Life Challenges
Don’t Go it Alone

Sometimes a major family change arises that jolts the “status quo” in your life. It can be very hard to accept the change, adapt to the new reality, and keep everyone in the family on track. Perhaps you’ve recently learned that your child has special needs, or that a parent who was living independently now needs your caregiving attention. All at once there are many things to think about when it comes to finding the right resources and planning for the future.

When a change like this impacts your family, there are a number of helpful steps you can take:

• **Take some time to think.** How do you feel and how will you deal with the change? Once the news really sinks in, you may be ready to plan and take control of the situation.

• **Learn as much as you can.** Do online research about your family member’s health situation and any specific needs his or her disability might entail.

• **Find others in the same situation.** Talking with other caregivers or parents with your same challenges can make a tremendous difference.

• **Take care of yourself.** Remember to eat right, find some quiet time for you, and add breaks and exercise to your day.

• **Ask for help.** Remember that there are many tools and resources available to help you cope. Don’t go it alone!

During the third quarter of 2012, we are focusing on a theme of Stress Management. This month we take look at how families can learn to cope with life challenges such as caring for special needs children or older loved ones.

Don’t try to go it alone in dealing with your family’s life challenges. Visit www.Here4TN.com for ideas, tools and resources—24 hours a day, seven days a week. Go to Work-Life to do a provider search for child or elder care, special needs and education. It’s simple and you get instant results. Or, access educational guides and podcasts for checklists, how to interview for care, how to make the right choice based on your needs and more!

Or you may call 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486) to speak confidentially with a caring professional who can provide you with practical, solutions-focused resources for dealing with life challenges.

If you haven’t already, be sure to check out our brief video that will remind you of the many resources you can find through the ParTNers EAP. This short video is posted on the home page at www.Here4TN.com.

www.Here4TN.com | 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)
When a Child’s Special Needs Change Your Life’s Path

If you have a child with special needs, you may find yourself in territory where you never expected to be. “Special needs” typically means the unique requirements of a person who has (or is at risk of having) learning difficulties or a mental, emotional, or physical disability.

At first your path may be uncertain, but there are steps that can provide guidance:

- **Focus on diagnosis and early intervention.** If you suspect that your child might have a disability, don’t wait. Take the child to your pediatrician and/or a clinical psychologist as soon as possible for testing.

- **Ask for direction.** Once your child is diagnosed, be sure to talk to your child’s health care providers for their recommendations on the best resources and the most important things to focus on as you care for your child.

- **Learn about the child’s educational needs.** For every child eligible for special programs, each state guarantees special education and related services. Initially an evaluation team works with you to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Your child may then receive services from a speech therapist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, and/or aide.

- **Be an advocate for your child.** It’s important to monitor your child’s educational progress and ask for frequent updates. If your child is not progressing, discuss this with the teacher and decide whether the program should be changed. Ask what you can do at home to support the IEP. And be sure to speak up when you have questions or concerns.

- **Stop and enjoy small successes.** Regardless of how things are going, spend time together doing things that the child enjoys. Build a feeling of success by praising their efforts and providing special rewards when they succeed at something. This can help offset the days when things don’t go so well.

Tips for Helping a Child with Special Needs

If you are a parent or guardian of someone with special needs, you are the most important person in his or her life. As you prepare to meet the challenges of each day, it’s important to remember that support is available to you.

- **Talk to other parents of children with disabilities.** They can be a great source of emotional support. Other parents can also offer their experience in how to best work with school personnel, therapists, etc.

- **Join a support group.** There are parent support groups (either in-person or online via websites or social media) that focus on children's specific conditions, e.g., autism.

- **Get organized.** Keep a notebook for school records, medical records, professional evaluations, and letters and notes exchanged between you and teachers/school staff.

- **Stick to a simple daily routine.** Take things one day at a time. Be patient, repeating even those routines or activities that you feel should have been mastered but which are still difficult for your child.

- **Become familiar with laws** that protect your child’s educational rights.

- **Take care of your own health and wellness.** Although you may be busy with school and therapy appointments, take breaks to recharge yourself or ask for help.
Challenges of the “Sandwich” Generation

Millions of people in this country are active caregivers who are taking care of aging relatives. At the same time, over half of these caregivers are also caring for children under the age of 18, while trying to balance full or part-time work outside the home.

We know your schedule is hectic, but did you know that ParTNers EAP offers telephonic EAP sessions, up to 5 sessions? If that sounds like something that might fit your schedule better, call us to talk about it.

In addition to telephonic EAP sessions, our work-life services can assist with scheduling appointments, looking into adult and child care, and much more. We also wanted to share with you additional information about the sandwich generation and ways we can help.

We encourage you to check out the Sandwich Generation recording and handout available on www.Here4TN.com under Tools.

Communicate from the Outset

Ease your care-giving load by taking these steps:

• Communicate. Through talking and sharing, everyone will know clearly what is expected of him or her and will have a sense of belonging.

• Make your boundaries clear. The best time to discuss boundaries is at the start, when the care-giving relationship is new to all parties.

• Consider long-term financial plans. The financial squeeze can be especially tight if you’re caught between needy parents and children.

• Remain flexible. Expect care arrangements to change. For many families, one decision rarely settles the matter forever.

• Take advantage of community services. Family or friends might be willing to pitch in, if you ask. Check out your local senior center, place of worship or hospital to find out what’s available.

• Maintain important relationships with family and friends. Don’t let your needs and wants get lost as you juggle the demands and stress of your role as caregiver.

• Call ParTNers EAP anytime, 24/7 at 1.866.Here4TN.

FAQ: What if there are conflicting views between two family members under a new household arrangement?

Try calling a family meeting to see if you can clear the air. Give each a chance to discuss what’s bothering him or her without interruption. Perhaps the house rules need to be adjusted to address everyone’s concerns.