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# COUNSELING PARENTS OF RETARDED CHILDREN

GERARD R. BREITENBECK, C.S.S.R.\*

*Editor's Note: The material that follows was prepared simultaneously with that contained in the article, "On Mentally Retarded Children" and we feel it is repetitious only in its emphasis of the subject matter and its vital concern in today's pattern of living. The Reading Guides should be of particular interest and a source of assistance to parents seeking advice and counsel.*

A child is a family's most precious possession. From the moment of birth, devoted parents pray that their child will grow into a happy, mature, healthy adult. In today's world that happy development is not always assured.

Most of us can understand and accept the crippling of a child's arm or leg. The crippling of a young mind, however, baffles and disconcerts us. The National Association for Retarded Children in their brochure, *No Less Precious* gives these figures: "300 mentally retarded children are born every day. In a month that totals nearly 10,000 — in a year, 120,000."

President Kennedy in an address last October 11 tells us: "Mental retardation . . . disables ten times as many as diabetes; twenty times as many as tuberculosis; twenty-five times as many as muscular dystrophy, and six hundred times as many as infantile paralysis. Today there are an estimated 5,400,000 mentally retard-

ed Americans." The National Association for Retarded Children asserts: "Three out of every one hundred babies born are mentally retarded in some way."

According to the 1962 edition of *Information Please* (p. 24) the average population per family is 3.68 — mother, father, and one or two children. There are 40,200,000 married couples in the United States. *Information Please* gives these figures as of March, 1960. Some families are large, some are small. If we consider four persons per family as a workable estimate of what constitutes the average family today, it becomes apparent that 21,600,000 individuals are directly affected because one member of their family is mentally retarded.

In recent years medical science has made astounding gains in curing illnesses that were previously classed as "incurable." With each new accomplishment, men in this field moved on to conquer more problems. Experts tell us that a vast amount of research is still ahead in the study of retardation. *The Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1961, quotes Dr. R. E. Cooke,

director of the department of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Baltimore, as saying: "There are really a thousand causes of mental retardation, stemming from events before conception to social effects in the home after birth." This same article continues: "Anyone of a hundred virus infections in a pregnant mother can be to blame."

With swords of steel the knighted warriors of old went forth to do battle against the oppressors of women and children. With weapons of test tubes, microscopes, and scientific knowledge the modern knights in white, those men and women of medical research, also go forth. They are waging war daily to conquer and overcome the oppressive causes that affect the lives of millions of men, women, and children. God bless them and encourage them in their gigantic struggle.

The federal government is allocating twenty-six million dollars a year for research into the many causes and possible cures for retardation. Those engaged in the work are optimistic that this program will lead to important "break-throughs" in conquering arrested or incomplete mental development. Until this is an accomplished fact, we must live with the reality that three out of every one-hundred new-born babies will be mentally retarded in some way. For the present, however, 100,000 new parents of retarded children will seek help each year.

In their anxiety, the vast majority of these mothers and fathers

will turn to their physicians for counsel and guidance.

In some communities special clinics for diagnostic evaluation and treatment recommendations are available. Where these facilities exist, many cases are referred to a member of the clinical staff. Such means are not always at hand. In the *Journal of Pediatrics*, April 1954, Dr. Israel Zwerling, M.D., Ph.D., in his article, "Initial Counseling for Parents with Mentally Retarded Children," says: "The individual physician, pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, or most frequently the general practitioner will continue to serve as initial counselor for the great majority of parents with retarded children. He must develop appropriate knowledge and skills for this difficult task."

In the light of this, the anxiety of the parents becomes the particular concern of their physician. In the white-walled counsel room of his office he must grapple with the problem of *how much, when, and what phrases to employ* in answering the questions of these troubled mothers and fathers. Advice will be sought and counsel asked.

Parents will propose such questions as: "Are we to blame?" — "What should be our general outlook?" — "How do other parents handle this problem?" — "Are there any non-technical books available that explain mental retardation?" — "Is there any home-training program to assist our child?" — "Can we acquire a list of the public and private institu-

\* Father Breitenbeck has done extensive work in the field of retardation. He is the author of a manual entitled *For Parents of Retarded Children* and a teaching course, *Christian Character Study*.

tions that care for these children?" — "Is there any hope of financial assistance in the future, security for our child, and/or insurance plans?"

The conscientious doctor desires to answer these questions. With an office full of waiting patients, however, his counseling time is limited. A prepared reading list of recommended literature would seem to be of help. Many and great are the treatises that have been written on the various phases of mental retardation; they have shed much light on this problem. In the May 1950 issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Dr. Reynold A. Jensen in his article, "The Clinical Management of the Mentally Retarded Child and the Parents," has this to say: "It seems obvious that in any program designed to help deficient individuals, the emphasis must be placed on the family. Upon the family's attitudes and thinking, particularly those of the parents, depends the ultimate success of the program."

A folder entitled, *Suggested Reading Guides for the Parents of a Retarded Child* is a sincere attempt to assist today's busy doctor in counseling the parents of a retarded child. This publication lists booklets, pamphlets, and articles that answer many of the questions that are asked. In distributing this brochure to parents definite information becomes available and the doctor, limited in time as he is, can feel assured he has offered positive assistance. Here follow the *Guides* which can be procured at the prices indicated.

### A Positive Outlook . . .

#### FOR THE PARENTS OF RETARDED CHILDREN

Gerard R. Breitenbeck, C.S.S.R.

This booklet presents a positive approach to the various problems that the new parents of a retarded child will encounter. Besides spiritual considerations it contains many statements from the parents of retarded children. 9 pp.

