

Research Highlights

Topic: Positive Perceptions of Disability

Summers, J.A., Behr, S.K., & Turnbull, A.P. (1988). Positive adaptation and coping strengths of families who have children with disabilities. In G.H.S. Singer & L.K. Irvin (Eds.), *Support for caregiving families: Enabling positive adaptation to disability* (pp. 27-40). Baltimore: Brookes.

BOTTOM LINE

A thorough literature review provided clues to how families deal in a positive way with the daily emotional and practical demands placed on them as a consequence of the disability of a family member. Lower stress levels and a better self-image are possible when families look for the true cause or meaning of the disability, when they are able to gain a sense of control over their family's situation, and when they are able to dwell on positive rather than negative aspects. Support groups, education and communication for the benefit of families also help them to cope and succeed. Practitioners who understand the realities of families with children who have disabilities gain valuable insights into the lives of these families and are as a consequence better able to serve and support them.

TIPS

- Build on family's strengths in understanding how they manage stress and cope with challenges of having a child with a disability.
- Guide families to become skillful, knowledgeable and in control of their lives by providing training in problem-solving, stress-management, and communication skills.
- Recognize that families are empowered when they are at the center, and the role of the professional is as a consultant rather than as someone serving clients.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Families who adapt positively to their child with a disability accept the reality of the disability, are able to love their child for who she or he is, and recognize that the child does not need to be "fixed."

HIGHLIGHTS

cont.

- Families may be strengthened in many ways by their experience of having a child with a disability.
- Coping well may depend more on how someone views a situation than the actual situation. Families seem to cope best when they
 - ◆ are able to explain the reason why the situation is what it is.
 - ◆ find a sense of control over the situation.
 - ◆ build self-esteem and general well-being by focusing on the positive aspects of the situation and the benefits it has for their family.
- Strategies for managing the challenges of having a child with a disability include having communication and negotiation skills and making good use of effective resources such as informal and community support.
- Social support or self-help groups for family peer groups serve to
 - ◆ show people that their feelings are acceptable
 - ◆ allow comparisons with others
 - ◆ help those who are active advocates for their children with disabilities gain a better sense of empowerment.
- Parents who successfully raise their children with and without disability raise all of their children in about the same way.
- Among the positive contributions parents of children with disabilities identified were: increased happiness and love; strengthened family ties and religious faith; greater pride, accomplishment and knowledge about disability; opportunity to learn patience, tolerance, sensitivity and not taking anything for granted; opportunities for career development, personal growth, and taking control of one's life; and living life at a slower pace.

METHOD

- Literature review including empirical studies and published reviews of parent narratives and anecdotes.
- The discussion makes use of the ABCX stress theory. It applies to families with a child with disability, suggesting that a family's reaction (X) to an event (A) is made less severe by the resources available to that family (B), depending on how the family views the event (C).

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Akey, T.M., Marquis, J.G., Ross, M.E. (2000). Validation of scores on the psychological empowerment scale: A measure of empowerment for parents of children with a disability. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(3), 419-438.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS
cont.

- Behr, S.K., & Murphy, D.L. (1993). Research progress and promise: The role of perceptions in cognitive adaptation to disability. In A.P. Turnbull, J.A. Patterson, S.K. Behr, D.L. Murphy, J.G. Marquis, & M.J. Blue-Banning (Eds.), *Cognitive coping, families, and disability* (pp. 151-163). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Glidden, L.M., & Johnson, V.E. (1999). Twelve years later: Adjustment in families who adopted children with developmental disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 37, 16-24.
- Hastings, R.P., & Taunt, H.M. (2002). Positive perceptions in families of children with developmental disabilities. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 107(2), 116-127.
- Helff, C.M., & Glidden, L.M. (1998). More positive or less negative? Trends in research on adjustment of families rearing children with developmental disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 36, 457-464.
- Sandler, A.G., & Mistretta, L.A. (1998). Positive adaptation in parents of adults with disabilities. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 123-130.
- Scorgie, K., & Sobsey, D. (2000). Transformational outcomes associated with parenting children who have disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 38, 195-206.
- Turnbull, H.R., Guess, D., & Turnbull, A.P. (1988). Vox populi and Baby Doe. *Mental Retardation*, 26(3), 127-132.
- Vohs, J. (1993). On belonging: A place to stand, a gift to give. In A.P. Turnbull, J.A. Patterson, S.K. Behr, D.L. Murphy, J.G. Marquis, & M.J. Blue-Banning (Eds.), *Cognitive coping, families, and disability* (pp. 151-163). Baltimore: Brookes.

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