

LIGHTHOUSE FREE PARENT GUIDE

Caring for the Caregiver

The parent's inner journey nobody prepares you for —
grief, envy, faith, joy, and permission to be human.

Guiding families from diagnosis to thriving

You Matter in This Story Too

Every guide about autism focuses on the child — as it should. But there is a person carrying the appointments, the research, the insurance calls, and the 2am worries. That person needs care too. This guide is for you.

Read it slowly. Maybe with tea. Nothing here needs to be checked off by Friday.

1

The Feelings Nobody Warns You About

All of them are allowed here

■ Grief — for the picture you had, even while loving the child you have.

Grieving an imagined future doesn't mean rejecting your real, wonderful child. Both can be true.

■ Envy — when other families' lives look easier.

Noticing it doesn't make you a bad person. What matters is what you do next: name it, release it, return to gratitude.

■ Guilt — the constant whisper that you're not doing enough.

You researched, you advocated, you showed up. That whisper is lying to you.

■ Joy — sometimes arriving in moments others might miss.

The first time they point, sing, or reach for your hand. Your joy is not smaller. It may be deeper.

2

Know the Burnout Signs

Catch it early, not at empty

Check In With Yourself — Are You Noticing:

- Sleep that doesn't restore you, or racing thoughts at night
- Withdrawing from friends because explaining feels exhausting
- Irritability with the people you love most
- Running on autopilot — caring for everyone except yourself
- Feeling like rest must be “earned” and never quite earning it

If several of these feel familiar, that's not weakness — it's data. It's your turn for support: a counselor, a doctor's visit, respite care, or simply telling someone the truth about how heavy it's been.

3

Practical Care That Actually Helps

Small, real, sustainable

■ Find one community — a parent group, online or local.

The people who get it without explanation are medicine. One group is enough.

■ Anchor in your faith or grounding practice, if you have one.

For many parents, prayer and community carry what willpower cannot.

■ Protect one small ritual that is only yours.

A morning coffee in silence, a walk, a workout — guard it like an appointment.

■ Check in with your partner or co-parent as teammates, not just co-managers.

Schedules can swallow a relationship. Ten intentional minutes a day pushes back.

■ Accept specific help when offered — and name what you need.

"Can you take the kids Saturday morning?" is a full sentence.

4

Handling Comparison with Grace

For the days envy knocks

There will be days when someone else's news — the easy milestones, the new house, the effortless-looking life — lands hard. When it does: notice the feeling without judging yourself for it. Bring it to prayer or to paper. Remember that you never see anyone's full story. And then return to your own lane, where a remarkable child is growing because of you.

Someone else's blessing is not your loss. Your season is coming — and in many ways, it's already here.

5

Celebrate — On Purpose

Joy is a discipline too

■ Keep a small record of wins — yours and your child's.

First words, calm drop-offs, brave appointments. On hard days, read it back.

■ Mark milestones out loud, even tiny ones.

What gets celebrated gets remembered. Your child feels your delight.

■ Once in a while, celebrate YOU.

You became an advocate, a researcher, a case manager, and a safe place — while still being a person. That deserves acknowledgment.

*“You are not just raising a child.
You are becoming someone — braver, wiser, softer, and stronger —
and that person deserves the same tenderness you give everyone else.”*

— With love, from parents who've been there

This guide is free. Share it with any family who needs it.