



# Complex Child E-Magazine

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## Organizing and Preparing to Leave Your Child With a Caregiver

by Dawn Klepinger

Who would ever think leaving your child with a caregiver could sometimes take hours of preparation?

When I first became pregnant, I knew my organizational skills would come in handy as a mother. I didn't realize how much more I had to learn until I became the mother of a child with special needs. Leaving your child with a caregiver when he has neurological issues and developmental delays requires a lot of thought, organization, preparation, and patience. There are many aspects you need to plan for, whether your caregiver comes to your home or your child goes to the caregiver in a different setting, such as school.

### Care At Home

My four-year-old son, Hunter, has a seizure disorder and severe developmental delays. When I have someone come into our home to care for Hunter, I use a complete care notebook, lists, and lots of organization to make sure the caregiver has everything he or she will need while watching our sweet little boy. It is also important to make sure Hunter's caregiver is aware of where the supplies and equipment are located, and is prepared to handle Hunter both physically and emotionally, since he is nonverbal.

The complete care notebook contains basically the ins and outs of Hunter's care. If you are having trouble with his feeding pump or do not know how to bolus feed him, there are instructions with photos to use as a guide. Also included is a current list of medications, as well as a complete listing with phone numbers of all the doctors and other important people involved in Hunter's care. I use Microsoft Office PowerPoint to create most of these documents because it allows me to freely move text boxes and photos to make my guide user friendly and easy to read. For more information on care notebooks, see this previous article.

Hunter's food, supplies, and medicine are on the counter, and I also keep lists nearby of what Hunter will need to eat and which medicines he will need to take at what times. Also on the list are activities the caregiver can do with Hunter, such as watching one of his favorite shows, or working on physical therapy skills if the caregiver is able to lift and

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move him. I will also put all needed supplies with each list. For example, if it's a food list, I will put the spoons, feeding tubes, syringes, and food items right with the list so the caregiver does not have to search all over. If the food item is in the refrigerator, I will note that on the list.

### **Care Out of the Home**

When we send Hunter to school or to another setting where a caregiver will be, we often bring along the complete care notebook, as well as lists and supplies needed. Hunter has a bag that comes with us everywhere, and it has almost everything he could need. It contains the following:

- an extra set of clothes and socks
- at least four daytime diapers
- one night time diaper
- lotions and salves
- medicines
- bibs
- syringes
- extension tubes
- spoons
- medicine cups
- pill crushers
- Band-Aids
- copies of his current medication list
- backup G-tube kit with instructions
- extra food
- a hat
- dirty diaper bags
- changing pads

I refill this bag after almost every outing. My caregivers are very happy to have what they need and say it makes things much easier. As far as the feeding supplies go, I always pack more than I think I will need. I feel much more confident sending him somewhere when I know they will have everything Hunter will need while he is in their care. There is also a smaller food bag that goes with Hunter and contains ice packs, blended food and sippy cups with milk.

### **Preparing a Caregiver**

Before I leave Hunter with a caregiver for the first time, I like to spend some time with both the caregiver and Hunter to help the caregiver learn how to respond to Hunter's many different sounds and emotions, since Hunter cannot communicate with words. I also show him or her the best ways to hold him and move him. I will demonstrate how to

feed Hunter both orally and via his G-tube and give the caregiver tricks to help make it easier. I like to give the caregiver a tour of the house and show him or her where food, medicine, supplies, diapers and diapering supplies, and the First Aid kit are stored. I also show him or her where the backup G-tube kits are and how to put one in if it comes out, and I point out the equipment Hunter has and how to use it. I also like to go over the complete care notebook so a caregiver knows what is in it.

### **Always Prepared**

In the last four years I have learned so much about being prepared and how to think ahead. It takes a lot of time and patience to get supplies and equipment ready for a caregiver, and sometimes I feel burnt out from the amount of organization I have to keep up with. I find it's important to take a few moments for myself each day in order to recharge and be able to keep up with the constant demands that restocking and keeping everything organized create.

When you have a child with special needs, it is important that your caregiver feels confident and prepared to take care of your child's needs. Being organized and preparing the caregiver gives him or her the tools needed to be able to take care of your child in the best possible way. Breaking it down and making things easy to read and understand is very helpful. If the parent prepares the caregiver adequately, the child is well cared for, gets everything he needs, and everyone is happy!