

Case Study: Anne Caring for a Neurodivergent Child

Anne is a mother in her mid 40s caring for her 11-year-old son, Charlie. Charlie lives with a congenital neurological condition, ASD, and ADHD. Anne's story highlights the emotional load of parent-carers and the importance of whole family support.



Background

- Mother of two (13 and 11).
- Strong health literacy; partner supportive.
- Charlie received staggered diagnoses over several years.
- Accesses NDIS, allied health, and behavioural supports.

Caring Experience

Daily Realities

- Managing sensory issues, emotional dysregulation, and behavioural challenges.
- Providing constant structure, reminders, and emotional regulation ("lending" him her executive function).
- Navigating appointments, schools, and NDIS.

Family Impacts

- Older sibling overwhelmed at times; conflict can escalate.
- Occasional unsafe or distressing behaviours (e.g., hitting, biting).
- Extended family often misunderstood Charlie's behaviour.

Challenges in Health Settings

- Anne has **never been identified as a carer**.
- Appears competent, so clinicians assume she is coping.
- Focus is always on Charlie, not the family system.
- She cannot speak openly about her struggles in front of him, for fear of impacting his self-esteem.

Positive Aspects

- Charlie is affectionate, funny, loving, and determined.
- Every developmental gain feels significant.
- Medication and behavioural support have improved stability.
- Growing sense of identity and self acceptance for Charlie.

What Health Professionals Can Do

- Ask how the child's needs impact the *family*, not just the child.
- Offer private time for the parent to speak honestly.
- Normalise referrals for family therapy, sibling support, and parental mental health care.
- Don't assume competence = coping.

Conclusion

Anne finds caring for Charlie both challenging and deeply rewarding. With the right supports, he is thriving, and she feels hopeful. She urges health professionals to recognise parent-carers, support the whole family, and create safe spaces for honest conversations.