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ИНСТИТУТ РЕПОРТАЖЕЙ ВОЙНЫ И МИРА

CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARE:

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT
FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS
RAISING CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES IN KAZAKHSTAN

WHITE PAPER

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ABOUT «MAMA PRO»

The «Mama Pro» Foundation for the Support and Development of Socially Vulnerable Women was founded in 2018 by parents of children with special needs. The foundation helps women acquire relevant knowledge in entrepreneurship, receive psychological counseling, and gain skills in starting and running a business without being separated from their children.

The foundation's mission: to improve the quality of life for families raising children with special needs.

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ABSTRACT

IN KAZAKHSTAN

more than 103,000 families are raising children with disabilities and special educational needs. These families face chronic stress, emotional burnout, social isolation, and financial strain. According to the results of the first large-scale study conducted by the Public Foundation «Mama Pro Foundation for the Support and Development of Socially Vulnerable Women» (2025), among 1119 parents and guardians, more than half of those surveyed reported a high need for psychological and social support, but access to it remains extremely limited.

THE STUDY SHOWS THAT:

57% of parents are in urgent need of psychological support, and 55% need support from society.

20% of parents are unable to cope with emotional difficulties on their own.

More than 50% experience critical financial strain.

Almost 40% regularly face social isolation, and more than half experience discrimination.

Government support measures are insufficient and often merely formal: only 13.6% of parents rate the support as good.

International and Kazakhstani experience shows that the lack of systemic support for parents negatively affects not only their health, but also the effectiveness of rehabilitation and educational programs for the children themselves.

A key challenge in Kazakhstan remains the lack of institutionalized psychological assistance for parents. Today, psychological support is not part of the individual rehabilitation program (IRP) or other government services, while peer-to-peer practices and NGO initiatives remain fragmented and lack stable funding.

«MAMA PRO» RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELEVANT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INCLUDING THE MINISTRY OF HEALTHCARE AND THE MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION:

- 1** Include psychological support for parents and guardians (individual and group consultations) in the individual rehabilitation programs (IRPs) of children as part of the guaranteed medical services package.
- 2** Launch pilot programs for respite care, peer-to-peer communities, and online consultations in the regions.
- 3** Create a national information platform on available services and support measures.
- 4** Systematically develop training for family counseling specialists, focusing on psychological support for parents and guardians of children with disabilities and special needs.

Kazakhstan faces an important choice: to continue providing fragmented support to families with children with disabilities or to switch to a systemic model of assistance focused on the sustainability of the entire family. Including psychological support for parents in state mechanisms will be the first step towards building a comprehensive, equally accessible, and sustainable system. This decision will not only reduce the level of emotional burnout among parents but also increase the effectiveness of measures for the rehabilitation and social integration of children.

INTRODUCTION

Families raising children with disabilities and special educational needs face unique challenges that extend far beyond medical and educational support. Parents and guardians, especially mothers, bear the main burden of caring for their children, leading to chronic stress, emotional burnout, and social isolation.¹

Parents of children with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress compared to parents of children without disabilities.² The accumulating daily difficulties, the need for constant child care, and limited resources increase the risk of depression, anxiety disorders, and reduced quality of life (Ooi, 2016, Brown et al., 2006).

Research also shows that unpaid caregiving and weak institutional support are directly linked to the risk of poverty, worsening physical health, depression, and social isolation.³ At the same time, Yazicioğlu et al. (2024) argue that high levels of family stress in parents of children with special needs are mitigated by perceived social support and parental self-efficacy.⁴

The problem of emotional burnout among parents of children with disabilities is universal. A key challenge for such families is the lack of systemic psychological support for parents. International organizations emphasize that

¹ Yazicioğlu, T., Yildirim, A., Kumaş, Ö. (2024). Family stress and self-efficacy in parents of children with special needs: The regulatory role of perceived social support. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 163: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107804>; Chen, C., Bailey, C., Baikie, G., Dalziel, K., and Hua, X. (2023). Parents of children with disability: Mental health outcomes and utilization of mental health services. *Disability and Health Journal*, 16 (4):

² Wahab, R., & Ramli, F. F. A. (2022). Psychological Distress Among Parents Of Children With Special Needs. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 7 (46), 498-511; Valicenti-McDermott M, Lawson K, Hottinger K, et al. Parental Stress in Families of Children With Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities. *Journal of Child Neurology*. 2015;30(13):1728-1735. doi:10.1177/0883073815579705

³ Brehaut, J., Garner, R., Miller, A., Lach, L., Klassen, A., Rosenbaum, P., Kohen D. (2011). Changes Over Time in the Health of Caregivers of Children With Health Problems: Growth-Curve Findings From a 10-Year Canadian Population-Based Study. *American Journal of Public Health* 101, 2308-2316; Gallagher, S. and Whiteley J. (2013). The association between stress and physical health in parents caring for children with intellectual disabilities is moderated by children's challenging behaviours. *Health Psychology* 18(9), 1220-31: doi: 10.1177/1359105312464672. Epub 2012 Nov 5. PMID: 23129834.

