

The Disabled Child

At the playground, Jamie whispered to his best friend Sam, "Let's get the wagon."

Sam got the wagon. "OK, Jamie, get in."

Jamie grinned. "OK. Help me with the brace."

Sam unlocked the brace on Jamie's leg and helped him into the wagon. Sam pulled Jamie, and both boys made engine noises.

In the sandbox on the same playground, Carol shoveled sand into a pail. She used her "good" hand and hid the other in her sleeve. When Carol was very young, she lost a finger in the car door. Neither she nor her parents could adjust to the loss. Now, she never lets others see that hand. And she rarely plays with other children.



How do you separate being "normal" from having special needs?

It's hard. Often there is no clear dividing line between the two. Carol and Jamie, like most disabled children, are "normal" in many ways. They

like wagons and sand. They cry when they fall. They feel happy when someone hugs them. They are more like other children than different from them. Like other disabled children, however, they have some physical, emotional, or mental problem that will affect the course of their lives.

Feelings make the difference

How much their disabilities affect them will vary. Except for the few profoundly disabled children, the disability is not as important as the way children feel about themselves and the way others respond to them. For example, Jamie's disability is not a big problem to him. He accepts it and works around it. So does his friend.

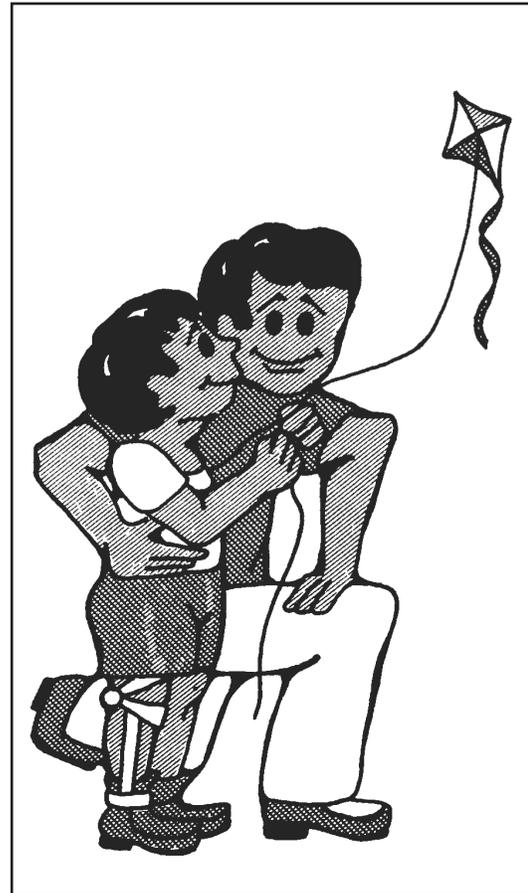
Carol and her parents, on the other hand, have let a very small disability become a real problem. It affects the way she acts with other people and how she feels about herself.

The way a parent helps a child live with his or her disability, then, is very important.

The sooner the better

Long before the baby is born, you invest your dreams and hopes in the coming child. If you suspect something is wrong, it may be hard to seek the truth.

The best thing you can do, however, is to get a diagnosis as soon as possible. Early detection of a problem can help you understand your child's needs and get special help. For instance, a child with a hearing loss may be fitted for a hearing aid. This may prevent language or behavior problems that sometimes result when a child cannot hear.



Moving on



When you are told your child has a disability, it's bound to be a shock. Suddenly, you feel different—set apart from other people. Your child seems different too. It's hard to adjust. You may begin to wonder:

- Why did this happen to me?
- Is it something I did or didn't do?
- Is it from my side of the family?
- How is this going to turn out?

Most parents of disabled children have these questions. That's why they need support. They need to resolve their own feelings before they can help their child deal with the disability. Fortunately, there are many sources of help for disabled children and their families.

So, if you have a disabled child or suspect that you may:

- Get a complete diagnosis as soon as possible.
- Be realistic about the disability, but provide the opportunities for growth every child needs.
- Treat your child as a regular member of the family.
- Seek out support groups and professional organizations for disabled children and their parents.

What can you hope for a disabled child? Some disabled children will need supervision or physical care all of their lives. A few may have to live in a special home or an institution. But a great many will become self-supporting, marry, and have children of their own.

Whatever the disability, your child needs opportunities to grow and "become," just like any child.

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H E L P I N G • C H I L D R E N • G R O W

Helping hands

Today disabled children and their families have many sources of help:

The federal government. *Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).* This program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, is a clearinghouse that responds to inquiries, focusing on federal funding for programs and legislation affecting the disabled. Contact OSERS at Rm 3006, Switzer Building, 330 "C" St. SW, Washington, DC 20202-2500, phone (202) 205-5465.

National Information Center for Children and Youth With Handicaps (NICHCY). This program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, gives information and services for disabled children, their parents, and people who work with them. They can answer specific questions about services for your child and send you information packets. All NICHCY materials are free from: NICHCY, Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013-1492, (703) 893-6061, or leave your request at 1-800-695-0285.

Your state government. The Child Development and Rehabilitation Center (CDRC) has state funding to help with special needs and equipment for disabled children. They provide early screening and diagnosis of problems for children from birth to age 21. Contact Social Services, CDRC, P.O. Box 574, Portland, OR 97207, (503) 494-8095.

Your school district. Congress has passed laws to help give disabled children educational opportunities equal to those for non-disabled children. To ensure that every disabled child receives a free and appropriate public education, an Individualized Educational Plan is drawn up to determine:

- What each child's educational needs are
- Where he or she will receive educational services
- What related services the child needs

Parents participate in and approve these plans.

Public Law 101-476, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, mandates that disabled children have appropriate school, rehabilitation, social work, and home-based services (combines PL 94-142 and PL 99-457). Public Law 101-336, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, provides civil rights protection for people with disabilities.

Find out what your state or county is doing for disabled children.

Private organizations For information on your child's disability, contact the appropriate organization(s) below:

American Diabetes Association
1701 North Beauregard St.
Alexandria, VA 22311
(703) 549-1500
www.diabetes.org

The Arc of the United States
1010 Wayne Ave., Suite 650
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 565-3842
www.thearc.org

The National Easter Seal Society
230 West Monroe St., Suite 1800
Chicago, IL 60606
(312) 726-6200
www.easterseals.com

American Heart Association
7272 Greenville Ave.
Dallas, TX 75231
(800) AHA-USA1, (800) 242-8721
www.americanheart.org

United Cerebral Palsy Association of Oregon & SW Washington, Inc.
7830 SE Foster Rd.
Portland, OR 97206
(503) 777-4167
e-mail: ucpa@ucpaorwa.org
www.ucpaorwa.org

Epilepsy Foundation of America
4351 Garden City Dr.
Landover, MD 20785
(301) 459-3700
(800) 332-1000
www.efa.org

American Foundation for the Blind
11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300
New York, NY 10001
(800) AFB-LINE, (800) 232-5463
www.afb.org

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Library Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515
www.lidaamerica.org

Muscular Dystrophy Association
3300 East Sunrise Dr.
Tucson, AZ 85718
(520) 529-2000
(800)-FIGHT-MD, (800) 344-4863
www.mdaua.org

American Speech/Language/Hearing Association
10801 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852
(800) 638-8255
www.asha.org

National Mental Health Association
2001 North Beauregard St., 12th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
(703) 684-7722
www.nmha.org

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation
1275 Mamaroneck Ave.
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 428-7100
www.marchofdimes.com

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