How Parents Can Find Credible Information on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

Introduction

You may feel many different emotions when your child is diagnosed with a developmental disability and/or mental health diagnosis. Your initial reaction can be influenced by many factors. Some examples are culture, how a provider tells you about the diagnosis, and what you already know about the disability or diagnosis. Some parents from our storytelling series said they did not know much about the diagnosis. Some had never heard of the diagnosis before. They wish providers would make sure a parent really understands the diagnosis before moving on. Some parents did not understand what caused their child's diagnosis. They thought it was something they did. With more information, these parents learned it was not anything they did. They also learned that disabilities can be strengths. Many parents go to the internet to learn more or find resources. Having accurate information can help build on our perspectives or in some cases change them. Being informed can also help parents advocate for their child's developmental wellbeing.

It is important to make sure you are looking at credible information. This fact sheet lists some useful websites with a range of information parents of children of disabilities may find helpful. You may have specific questions or want information that goes beyond what is offered on these websites. Therefore, we also review what to look for and pay attention to when looking for credible information online.

Tips

When going online, there are a few questions you can ask yourself to help decide if the information is credible.

Who is publishing the information?

Paying attention to who posts the information can help determine if it is based on facts or opinions. Typically, informational resources posted by educational institutions and government agencies present factual information. Websites ending in "**.edu**" are hosted by educational institutions, like universities. Websites ending in "**.gov**" are hosted by government agencies.

You may find information about mental health and disabilities on a "**.org**" website. Websites ending in "**.org**" are hosted by an organization- usually a non-profit organization. This information is generally credible and based on facts. Organizations may focus on particular information because it aligns with their perspective. An organization's perspective is usually influenced by their mission and values. Many organizations have an About Us section where they state what their mission is. You can read about an organization's mission to see if it aligns with your beliefs and perspective.

If a website ends in "**.com**", it is known as a commercial site. Information on commercial websites can be biased, because they are typically trying to promote a product or interest.[1] Their information may be factual but presented in an inaccurate way or leave out information. Businesses and online newspapers are examples of .com websites.

The ending of a website link can also give you information on its geographic source. For example, .mx means a website originates from Mexico. Others include .uk for the United Kingdom and .au for Australia. Information from these websites can be helpful and credible. However, depending on the information, it may not be as relevant as other resources. Online information coming from another country will likely not inform readers about resources in their area. Outside resources may also refer to a healthcare system very different from the reader's.

Resources from other countries might be based on cultural perspectives and influences that are different from the country a reader lives in. For example, the same word or term can have different connotations and meaning based on cultural influences. You may appreciate or relate to another country's perspective and intentionally seek this information. It is good to keep in mind how a website's origin affects its information and if it supports what you are looking for.

When was the information published?

It is helpful to pay attention to when information was published online, because a lot of information can change over time. For example, policies and laws that affect people with disabilities continue to change. This has included what rights students with disabilities have in schools, and changes to what services Medicaid can pay for. For this kind of information, you want to make sure you are viewing up-to-date, recent information. Also, as research is done, our knowledge about disabilities and mental health can expand or change. Some information can remain relevant over time. For example, a blog written by a parent on their experience or ways to practice self-care be relevant over time.

Are sources for the information given?

When a website is making a claim or reporting information, it is recommended that it states where they got that information. For example, if there are statistics they should state where the information originated from. Was it their own research or if it is research from another group then is it cited? Again, this can depend on the kind of information you are looking at. If you are simply looking for a list of resources in your area, then a list of references is not expected.

Putting Information Into Your Preferred Language

It can be challenging to find information on disabilities and mental health in your preferred language. Especially, if you are looking for specific information. Some websites offer translation options on their site. However, this is not always the case and language options may be limited. Although automatic translations are not always worded correctly, they can still be helpful. You can find

written instructions on how to translate webpages through Google Chrome Help. You can also watch a video on how to change the language on Google Chrome.

Recommended Disability and Mental Health Online Resources

The Arc Resource Library offers a wide range of information. Information can be filtered for various audiences, including family members and individuals with disabilities. Through their resource library, you can find fact sheets, webinars, toolkits, trainings, and more.

The Center for Parent Information & Resources (CPIR) has an online Resource Library where you can filter search results for information written for parents. You can also use CPIR's online directory to find your state's parent center website. State parent center websites offer many educational resources on disabilities and related topics for parents.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) webpage has educational resources, a video resource library, and can help you find a family support group. They also offer NAMI Basics, a free education program for those providing care for youth with mental health concerns. NAMI Basics is offered in-person in some locations but is also available online.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is a federal research agency and part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The NIMH Mental Health Information webpage has information on various mental health topics and related information.

Other Ways to Find Information

In every state, there is a Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). PTIs provide information for parents about disabilities, what rights parents and children have, and resources in their area. Information is mostly given over the phone by knowledgeable staff. A lot of states have a Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) too. CPRCs offer the same kind of information and training as PTIs but focus on underserved parents. They may focus on working with parents living in rural areas or parents with limited English

proficiency.[2] Visit the Parent Center Hub website for a [directory of PTIs and CPRCs](#).

You can also prepare questions for your health provider in advance. By writing questions beforehand and taking them with you, you will be more likely to remember to ask and get the information you want. You can also ask your health provider for informational resources that pertain to your inquiries.

Contributors

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