

Keeping Hope Alive in Crisis

Extremely challenging behavior in a loved one can leave us confused and exhausted. Even in the midst of such difficulties, God is present and eager to guide us. The following tips helped me keep hope alive during the challenge of raising a child who lives with autism and schizophrenia.

Safety first. Find out if your local police department has a crisis response team trained to work with individuals who live with autism or mental illness. Learn how to access them in a crisis.

Rely on scripture. Memorize it, repeat it, pray it, eat, breathe, and live it. Sometimes all we can do is repeat short passages over and over. My favorites include: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10a); "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex 15:26a); "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9).

Pray. It can be difficult to pray when life is overwhelming. The Psalms provide words for crying out to God about our fears, challenges, and heartaches, while acknowledging that God is still worthy of praise and in control. "You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry" (Ps 10:16). "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:17-18). "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'" (Ps 91:2).

Find the wonder. The psalmist declares, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful" (Ps 139:13-14). This does not mean that God delights in the suffering of children any more than loving human parents take delight in such things. Things happen, and as long as we are here on Earth, suffering with be a part of life. Ask God to show you the "wonder," that which is "fearfully and wonderfully made," inside your loved one who struggles.

Resist worry. Develop a thankful attitude. Recall times when God brought you through difficulties. Trust that He will do so again. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil 4:4-6).

Reach out. Withdrawal is a natural response to extreme stress, but reaching out encourages hope. Call, text, or email friends or relatives who have been supportive in the past. Reach out to a pastor, counse-

lor, or crisis hotline. Seek out and utilize available resources for respite care. Do not allow yourself to become isolated. Isolation can breed negativity. "A friend loves at all times" (Ps 17:17a). Reach out and find that friend!

Ask for help until it arrives. Don't be afraid to be the "squeaky wheel" when it comes to seeking available resources. Keep in close contact with doctors, counselors, therapists, and your pastor. Take some sort of positive action. Self-doubt is a luxury we don't have when times are most difficult. Keep asking until appropriate help is found. Claim God's promises in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened."

Persevere. Do not under any circumstances give up! It sometimes is truly darkest before the dawn. Unexpected relief could be just around the corner. Don't miss it by giving up too soon! Rest in the promise of Isaiah 40:29: "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."

Revitalize. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). These words of Jesus show understanding of our human limitations. When we have been giving more to our families than we are taking in, it is time for renewal and refreshment. You might begin by reflecting on what is life-giving for you. What brings you joy? While it is easy to make excuses for not taking time for ourselves, we must recognize the toll that family needs can take on us if we do not care for ourselves.

Claim God's promises. Each day, claim the promises of God that transcend our troubles. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13).

These suggestions compiled by Sue Cassel incorporate excerpts from her book, A Journey of Hope: A Spiritual Path toward Hope and Joy in Caring for Your Child with Special Needs" (Holy Fire Publishing, 2010, available from ADNet).

Resource Suggestions

For more resources on coping with mental health challenges, visit www.adnetonline.org/MentalHealth.

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Questions? Call 1-877-214-9838 or write adnet@adnetonline.org or 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 5, Elkhart, IN 46517.