

INTRODUCTION

Hi and welcome to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's ParentWise Podcast series. I'm Robyn Cummins.

Today, Jaye Chadwick, physiotherapist and Mum of 10 year old Kate who has cerebral palsy, talks about the benefits of respite for both children with a disability and their families.

Respite is where your child is looked after by a trusted person, for a few hours, overnight or longer. It may be in your home or at a special respite centre. Respite is designed to give you a break and can offer your child a range of fun activities and an opportunity to meet other people.

WHY RESPITE?

Hi. I'm Jaye Chadwick. As Mum to a daughter, Kate, who has cerebral palsy, and three other children, I've found respite an invaluable option for giving Kate, me and the rest of my family much-needed time out from the daily expectations and often times, challenges, of caring.

If I knew when Kate was born what I know now about the benefits of respite I would have organised it much sooner. The main obstacle for us was getting the funding to assist with Kate's respite care.

In Australia, respite can take many forms - from in-house to sessional recreational respite in groups, overnight sleepovers or longer term for a week or so. Talking to your disability service provider will help you to work out the respite options that are most appropriate for your child.

Parents can sometimes feel guilty at first about using respite care but there are many benefits which ultimately make it a positive option for all involved.

Firstly, respite gives time for the other relationships in your life.

When you are a primary carer of a child with special needs the first thing you usually do is make sure their needs are met before you do anything for yourself, or for anyone else, all day and sometimes all night.

This means you are permanently multi-tasking and even when your child with a disability is out of sight you continually wonder if they are OK. For me it's sort of like a continuous white noise buzzing away all the time in the back of my head.

Respite gets rid of the white noise and the responsibility of the care of the child just for a little time and allows some time to concentrate on other relationships.

You can take time out from being a carer and focus on the other roles in your life like wife, sister, daughter, grand-daughter, aunty, cousin, a co-worker, friend, sports team member.

Like me you may also be a parent to other children who have many and varied needs.

In this way, giving respite to the primary carer gives a ripple effect to all other relationships in that it helps them grow and survive, just like a garden!

BENEFITS FOR YOUR CHILD

When your child attends respite they learn that other people can also look after them which has to help with a progression towards some level of independence - something we would all love to give to our children with a disability.

Your child will also learn social interaction with a broader range of people which possibly helps with their self esteem.

Sometimes, the 'learned helplessness' which exists in a family situation is tested when the child is exposed to a different but nonetheless supportive environment.

Quite often, the child's mobility and communication skills will be tested and stretched in these new environments.

On the downside, parents also need to be aware that the paperwork needed to initiate respite can be very involved, lengthy and repetitive.

This can actually become a frustrating obstacle for many parents as well as a source of stress, especially when carers are so time poor.

Funding for respite seems to be constantly changing and sometimes it feels like you need to keep jumping through bureaucratic hoops to get it.

When we were first trying to get respite for Kate we often felt that just as we'd worked out how to negotiate one process, it changed.

I can only imagine how much harder that shifting process would be for parents if English was not their first language.

We're lucky now to have all of those initial frustrations behind us.

Kate enjoys taking time out from the family and the rest of the family loves respite as it means going out for dinner, shopping, going for a surf, stopping for a coffee, having a sleep in, reading a book, chatting, going out with friends or going for a run.

For me it means time to be just myself first but knowing Kate is being well cared for and having fun too.

Kate is also at an age where it's appropriate to have some independence from her siblings and family.

All in all, finding out about respite options has been a very positive experience for our family. If you think that respite could benefit your child with a disability but haven't considered this option before, why not talk with your GP, your child's therapist, or phone the CP Helpline on 1300 20 29 30, to find out more?

CLOSE

Thanks for listening. We hope you've found these strategies and ideas useful.

You can download or listen to more episodes in the ParentWise Podcast series at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's website - www.cpfoundation.com.au