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Bouncing Back from Life's Hard Knocks

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By Cherie Takemoto

Life is not easy. Challenges from a child's disability, lack of service, difficulties in finding success, financial problems, busy lives, family stresses, limited social opportunities and/or limited expectations can be heavy burdens to bear. Sometimes it feels like playing in a card game. Only the cards in the deck are stacked against you. So what can you do to increase the chances in your favor?

My friend Rosalia is increasing her chances for success. Rosalia knows that life isn't easy. She fled her native country because of death threats. She left behind a comfortable lifestyle, a professional career and supportive family and friends.

Here in this country, Rosalia struggles to make ends meet and to advocate for her daughter, Margarita, who has disabilities. Yet, Rosalia is proud of what she has accomplished and where she is going.

"I see our situation as trying to fill up a pitcher of water, one drop at a time. Others might think it will take forever. But to me, I see the pitcher filling with water, drop-by-

drop. And drop-by-drop, we will get what we are longing for." Rosalia's perspective takes her far in building a positive life for her family and daughter. This attitude is a good example of resilience.

Resilience is how a person understands and handles the stresses and challenges that life brings. In other words, resilience is how people outweigh the negatives in their lives with the positives. So what are some things that families can do to survive and thrive, despite the many challenges that may come from having a child with disabilities?

Tackle the things within your control.

You may not be able to control the fact that your child has a disability. Life will always bring new challenges. Don't focus on what you can't control. What are some of the things that you can control? What decisions can you or your child make that will positively affect the situation? What aspect of the situation can you manage, if you cannot control?

Find out information about the disability or other problem.

What are some of the challenges and opportunities? How have others successfully handled similar situations? What are some possibilities? Who can help you?

Reframe the issue or problem.

Are there ways that you can state the situation so that others will actively work with you to



find solutions? How can you communicate this problem to yourself or others so positive outcomes are possible? Your perspective in this situation is a powerful way to find those solutions.

Build on strengths.

Each success, no matter how small, leads to other successes. Every time you, your family or child understand and respond to life's challenges, you become stronger. Focus more on what your child and family have that are positive than the negative. Celebrate each victory!

Balance the needs from the disability or problem with your personal or family needs.

Take care of your individual and family needs. As these needs are met, you and your family will have more energy to tackle more difficult challenges. What can you do for fun? How can you build closeness within your family?

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Supporting ALL Virginians
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Let others know about your child and family.

What are your hopes and dreams? What are your child's or family's strengths? What is important to you? What will help you and/or your child be more successful? What can you offer to others? How can others help?

Build supportive relationships.

Who at the school or other service provider can understand and support you? Friends, other families, religious organizations, professionals, advocates, support groups or others can often tip the balance in your family's favor. How can you, your family or child support these relationships?



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