Dealing With Migraine and Raising a Special Needs Child

by JAIME SANDERS

Managing Chronic Migraine and Raising a Special Needs Child

Motherhood is an all-encompassing job — it requires all of your time and attention. Children are demanding creatures who need our love and care, require affection and encouragement, and must be nurtured in all areas of their lives. The responsibility of being a mother is a great one, if not the most significant role of a woman's life.

Our children mean everything to us and we would do anything to make sure they are protected and given what they need in order to succeed. I am a mother of three beautiful souls. My youngest is special needs and it can be hard to manage sometimes because of my chronic migraine.

He has selective mutism (SM), a very rare social anxiety disorder that affects children.

Jaime's Experience With Her Special Needs Child

In social settings, children with SM become non-verbal. Many children with SM are often misdiagnosed as having autism because of the speech issue. My son has always been a quiet child and was very shy outside of the house.

It wasn't until he was in the third grade that his anxiety became visually apparent. His teacher thought he had a language issue because he wouldn't respond verbally to her or to his classmates. We had a meeting with the language therapist, vice principal and teacher to discuss this.

Despite being verbal at home, he would shut down and not communicate when he was outside of his comfort zone. We agreed that it was not an issue with speech but something else.

I have anxiety and knew that he was experiencing some form of it. After that meeting I took my son to a therapist in my area who specialized in children with anxiety disorders.

After meeting with my son and me separately, the therapist knew exactly what my son's diagnosis was.

I was a bit shell-shocked when he told me he had selective mutism. I had never heard of it before, and it made me very sad. I never want any of my children to have any obstacles in their lives — being a kid is hard enough.

Dealing with this new diagnosis was not easy. My son requires weekly therapy sessions and reading and math tutoring at school. On top of this, I have many days where I cannot function due to chronic migraine.

Throwing a new routine into my life was tough to manage at first — parenting through pain is a big challenge. Now that I had to devote more time to my son's needs, managing my own depression, anxiety and chronic pain became more challenging.

Over the last six years since his diagnosis, I have learned how to cope with my own pain and emotions so as to be a better parent and advocate for my son. You cannot pour from an empty cup.

Taking care of yourself and your own needs allows you to be more available to the ones you care for. These are the things that has helped me manage my own needs and my son's:

Manage Your Mental Health

Taking care of my own mental health helps me with managing my son's mental health. Talking to my therapist about my concerns and struggles opens up a dialog where I can learn new coping techniques to get through those tough days.

I also see a psychiatrist who helps me with finding the right medication to manage my anxiety and depression when those coping mechanisms aren't enough to keep them under control.

Accept Your Limitations

I know I have limitations due to chronic migraine. Accepting that reality does not make me any less of a mom.

What that acceptance affords me is the ability to manage my responsibilities better. Instead of overloading my schedule, I try to spread my kids and my appointments out so I have at least one to two days of rest in between.

My son goes to therapy up to twice a week (he has group once a week and individual sessions every other week) and sometimes requires tutoring before or after school. I make my appointments on the off days when I can. If I can't, I try to make my appointments in the morning so I have a few hours to rest before his appointments in the afternoon.

Keep Your Migraine Toolkit Up-to-Date

Having a migraine relief kit filled with all of the things that get you through a migraine readily available is very important. Mine consists of a pair of migraine glasses, my migraine hat, ginger chews, OTC pain relievers, essential oils, earplugs, an eye mask, prescription medications, and a binder with my treatment protocols for urgent care trips and hospital stays.

I don't go anywhere without it. It saves me from having to suffer when not at home.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Keeping an open line of communication is essential. I made sure to let my son's counselor know I have chronic migraine and that it will sometimes interfere with him keeping appointments.

I also have talks with my son about his feelings and how changes with school are making him feel. It's very important to make sure he is coping well and to reinforce the techniques he has learned in counseling.

Advocate Your Child Toward Success

My son is entering high school and that new change has its own set of anxieties.

In order to set him up for success, my husband I met with the special education director to create accommodations for him. He has a plan in place that his teachers will have to follow to ensure that his needs are being met. This eases anxiety for both my son and myself.

Living with chronic migraine is difficult. Finding the time, strength and energy to look after a special needs child is challenging. When you take care of yourself it allows you to be the best parent you can be to your child. That

makes all the difference for everyone to succeed in life.