⁴ Yazicioğlu, T., Yildirim, A., Kumaş, Ö. (2024). Family stress and self-efficacy in parents of children with special needs: The regulatory role of perceived social support. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 163: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107804>

without systemic support for parents, it is impossible to achieve real inclusion and sustainable development. UNICEF, for example, points to the critical importance of parental support for the successful integration of children into society, while also emphasizing the financial and psychosocial support that parents themselves need.⁵

In the context of Kazakhstan, the results of a study conducted by the «Mama Pro» Public Foundation in 2025 reveal a disturbing trend: the majority of parents experience chronic stress and emotional burnout, while systemic support mechanisms are lacking. Psychological support for parents is not prioritized and is not included in individual rehabilitation programs (IRPs) or other government services.

The purpose of this document is to describe the current context in Kazakhstan related to the mental health and quality of life of parents of children with disabilities, and to offer practical recommendations to relevant government agencies and organizations for building an effective and sustainable system of psychological support.

⁵ UNICEF. (2021). The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health. UNICEF.
<https://www.unicef.org/media/114636/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

In Kazakhstan, [more than 103,000 families are raising children with disabilities and special educational needs](#). These families face unique challenges that extend far beyond the medical or educational spheres. They affect the psycho-emotional state of parents, financial stability, and social integration. In the context of insufficient systemic support, the mental health of parents becomes one of the key threats to the quality of life of such families and the sustainability of the entire social protection system.

In 2025, the «Mama Pro» Public Foundation [conducted the first large-scale study, covering 1119 parents and guardians of children with disabilities from all regions of Kazakhstan](#). The results of the study revealed alarming trends: a high level of emotional burnout, chronic stress, feelings of social isolation, and a lack of access to psychological assistance.

CHRONIC STRESS, SOCIAL ISOLATION, AND FINANCIAL BURDEN

One of the most common consequences of long-term care for a child with a disability is chronic stress. Parents, especially mothers, report increased levels of anxiety and fatigue, which is particularly acute at the stage of receiving a diagnosis and during the family's adaptation to new living conditions.

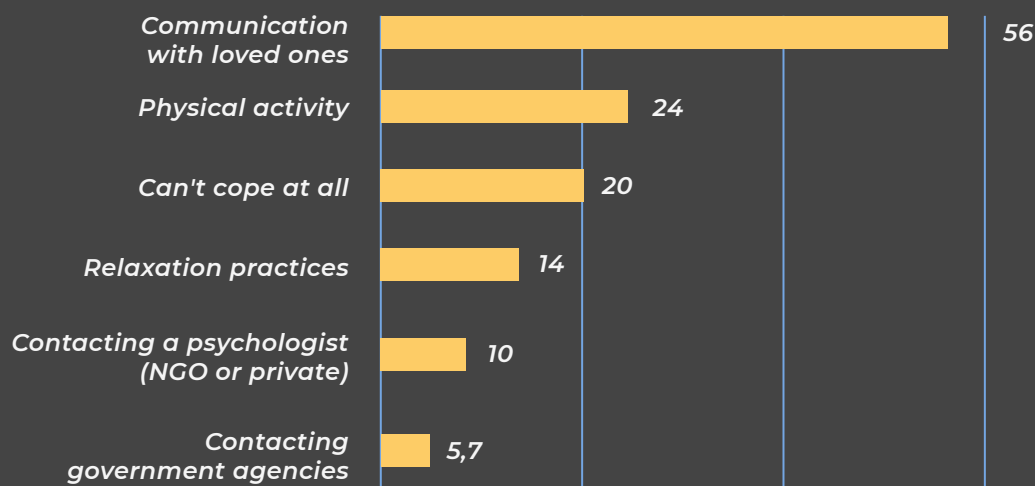
International studies confirm this trend: parental stress in families with children with disabilities is significantly higher than in families without disabilities, and this stress is cumulative and only intensifies over time.⁶

The results of the «Mama Pro» study, for example, show that 20% of respondents do not cope with emotional difficulties at all (see Figure 1). Moreover, more than half of the respondents are in urgent need of psychological support (57%) and almost as many need support from society (55%).

