

A Special Child in the Family, A Guide for Parents

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The author has written this booklet as an outgrowth of her involvement as Director of the Handicapped Infant Learning Laboratory (HILL) Project, Southwest Texas State University. Its purpose is to involve parents in self-awareness, suggest productive attitudes, and offer possible behaviour management strategies for their child. The booklet is not meant to be a stand alone guide for parents who have a child with a developmental delay but rather as an additional resource to the parent and child's personal involvement in an education/therapy/counselling program.

The special child referred to in the booklet is the child with a disturbance in sensing (deaf, blind), physical structure (deformities), motor movement (cerebral palsy), mental functioning (mental retardation, emotional disturbance), or language disorder (mute, autism).

Emphasis is placed, throughout the booklet, on the fact that the special child is firstly a child and secondly "special". The author has therefore take a wholistic approach as is demonstrated in the chapters on emotions, relationships, communication, and behaviour management strategies.

The first chapter discusses the grieving of the parents of the special child over the loss of a normal child. The feeling states — denial, anxiety, fear, guilt, depression, anger and their functions are considered. The next chapter on "Relationships" includes the family and community and describes how the system of family relationships can be out of balance. There are several valuable suggestions about where to locate baby-sitters. It also includes definitions of professionals for special children, as well as a list of possible questions which parents could use to obtain the necessary information from a professional.

"The Happy Medium", Chapter 3, discusses the Greek idea that nothing should be done to excess. Several principles are presented which caution parents to remember the happy medium. Other principles are in the form of suggestions which guide parents to positive action.

The next chapter, "Communication is the Key", very clearly defines communication, speech and language. The functions of communication are lucidly outlined. Explicit suggestions for enhancing receptive and expressive language are given.

The final chapter, "Managing Your Child's Behaviour", stresses management through consistent enforcement of rules and routines. To discipline effectively, certain factors need to be taken into consideration: the individual child's personality, developmental age (rather than chronological age), and abilities. The important ingredients in actively managing behaviour are: love, natural consequences, consistency, communication, and channeling emotions. Modeling is stressed as a powerful tool for teaching behaviour. The ultimate goal is for children to be able to make their own decisions regarding appropriate behaviour.

The author has an unusual sensitivity and insight into what it means to have a special child in the family. She uses a style which is matter of fact and easily readable. Many well chosen examples are given. The ideas which are presented are clear and would be useful to all parents. The bibliography contains additional books parents may wish to refer to in their search for help to be effective parents.

It would have been helpful to have included the gestural and symbolic communication systems which can serve as primary or augmentative systems of communication or as facilitators for a variety of behaviours. Not all the children referred to as special will develop speech as a functional means of communication and it would help parents to be aware of all forms/modes of communication to help their child's development and growth.

The terms impairment, disability, and handicap have been used interchangeably throughout the booklet. The World Health Organization (WHO 1980) has proposed comprehensive definitions for the key concepts of impairment, disability and handicap. Consistent use of terminology is one way for us as professionals to improve communication and understanding in the community at large.

This does not alter the fact that this book, with its ideal mix of realism and optimism, is highly recommended reading.

