

BLOGGER | ELLEN SEIDMAN

Come Play

What you should know about my kid with special needs



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This is my little boy, Max. He's 7. He loves chocolate ice cream, T-ball, splashing around in the pool, the movie *Cars*, pulling his little sister's hair. Also, chocolate ice cream.

And Max has cerebral palsy. He had a stroke at birth. Crazy but true: Babies can have strokes. My husband and I were told that Max might never walk or talk, that he could be mentally retarded. Every single one of my nightmares became a real possibility. Except...

Max walks. He runs, too. He speaks. He's bright. He's funny. Yes, he has his challenges: He cannot talk fluidly, and he has trouble using his hands and chewing food. But he's doing really well. And he makes me happy, blissfully happy, every single day. Because he's so sunny, because he's a fighter, because he is an all-around phenomenal kid. That might not be what you'd think if, say, you were to spot us at the playground.

You might feel sorry for my child. I know, Max may look a little pathetic when he drools or when he's struggling to pick up something and he can't. But, trust me, he is perfectly content with who he is—one very cheerful, life-loving child. Who will someday be quite the ladies' man, I know, but I'm not quite ready to worry about Max and dating. Maybe when he's 8.

You might think that my child should be treated differently from other kids. Nope. Max likes it when you talk to him. He likes it when you joke around with him. He likes it

when you fart (although I'm not expecting you to do that).

You might think your kid and my kid don't have much in common. It's true Max might not be able to do some things other 7-year-olds can do, or do them in the same way. But like your kid, he loves to pretend, laugh, get silly, roll in the dirt, get covered in dirt, track dirt all over the house. You get the picture.

You might feel embarrassed if your child says something "inappropriate." Like, "Mommy, why is that boy drooling?" Don't worry, I won't be offended; kids are curious. I understand that. Just as long as your child doesn't ask, "Mommy, do you think that boy's mommy could use a little liposuction?"

You might think it's rude to pull your child aside and explain that my child has special needs. Actually, I'd appreciate it if you did do that. Sometimes, kids don't know what to make of Max or how to play with him. I can certainly jump in and explain things to your child, but it'll be much more reassuring and encouraging coming from you. Say it however you wish—"This is a child who can't talk like you do but who likes to play just like you do; you may just need to have a little more patience with him"—but please, say it.

My child will feel included. Everyone will have fun. What could be bad? ■