Available from: Liguori Pamphlet Office, Liguori, Missouri. 25c

### A Mother's Account . . .

#### THIS IS STEVIE'S STORY

Dorothy G. Murray

In a heart-warming way Mrs. Murray recounts the day-to-day living with Stevie's retardation. She also shows how she and her husband developed patience through suffering, a wiser sense of values, and above all, a more compassionate love for all mankind. 19 pp.

Available from: Virginia Association for Retarded Children, 4705 Leonard Parkway, Richmond 26, Virginia. \$1.00

### What the Government Says . . .

#### THE CHILD WHO IS MENTALLY RETARDED

Children's Bureau U.S.A. No. 43-1956.

In this pamphlet the United States Government provides background information on mental retardation and directs parents toward acceptance and care of their child. 23 pp.

Available from: Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. 10c

### World Health Organization's Opinion . . .

#### THE MENTALLY SUBNORMAL CHILD

WHO Technical report series No. 75.

This is a report from a joint expert committee convened by World Health Organization (WHO) with participation of the United Nations. It deals with such questions as: prevalence, research, definition, parent and public education, etc. 46 pp.

Available at: Columbia University Press, International Document Service, 2960 Broadway, New York 27, New York. 25c

### A Home Training Program . . .

#### THE MENTALLY RETARDED CHILD AT HOME

Laura L. Dittman (Children's Bureau No. 374).

A manual for parents' home care and education. The author is a specialist in home training programs for mentally retarded children. 99 pp.

Available at: Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. 35c

### Another Home Training Plan . . .

#### TEACH ME

Division of Public Institutions.

This booklet gives practical suggestions for the training of a retarded child in home training, habit training, discipline, emotions, looks and manners, irregular behavior, health, and so forth. 31 pp.

Available at: Minnesota Dept. of Public Welfare, 117 University Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota. 25c

### Teaching the Truths of God . . .

#### CHRISTIAN CHARACTER STUDY

Gerard R. Breitenbeck, C.S.S.R.

Without dependence on the written word, this course seeks to provide other means of conveying the truths of religion to a retarded child. Each question and answer is musically recorded. Color contrast, jigsaw puzzle, and word matching sheets are also used. A teacher's manual is included in the set. Each set contains two lessons.

Available at: Christian Character Study, Liguori, Missouri. \$2.00 per set

### Social Security Benefits . . .

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY CHILD

Lee Marino.

Suggestions are offered regarding the Social Security benefits parents of retarded children can obtain. The subjects of Wills and Trusts are also treated. 9 pp.

Available at: National Association for Retarded Children, 386 Park Ave. South, New York 16, New York. No Charge

#### NARC GROUP LIFE INSURANCE PLAN

This pamphlet describes the principal features of a group insurance plan that

has been developed by a committee of the National Association for Retarded Children. 10 pp.

Available at: National Association for Retarded Children, 386 Park Ave. South, New York 16, New York. No Charge

### CHILDREN LIMITED

This is a bi-monthly publication. It informs the parents of a retarded child of the advances in education, parent counseling, vocational rehabilitation, research, federal and state legislation. Significant efforts on the international scene are also reported.

Available at: Children Limited (Subscription Dept.), 386 Park Ave. South, New York 16, New York.

annual subscription \$1.00

### DIRECTORY OF CATHOLIC FACILITIES FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN THE U.S.A.

In this directory the various schools, institutions, etc. are listed according to the care provided and the facilities available. 248 pp.

Available at: National Catholic Educational Association, 1785 S. Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington 6, D.C. \$2.75

### LISTINGS OF STATE AND PRIVATE TRAINING SCHOOLS AND HOMES FOR THE RETARDED

Listing in this Directory is in State order. Although this publication is primarily directed toward residential training schools and homes, a number of day schools are also included.

151 pp.

Available at: A.A.M.D. Central Office, P.O. Box 96, Willimantic, Connecticut. \$1.00

This reading list was compiled by the writer in collaboration with Sister Mary Charitas, S.S.M., Sister Marion, S.S.M., and the graduate students in obstetric nursing at St. Louis University. This is not claimed to be an exhaustive enumeration of all the wonderful and useful material that has been written on this subject. It is presented as an inexpensive

and time-saving *Reading Guide* to the mothers and fathers of retarded children. May the material aid them in making right decisions in relation to the *total needs* of every member of the family.

Copies of *Suggested Guides for the Parents of Retarded Children* can be obtained from:

**Christian Character Study  
Liguorian Publication Center  
Liguori, Missouri**

single copy - - - - 10c  
12 copies - - - - \$10.00  
\$10.00 copies - - - \$10.00

With orders of less than \$1.00, kindly enclose cash and a self-addressed, postage paid envelope.



**ATTENTION!**

Physicians

Attending the A.M.A. Convention  
McCormick Place, Chicago, Ill. — June 24-28

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds will again be an exhibitor at the A.M.A. 1962 convention to be held at McCormick Place, Chicago. Consult your program for Space F-128. Dr. James T. Nix of New Orleans will also be among those in the scientific exhibits with a booth indicating his study of lung cancer in nuns.

As in previous years, the Booths will need staffing. Catholic physicians willing to give a few hours time to meet visitors during the five days of the convention are urged to write:

GERARD P. J. GRIFFIN, M.D.  
311 Garfield Place  
Brooklyn, New York

Please advise the day and time you will be available. The exhibits open Sunday afternoon, June 24 and close on Thursday, the 28th, at 5:30 p.m. Assistance for Dr. Nix will also be appreciated. Please contact him at 1407 So. Carrollton Ave., New Orleans 18, Louisiana. Be sure to visit the Federation Booths and bring others with you.

