Melanie K Milicevic, BA, is a graduate of UCLA and a former 5th-grade teacher for the Los Angeles Unified School District. She worked primarily with second language learners and collaborated with special needs families to meet the unique needs of her students. She now advocates for her own special needs children and keeps her book-writing dream alive by typing notes on her iPhone. Melanie is a passionate writer and has been published in Autism Parenting Magazine, Exceptional Needs Today, Parenting Special Needs Magazine, and Special Needs Resource Foundation of San Diego. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two children.



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