⁶ Choi, E. K., & Yoo, I. Y. (2015). Resilience in families of children with Down syndrome in Korea. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 21(5), 532–541. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261768244_Resilience_in_families_of_children_with_Down_syndrome_in_Korea; Chan, K. K., Lam, C. B., Law, N. C., & Cheung, R. Y. (2018). From child autistic symptoms to parental affective symptoms: A family process model. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 75, 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2018.02.005>; Cheng, A. and Lai, C.(2023). Parental stress in families of children with special educational needs: a systematic review *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Rehabilitation* 14: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1198302>

Figure 1.

How do you cope with the emotional difficulties associated with raising a child? (one or more answer options)



The reasons for this are not only medical or behavioral characteristics, but also social isolation, discrimination, lack of understanding, and the absence of systemic emotional support (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Parents face misunderstanding from society, stigmatization, and limited inclusion in public life. This leads to a decrease in social activity and the formation of «closed communities», which deprives families of access to equal participation in society.

Figure 2.

How often do you experience **social isolation** due to your child's disability/special needs?

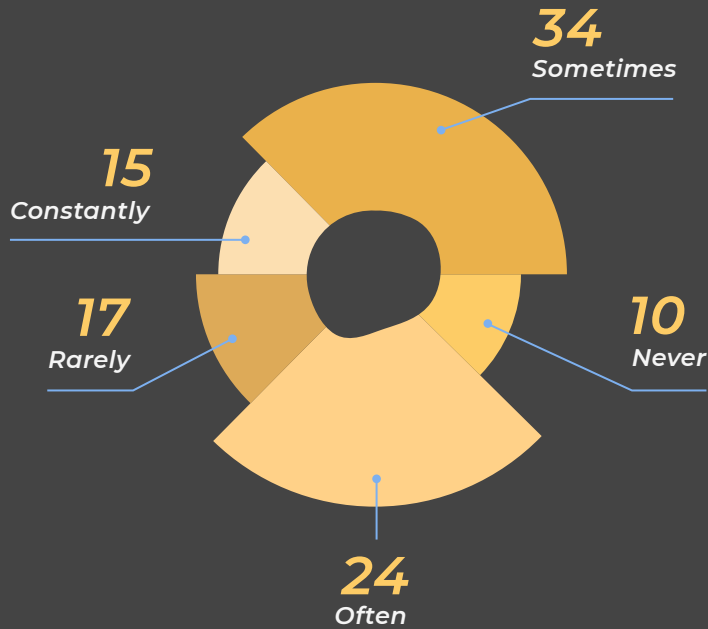
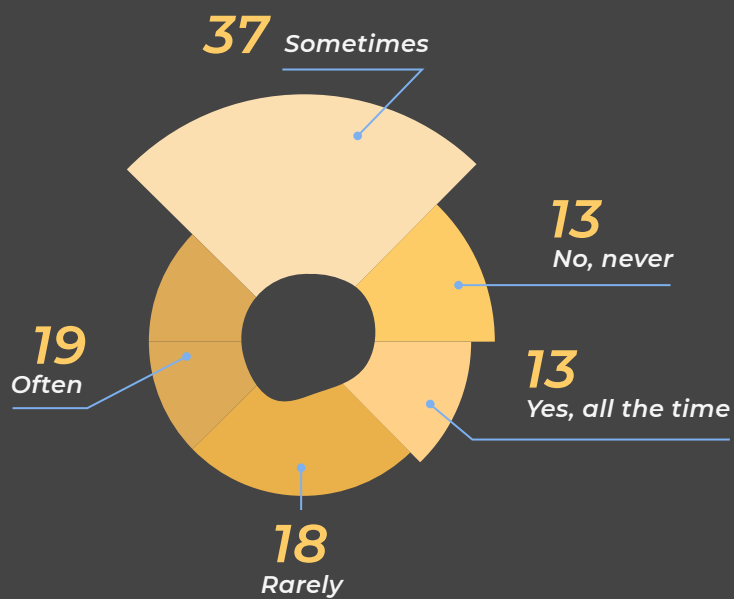


Figure 3.

