

Coping and acceptance

A resource for patients, by patients

You and your family may be affected by having a parent with arthritis. Most importantly, remember that for your child, you are one of the most important people in their life. Arthritis may mean that you do some parenting tasks differently. For example, you may spend more time playing quietly, reading, doing puzzles, cooking, etc., and your children may do more physical play or outings with other members of the family. Children may also see you take a number of medications on a daily basis, receive intravenous infusions, spend a lot of time with healthcare providers and even hospitalizations and surgery. As a result, your children may gain a new appreciation to certain aspects of life:

- The fact that people come in all shapes and sizes. Not everyone is fully able to do all activities and that's OK.
- Your child may learn to be more empathetic (someone who can better understand another person's feelings, thoughts, or attitudes) when they see you live with arthritis on a daily basis.
- Strength does not only come in the form of muscles. It takes strength of character and creativity to nurture children.
- Not all health challenges are visible and can be seen.

"My now almost 4-year-old has a compassion and understanding that many adults lack, she understands some people need to rest more because their bodies are fighting an invisible battle. She asks with curiosity rather than judgement. The struggles are well worth the rewards!"

Resources for children

Educate your child about arthritis and how it affects you and the family. Keep to the facts and explain what arthritis is and how it affects you in day-to-day life (e.g., I get more tired than other people which means I need to take a nap. My feet may not allow me to stand for as long.) There may even be questions from your child's friends about your physical appearance if you have any noticeable joint damage. There are some books to add to this discussion and an overview of the books and their content can be found on the [Mamas Facing Forward website](#).

Of course, children may also learn that their parent can get sick and that they (and people in general) are not always healthy. This can be scary and may mean a number of discussions with them to ease any stress they may be having. Counselling may also help in some situations.

Expressing your needs

When you live with pain and fatigue on an ongoing basis, it may affect your behaviour towards those closest to you, such as your partner and children. There may be times when your child(ren) pick-up on your frustrations and pain. Here are a few tips to help manage this situation:

- Don't be afraid to speak openly to them about how you're feeling. If you are in pain, it's OK to say so.
- Speaking to your child about arthritis is an ongoing discussion that is developed over the course of their childhood and as your health changes.
- Be honest but reassuring about your health. Explain your arthritis in a way that your child can understand for their age.
- As your children get older, they may be more than willing to become part of your [network of support](#). Don't hesitate to ask them for help based on what they are able to do at their age(s) (e.g., taking groceries from the car to the house, going upstairs to fetch something).
- Ask your child(ren) about how they are dealing with the fact that you are living with a chronic disease. Being open and listening will make them feel more comfortable in sharing their concerns or fears with you.

"Be honest with your children about how you feel. They understand more than some people realize and children love to help people they love."

It is not easy for children to see their parent in pain and struggling. While you are the one living with arthritis, arthritis will forever be a part of who they are as well. This is not a negative thing, it simply is. They will likely become more empathetic adults who understand inner strength and see how their parent has overcome huge obstacles. Remember, as their parent, you are the most powerful influence in their life.