

# Emerging Parenthood: Trust the Process – Don't Rush the Process

Dr. El Brown | My Journey of Awareness



While working through the emotions that come with parenting a child with disabilities, there was also a steep learning curve. A journey of awareness that I had to go through in preparation to parent my child. As the mother of a child with disabilities, my journey has included emotions that many professionals would easily recognize as elements in the stages of grief. However, while navigating that spectrum of emotions, I also experienced a continuum of awareness as I gained knowledge about my child and how the disability manifested itself in my child for a lifetime.

My journey of awareness included teaching, nurturing, and advocating for my son. In later years, with additional research, I learned that this process of awareness that I experienced was not an experience that was specific to me. It was a process that emerging parents of children with disabilities experience at the onset of their parenting journey. This process is referred to as a parent's levels of awareness.

## **Making Plans for the New Baby**

*When a family discovers a new baby is on the way, it can be the happiest of times.*

So much hope, so many dreams for the future of this new life. A baby, while still in the womb, becomes very real to the parents.

They begin to make plans for their child. Not just plans for the immediate future, but visions of long term endeavors dance through the minds of parents. They choose a name, then decide the type of person their child will be. They dream about what sport or extracurricular activity the child will participate in...how many friends the child will have...who the child will take to the prom...what college the child will attend...what profession the child will select.

Some parents even dream of when their child will be old enough to have a family of his own, so the parents can enjoy being retired and grandparents. That's a lot of promise placed on an unborn child. But we, as parents, do it every day.

We cast our hope and dreams of the future on very small children. The vision of these hopes and dreams are very real to us.



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### Discovering the Child's Disability

Now fast forward three years later and the same parents, who held these very real hopes and dreams for their child in their hearts, find out that their little one is going to need special support, support for needs that will alter the parents' original vision. This occurrence can throw even the most prepared parent for a loop. Discovering your child has a disability is a parental trauma.

Even for veteran parents, parenting a first child with a disability is a completely new experience. Additionally, if a parent has limited or no prior experience with disabilities, parenting a child with disabilities is uncharted territory with a steep learning curve.

However, with support, parents can develop patterns of positive adaptation that will aid in the process of confidently parenting a child with disabilities.

### Understanding the Parent's Journey

That's where you as early interventionists, come in. You can best assist the families you serve by understanding that this journey of parent understanding and skill building takes time. In the coming weeks, we will discuss and explore the levels of awareness that emerging parents of children with disabilities experience, as they develop their parenting self-efficacy. This knowledge will help you, as service providers, better understand the process that the parents you serve experience at the beginning of their parenting journey.

Sometimes, early interventionists want parents to hurry up and see the world and their child the way that the interventionist does. I understand. I was guilty of trying to rush my spouse through this process. However, appreciating each stage in a parent's levels of awareness will illuminate your ability to trust the process – not rush the process.

Remember a parent's journey of parenting their child with disabilities spans a lifetime. Just like the children you serve, parents, too, take time to develop.

How do you view the role you play in assisting with the development of emerging parents of young children with disabilities?