Do you experience **prejudice or discrimination** from others because of your child's disability/special needs?



Caring for a child with special needs requires not only time and physical effort, but also strong emotional and social bonds within the family. Families with children with disabilities effectively live under conditions of chronic, multifaceted stress. The greatest risks of destabilization of family dynamics after the birth of a child with a disability and special needs are observed in families with insufficient emotional or financial support, including through various social services.

The study respondents also noted that the financial burden is one of the most significant sources of stress. More than 50% of the parents surveyed are critically in need of financial support (see Table 1). The funds are spent on medical examinations, specialized treatment, rehabilitation, and education, while government support measures cover only a small part of these expenses.

Table 1.
Assessment of sources of stress on a scale from 1 to 10.

Source of stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Caring for the child's health</i>	13.4%	3.5%	4.4%	3.7%	15.4%	7%	10.6%	8.9%	6.3%	30.3%
<i>Lack of time for oneself</i>	9.7%	3.2%	5.2%	5%	14.3%	6.7%	9.3%	11.2%	9.4%	30%
<i>Lack of time for personal/professional fulfillment</i>	10%	2.9%	3.7%	4.7%	10.6%	5.3%	7.6%	10.2%	10.2%	36.4%
<i>Lack of social support</i>	11.3%	4.1%	5.4%	5.2%	12.8%	9.4%	10.4%	8.7%	8.4%	25.5%
<i>Financial problems</i>	7.4%	3.5%	4.2%	4.4%	11.9%	7.5%	8%	11.3%	13.9%	38.5%

At the same time, qualitative data from the interviews reveals trends that would be impossible to identify through quantitative data alone. These include bureaucratic pressure, systemic indifference and a lack of structured state support, as well as moral burnout and the need for a respite. Respondents speak of chronic fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and a never-ending struggle for access to services, repeating the same words over and over again: «we are alone», «they don't hear us», «the state has turned its back on us».

THUS, THE «MAMA PRO» STUDY REVEALED:

- 1 Increased emotional stress and burnout are common among parents and caregivers of children with special needs. Many experience exhaustion, loss of motivation, anxiety, uncertainty about the child's future, and a lack of systemic support.
- 2 The significant financial burden associated with caring for the child, as well as social stigmatization and social isolation, are aggravating factors.
- 3 Seeking professional help most often occurs years after the child's diagnosis, which leads to the accumulation of negative consequences and exacerbates the psycho-emotional state of the parents.

REASONS FOR INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT:

SOCIAL BARRIERS, LOW AWARENESS, AND LIMITED ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT MEASURES

Despite the Social Code adopted in 2023 and a number of adaptation programs, psychological support for parents is still not integrated into state mechanisms. Within the framework of Individual Rehabilitation Programs, children receive rehabilitation services, but assistance to parents is not a mandatory component, despite their crucial role in the child's rehabilitation and integration process.

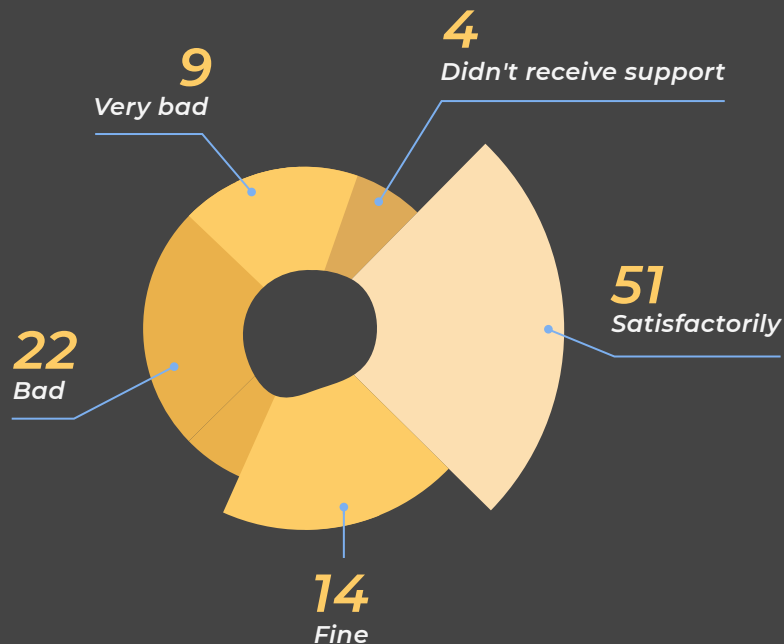
Moreover, parents and guardians of children with disabilities face multiple barriers that limit their real access to assistance. The «Mama Pro» study showed that almost 40% of parents regularly experience social isolation, and more than half have faced discrimination due to their child's disability. This reinforces stigma and reduces willingness to seek support.

