

Does Having a Special-Needs Child Strain Marriage?

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Marriage is tough enough. Does it get tougher if you have a special-needs child? [Recent research](#) seems to suggest that may be true.

The [study](#), from the University of Buffalo, State University of New York, found that parents of a child with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder are nearly twice as likely to divorce by the time the child is 8 years old.

The researchers looked at nearly 500 families both with and without children with ADHD, and concluded that disruptive child behavior, combined with existing stress in a family, likely sparks marital conflict.

Research into the marriages of parents of special-needs children is spotty, and much of it indicates that the severity of a child's disorder plays a role. Some research has found that parents of children with disabilities experience more stress, and a [2007 report from One Plus One](#), a British research group, said that couples raising ill or disabled children are at greater risk of divorce and have poorer marital quality.

But a [big 2006 survey by Canada's national statistics agency](#) found that fewer than one-third of parents with a disabled child said that the child's condition had caused problems in their relationship. In fact, 18% said that their child's condition made them closer.

The notion that having a special-needs child is a ticket to divorce court is anathema to some families. It was a [subject of debate last year on a blog on the autismvox.com Web site](#), where many posters said that dealing with autism had made their marriages stronger. Indeed, the researchers at the University of Buffalo found that among couples whose marriages lasted past a child's 8th birthday, there was no difference in divorce rates.

Readers with special needs families, have you found your situations to be stressful on your marriage? Do you have more advice to share on how to stay together?

Here are some resources for couples with special needs children:

–The [National Autism Association's Family First program](#) offers grants of up to \$1,000 to couples to help pay for marital counseling. The group will start taking applications in January

–[One Plus One offers a brochure](#) on relationships for parents of children with disabilities.

–[This article on the PsychCentral Web site](#) entitled "Married with Disabled Children," by therapist Marie Hartwell-Walker, offers copious advice for couples.

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