

Raising a Child with Disabilities in a South Asian Household

Navigating Stigma, Guilt, and Family Expectations

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About Dr. Ritu Goel

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Forbes Business Council Member

Qualified Medical Evaluator (QME)

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South Asian woman, immigrant, mother —

I understand the world you come home to



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What We Will Cover Today

01

The Cultural Landscape

Naming the real stressors South Asian families carry

02

Guilt, Shame & Reframes

The difference — and 3 mindset shifts that help

03

Boundary Scripts

Exact words for hard conversations with relatives

04

Nervous System Tools

60–90 second practices to calm down and prevent burnout

05

You Are Not Alone

Building strength and community

SECTION 1

Understanding the Cultural Landscape

5 Cultural Stressors – Name Them Out Loud

Izzat (Family Honour)

"What will people think?" — The child's needs become a threat to the family's social standing.

Karma Narratives

"This happened because of something you did." Guilt with no logical exit — you can't undo karma.

Extended Family Pressure

Dadi, nani, maasi, chacha — each with authority, each with an opinion, all at once.

Marriage & Future Anxiety

"Who will marry your child?" Said to parents of very young children. Cruelly, prematurely.

Immigrant Gratitude

Feeling too grateful to advocate loudly for your child's actual needs at school or in the system.

SECTION 2

Guilt, Shame & Mindset Reframes

Guilt vs. Shame — The Distinction That Changes Everything

GUILT

"I did something wrong."

Specific
Actionable
Can motivate change
Has an exit

SHAME

"I am wrong. I am the problem."

Global — no specific exit
Paralyzing
Hides in silence
Doesn't respond to logic

Most parents here are experiencing SHAME — not guilt. Shame responds to connection and truth-telling, not advice.

3 Mindset Reframes — Learn These, Use These

Reframe 1

Your child did not happen TO you. Your child happened FOR you.

A shift from 'Why me?' to 'What is this asking of me?' — that changes everything.

Reframe 2

Protecting your child FROM the world is not the same as preparing them FOR it.

Hyperprotection driven by shame limits your child and exhausts you. Growth requires some exposure.

Reframe 3

Your wellbeing is not selfish. It is medical.

Caregiver mental health directly predicts child outcomes. When you burn out, the whole system suffers.

SECTION 3

Boundary Scripts for Hard Conversations

Ready-to-Use Scripts — Take These Home

WHEN: When relatives offer remedies / question the diagnosis

 *"Thank you for caring about him. We're working with a great team and we feel good about the plan."*

WHEN: When strangers ask 'What's wrong with him?'

 *"He has a developmental disability. He's doing great — he just learns differently."*

WHEN: When someone asks 'Who will marry your child?'

 *"We think about his future every day — that's why we're focused on building his skills right now."*

WHEN: When someone weaponizes faith ('This is your karma')

 *"Our spiritual practice gives us strength. Our doctors and therapists give us a plan. We need both."*

SECTION 4

Nervous System Tools & Burnout Prevention

Three Tools — Practice at Least One This Week

01

Box Breathing

Breathe IN — 4 counts
Hold — 4 counts
Breathe OUT — 4 counts
Hold — 4 counts
Repeat 3–4 times.

*Before hard conversations, IEP meetings,
or family events.*

02

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

5 things you can SEE
4 things you can TOUCH
3 things you can HEAR
2 things you can SMELL
1 thing you can TASTE

*Interrupts a spiral. Pulls you back to now.
Works for children too.*

03

2-Minute Daily Reset

One thing I did well today
One thing that was hard — and I
survived
One thing I need tomorrow

*A nervous system reset. Interrupts the
shame loop every evening.*

Caregiver Burnout — It Looks Like This

Burnout is not 'being tired.' It is a clinical state — and in South Asian families, it almost always stays hidden.

Losing patience faster — and feeling ashamed about it

Withdrawing from your partner, friends, or yourself

Feeling resentment toward your child — and hating yourself for it

A sense that nothing you do is ever enough

Going through the motions but feeling hollow inside

"If you have felt resentment toward your child — even for a moment — you are not a bad parent. You are a burned out one."

SECTION 5

You Are Not Alone

Three Things to Take Home

The guilt you feel is real — but it is not evidence that you are doing it wrong.

You don't have to explain your child to anyone who hasn't earned the conversation.

Your wellbeing is not separate from your child's wellbeing. It is the foundation of it.

Resources & Support

Support Communities

JEENA — jeena.org

SAMHIN — samhin.org

NAMI — nami.org

Autism Society — autism-society.org

Finding Culturally Informed Therapy

Psychology Today — filter by ethnicity

Inclusive Therapists — inclusivetherapists.com

Ask: 'Have you worked with South Asian families?'

School & Advocacy

Wrightslaw — wrightslaw.com

Parent Training & Information Centers (PTI)

Free federally funded — in every state

Connect with Dr. Goel — MindClaire

www.mindclaire.com

[linkedin.com/in/dr-ritu-goel](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-ritu-goel)

Integrative psychiatric care — all ages

Referrals welcome

*"You showed up today.
That matters.
That is evidence that you are exactly
the parent your child needs."*

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