The assessment of government support remains predominantly negative: only 13.6% of parents rate it as good, while a third consider it unsatisfactory or completely absent. Most families note that the assistance system is formal and compensatory in nature and does not contribute to the child's development or the family's stability.

Figure 4.

How do you rate the support provided by the state

(medical services, benefits, education, social programs, etc.)?



Awareness of available support measures is also extremely low. Only 15% of parents are aware of all possible resources, and most often they learn about them not from the government, but from other parents or through social networks (see Figure 5). Only 9.6% of respondents received information from official sources (see Table 2). The lack of a centralized information platform leads to fragmentation and uneven coverage of government services.

Figure 5.

Do you know where you can go to receive government support for your child with a disability/special needs?

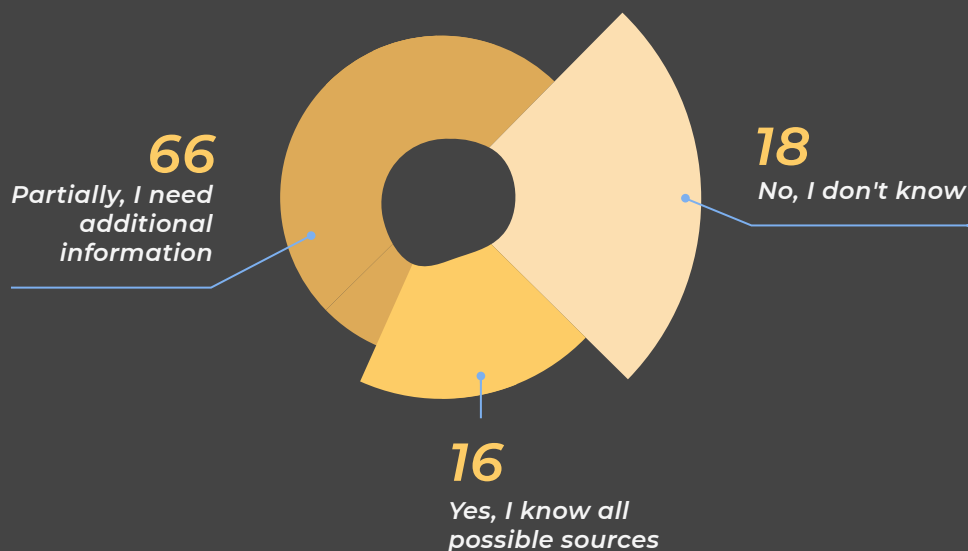


Table 2.

Where did you learn about government support opportunities?
(multiple choice)

<i>In social welfare agencies (Public Service Center, Social Protection Department, Akimat)</i>	9.65%
<i>In medical institutions (polyclinic, hospital, rehabilitation center)</i>	19.93%
<i>At school or kindergarten</i>	4.74%
<i>From other parents</i>	65.95%
<i>On social media or in the media</i>	9.65%
<i>In public organizations (NGOs)</i>	19.93%
<i>I searched for the information myself</i>	4.74%
<i>I don't know where to look for such information</i>	65.95%

The survey also shows that real access to assistance is limited. Although 63% of families applied for and received certain services (most often benefits), comprehensive forms of support (rehabilitation, support services, logistics) reach several times fewer families. The problem is particularly acute in regions where there is a lack of specialists and centers, and parents have to spend significant resources on traveling to large cities.

The insufficient training of psychologists, especially in the field of primary health care, exacerbates the situation. Most specialists do not possess the specific knowledge and skills to work with parents of children with disabilities, including an understanding of traumatic experiences, emotional burnout, and the need for long-term support. As a result, the quality of care provided is often formal rather than therapeutic. Expanding the competencies of primary health care psychologists is a necessary step towards creating a system for early detection of emotional risks in parents and preventing their burnout.

BASED ON THE INTERVIEWS, THE FOLLOWING CRITICAL SHORTCOMINGS CAN BE IDENTIFIED:

- 1** Lack of a structured state-level psychological support program;
- 2** Shortage of specialists working with parents of children with special needs, primarily in the regions;
- 3** The formal nature of the services provided;
- 4** Social barriers, such as the lack of a culture of seeking help and the stigmatization of psychological support;
- 5** An acute need for peer support communities and safe support groups (online and offline).

