



21[•]NEXT COMMUNITIES

5 RESOURCES

Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council

<https://www.md-council.org>

Disability Rights Maryland

<https://disabilityrightsmd.org>

Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Administration

[https://health.maryland.gov/dda/
Pages/home.aspx](https://health.maryland.gov/dda/Pages/home.aspx)

Pathfinders for Autism

<https://adultsinmotion.org/virtual/>

Autism Faith Network

<https://autismfaithnetwork.com/>

INTRODUCTION

I am a mother, an entrepreneur, an advocate, community organizer, and a special education teacher. I found myself taking on all of these roles when I was blessed to have a daughter who was diagnosed with Autism over 21 years ago. I have always valued my flexibility, curiosity, and tenacity but had no idea these qualities were my gifts to navigate the disability community that would become my second home.

There have been so many ups and downs, successes and failures, disappointments, and victories, but most importantly there has always been love. Watching my daughter navigate through this thing called life has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life.

5 TIPS



1. Ask for help.

- No matter how amazing you are, you will need help on this journey. Swallow your pride and admit you don't have all the answers so that the answers you need can be available to you.

2. Remember laughter really is the best medicine.

- Learn not to take every moment so seriously. I have numerous recollections of where choosing to laugh kept me from crying. Whenever possible, succumb to a gut-bellowing laugh out loud and enjoy tears of joy rather than tears of disappointment.

3. Build a village of hope.

- Immediately, connect with other people who are in the disability community. These individuals will become your greatest asset as you push forward. They will uniquely understand and not judge but pour hope into your soul when you feel depleted. I met my original village members when my daughter was 5 years old and we have been advocating and supporting one another for close to two decades. With due diligence, this village will expand over time, and nurture it to keep it intact.

4. Trust a higher power and your instinct.

- My faith has anchored me and has been my lifeline! PERIOD! Pray and trust that there is a purpose in this experience, know neither of you are forgotten. Peace and joy will find you. On this journey, it's crucial to listen to your intuition. Lean into the "feeling" that guides you and tells you when to let this go or to dig in a little deeper. You are given this ability for a reason, don't ignore it, trust it.

5. Plan for the Future.

- Don't become so invested in the present chaos that you forget to plan for the future. When my daughter was in elementary school, I began to plan her life at 21 and beyond. I trusted my vision for her future life to guide the development of her educational, vocational, and residential goals. Remember this, your loved one will live more of their life outside of school than within it! Plan for a full, self-actualized life and help manifest it into existence!



Families, especially mothers, and caregivers, don't stop dreaming, just dream a different dream.

Sharon Dockery