Thus, parents find themselves in a situation of chronic emotional crisis, where help is either unavailable or does not meet the real needs of the family. The low level of mental health among parents of children with disabilities and special needs is a complex problem that affects the quality of life of tens of thousands of families in Kazakhstan. Without creating a sustainable system of psychological and social support for parents, it is impossible to fulfill either the

state's obligations regarding inclusion or the basic rights of children with disabilities.

«Mama Pro» believes it is necessary to expand the accessibility and quality of psychological services, adapt support programs to the individual needs of families, and ensure interagency cooperation for a comprehensive solution to emerging problems.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

AND EXPERIENCE IN SYSTEMIC FAMILY SUPPORT

Supporting parents and guardians raising children with disabilities is one of the key elements of comprehensive social policy for both leading international organizations and individual countries. International experience emphasizes that without systematic work with families, it is impossible to ensure either real inclusion or respect for the rights of the child in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

International norms unequivocally confirm that without systematic work with families, it is impossible to ensure the realization of the rights of a child with a disability. The CRPD considers the family as a key link in the realization of children's rights ([Article 7](#)), preventing separation and institutionalization ([Article 19](#)), ensuring inclusive education ([Article 24](#)), early intervention and rehabilitation ([Article 26](#)). States are obliged to create a system of comprehensive support for parents, including psychological assistance, training, respite services, and support.

General Comment No. 7 of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes that the participation of family and parent organizations is a legal obligation of the state.⁷

The Comment requires the systematic inclusion of parent NGOs in the development, implementation, and monitoring of state policies in the field of disability. The document also obligates the state to provide such organizations with conditions for sustainable work, including funding, training, and participation in national dialogue platforms.

Furthermore, General Comment No. 5 ([Article 19 of the CRPD](#)) officially establishes that the state is obligated to develop community-based services, early intervention programs, respite services, mental health support for parents, and family support models so that children can live at home and participate in community life.⁸

⁷ General Comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, CRPD/C/GC/7. <https://docs.un.org/ru/CRPD/C/GC/7>

The document emphasizes that a stable family environment is fundamental to preventing institutionalization. Without the implementation of these mechanisms, the rights of children with disabilities cannot be fulfilled.

ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES CONFIRMS THAT SUCCESSFUL MODELS OF PARENTAL SUPPORT ARE BUILT ON FIVE COMMON ELEMENTS:

- 1 Legal guarantees and sustainable funding of services;
- 2 Integration of psychological support into the healthcare, education, and social protection systems;
- 3 Early intervention immediately after diagnosis;
- 4 Multiformat approach – combining individual, group, online, and offline support, including peer-to-peer and respite care;
- 5 Active participation of parents in the design and evaluation of programs.

Table 1. Assessment of sources of stress on a scale from 1 to 10.

France	<p><i>An important institutional step was the adoption of the «Loi Handicap» (2005) law, which enshrined the right of families raising children with disabilities not only to financial and social assistance, but also to psychological support. The law provides for the development of a network of specialized services, including counseling, group programs, and respite care, as well as the participation of families in decision-making at the level of social and educational institutions.⁹</i></p> <p><i>This approach reflects the understanding that the well-being of parents is directly related to the quality of life of the child and the stability of the entire family.</i></p> <p><i>A comprehensive set of support measures for families with children with disabilities is also in place, among which the key ones are the</i></p>
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⁸ General Comment No. 5 (2017) on independent living and inclusion in the community, CRPD/C/GC/5. <https://docs.un.org/fr/crpd/c/gc/5>

⁹ Ministère des Solidarités, de l'Autonomie et des Personnes handicapées. (2005). Loi du 11 février 2005 pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées. Gouvernement de la République française. <https://handicap.gouv.fr/la-loi-du-11-fevrier-2005-pour-legalite-des-droits-et-des-chances>

allowance for raising a child with a disability and a daily allowance for childcare. The payment period is determined by the Committee on the Rights and Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities and can range from 2 to 5 years, or be indefinite. Additional allowances are provided for parents who are forced to take leave to provide constant care for their child.¹⁰

Germany

A family support service is in operation, offering families of children and adults with disabilities a wide range of services to reduce the burden on parents and strengthen the independence of individuals with disabilities. As part of this service, staff members take on some of the caregiving responsibilities, accompany children and adults with disabilities during leisure activities and in daily life, assist in teaching independent living skills (cooking, hygiene and household skills), provide transportation and accompaniment to doctors or government institutions, and advise parents on applying for benefits and allowances. This service reduces emotional and physical burnout in families and simultaneously promotes social integration and independence for people with disabilities.

A special support measure is also provided for parents raising children with disabilities: rehabilitation courses funded by the mandatory health insurance system. These courses offer the opportunity to complete a three-week wellness program in specialized institutions, which parents can attend with or without their child. The goal of these courses is to strengthen the physical and mental health of the caregivers, reduce stress, and develop skills for more effective caregiving, including medical procedures, physiotherapy, individual and group psychological counseling, and nutritional counseling.¹¹

Estonia

In the Estonian rehabilitation service, the family is supported by a multidisciplinary team, and parents do not need to search for specialists themselves. The team of specialists educates and advises parents, the child, and the community, helping them cope with daily life. In the social rehabilitation service, the child receives assistance from up to ten specialists, including a social worker, a special education teacher, a speech therapist, a psychologist, a creative therapist, an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, a practical experience consultant, a healthcare worker, and a doctor. This support is free of charge and integrated into the healthcare and education systems. Thus, psychological support for parents becomes not an option, but the norm for everyone.¹²

¹⁰ CLEISS – Centre des Liaisons Européennes et Internationales de Sécurité Sociale. (n.d.). Family benefits in France. https://www.cleiss.fr/docs/regimes/regime_france/an_4.html

¹¹ Handicap International Deutschland. (б. д.). Support system for family members of children with disabilities. <https://www.hi-deutschland-projekte.de/crossroads/en/infomaterial/support-system-for-family-members-of-children-with-disabilities/>

<p>Great Britain</p>	<p><i>The Family Hubs model has been implemented – support centers that provide families with children from birth to 19 years old (and up to 25 years old for children with special needs) with single-point access to services in the areas of healthcare, education, mental health, and social assistance. The initiative aims to strengthen family resilience and reduce social inequality by integrating services "under one roof." Within the framework of Family Hubs, parents can receive advice on care and upbringing, psychological and social support, assistance with employment, and also use digital services and mutual support groups. This approach is focused not only on the child but also on the entire family, which increases the effectiveness of support measures and facilitates access to them.</i>¹³</p>
<p>Canada</p>	<p><i>The legislative and policy framework is built on the principles of inclusive, family-oriented policies. Under the law on the rights of persons with disabilities, families receive financial support and access to specialized services.</i></p> <p><i>An important example is the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program in Alberta, which develops individualized support plans for families and covers a wide range of needs – from respite care to psychological assistance and reimbursement of related expenses. In addition, the country is developing community-based mental health centers, specialized family psychotherapy programs, and government-funded support groups that provide emotional stability for parents and facilitate the integration of families into the community.</i>¹⁴</p>
<p>Scandinavian countries</p>	<p><i>In Sweden, long paid parental leave is provided, along with access to publicly funded psychological support, and a legally enshrined right to short-term respite care programs that allow parents to take a break and reduce the risk of emotional and physical burnout.</i>¹⁵</p> <p><i>In Denmark, the Social Services Act allows parents to take special care leave and receive compensation from their employer or subsidies when they are forced to care for a loved one. People with serious disabilities can also receive funds from the municipality to hire a personal assistant (including a relative) with a flexible schedule.</i></p>

¹² Tallin. (2025). Social benefits and services for children. <https://www.tallinn.ee/en/social-benefits-and-services-children>

¹³ UK Department for Education. (2024, January 23). Family hubs: everything you need to know. <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/family-hubs-everything-you-need-to-know/>

¹⁴ Government of Alberta. (6. д.). Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD). <https://www.alberta.ca/fscd>

Norwegian municipalities are responsible for organizing, assessing, and coordinating assistance, including respite services, and must cooperate with various disciplinary services (medical, educational, social welfare) to ensure comprehensive support measures. ¹⁶

Parents also have the right to «care days», which they can use when a child is ill or needs extra care. For children with chronic illness or disability, this right extends up to the age of 18. ¹⁷

15 EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. (2018). Denmark: Respite care services for persons with disabilities. Fact Sheet.

https://easpd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/easpd_denmark_fact_sheet_0.pdf

16 Nordic Welfare Centre. (2021). Nordic examples on individualised support.

https://nordicwelfare.org/pub/Personalised_Support_and_Services_for_Persons_with_Disabilities___mapping_of_Nordic_models/nordic-examples-on-individualised-support.html

17 NAV – Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. (б. д.). Care benefit (omsorgspenger). <https://www.nav.no/omsorgspenger/en>

ANALYSIS OF KEY LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE:

International experience shows that effective support for families with children with disabilities is based on three interconnected principles.

LEGAL ENSHRINEMENT OF THE RIGHT TO PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE AND RESPITE CARE

Where support is guaranteed by law, rather than being project-based or donor-funded, it becomes sustainable, systemic, and mandatory for state structures. This is especially important for Kazakhstan, as currently psychological assistance for parents remains outside of state programs.

INTEGRATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE INTO THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

This means that caring for parents' mental health is considered an element of prevention and public health, not a private initiative. This approach reduces the risk of emotional burnout and strengthens family resilience, which directly impacts the child's development and socialization.

ACCESSIBILITY AND CONVENIENCE OF SERVICES

«One-stop shop» solutions (like [Family Hubs in the UK](#)), individual support plans (like [FSCD in Canada](#)), and municipal management of services (as in [Norway](#)) minimize bureaucratic burden and bring support closer to the family's place of residence. This is critical for Kazakhstan, given the disparity in access between services in the capital and regional areas.

Thus, the key conclusion is that family support should be considered an **institutionalized and multi-level system**, not a set of fragmented measures. Legislative consolidation, integration into the healthcare system, and decentralization of services not only reduce the burden on parents but also strengthen social sustainability as a whole.

Countries that have achieved real inclusion did not start with institutional reforms, but with systemic support for families. Without investment in parental well-being, it is impossible to fulfill the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reduce institutionalization, and create a sustainable model of community-based social services.

ADAPTING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO THE KAZAKHSTANI CONTEXT

International practices demonstrate a wide range of tools for supporting parents of children with disabilities. However, direct adoption of these solutions is impossible without considering the specifics of the Kazakhstani social and institutional environment.

EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES:

1

Extensive infrastructure: a developed system of public service centers, medical-pedagogical commissions, schools, and polyclinics already exists and can be used to implement psychological support for parents.

2

Regulatory framework and programs: Individual Development Plans (IDPs), compulsory social health insurance (OSMS), and the Social Code of 2023 provide a formal basis for integrating psychological assistance into existing mechanisms. Making minor amendments to existing programs can be the first step towards institutionalizing this service.

3

Active NGO sector and parent communities: organizations such as «Mama Pro», «Erekche Bakyt», or the «Union of Parents of Special Children» already conduct peer-to-peer groups and psychological training. These initiatives can be scaled up and supported by government funding, transforming them into a full-fledged element of the national system.

LIMITING FACTORS:

- 1 Staff shortage:** the number of specialists with specific methodologies for working with parents of children with special needs is limited, especially in the regions.
- 2 Regional inequality:** private services and NGO initiatives are available in large cities, while in rural areas parents have virtually no access to assistance.
- 3 Social barriers and stigma:** the culture of seeking psychological help in Kazakhstan is still underdeveloped, and seeking help from a psychologist is often perceived as a «weakness».

Based on this analysis, it is advisable to utilize existing favorable factors to achieve the fastest results and positive changes, as well as to lay the foundation for long-term institutional changes.

CONCLUSION

The existing state approach to supporting families raising children with disabilities and special needs in Kazakhstan remains predominantly **formal and compensatory**. At the same time, systemic psychological support for parents and guardians is practically non-existent. Individual initiatives by the state and NGOs aimed at supporting such families remain **fragmented and largely inaccessible, especially in the regions**.

The «Mama Pro» study shows that the lack of a sustainable support system leads parents to a state of chronic emotional crisis, which ultimately undermines the sustainability of the entire social policy. International experience confirms that *the well-being of parents is a necessary condition for the successful rehabilitation and socialization of children*.

Today, Kazakhstan has the opportunity to move from fragmented initiatives to a holistic, integrated model of psychological support. In many countries, such support has been institutionalized and included in the healthcare and social protection systems in response to three key challenges:

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- a high level of parental burnout;
 - a decline in the quality of family life;
 - the impact of parents' psycho-emotional state on the success of a child's rehabilitation.

Implementing similar approaches in Kazakhstan will create a systemic and equally accessible support model, reduce parental burnout levels, and increase the effectiveness of rehabilitation and educational measures for children with disabilities.

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