
Ordinary Families, Special Children offers a comprehensive survey and summary of research regarding families of children with disabilities. It includes illuminating quotes from family members as well as practical suggestions for helping families cope effectively with disabilities and “normalize” their lives. While the focus of concern of professionals has traditionally been the child with a disability, Seligman and Darling focus on family relationships and on interrelationships between the family and the community, including relations with pro-
professionals. They have effectively integrated psychological, developmental, cultural, sociological, and family systems perspectives into a coherent framework for understanding families under stress. That they have done so in a clear and readable 320 page work (including a 30 page bibliography) is impressive.

Building on a solid foundation of research and professional experience, the authors also present some very definite opinions about treatment. For example, they believe that professionals should act as advocates when necessary, should avoid blaming parents for disabilities and should help families define and achieve their own goals. They warn against assuming that a child with a disability inevitably has a pathogenic effect on the family or that difficulties in coping are necessarily caused by preexisting intrapsychic problems. In fact, they believe that a predisposition to focus on intrapsychic factors in these situations may actually lead to misunderstanding the sources of family distress such as social stigmatization and a lack of social and material supports.

The second edition of *Ordinary Families, Special Children* reflects changes that have occurred since the first edition was published in 1989. The authors have included recent research and new information about the important role of fathers, siblings, and grandparents as well as material on relevant legal and technological developments. They have updated their section on treatment with special emphasis on peer groups. They have revised a form for family self-assessment of goals, needs, and strengths so that it conforms to the requirements of Public Law 94-142 without sacrificing sensitivity to each family's unique situation. The authors are sensitive to changes in perceptions regarding disabilities, especially among the "disabled" and their families. They were so concerned that retaining the term: "special children" in the title of the second volume might be offensive that they posted their concern on several Internet lists used by families and professionals. They received over eighty responses on both sides of the issue and have included several of them in the preface.

The first chapter is devoted to a general discussion of family systems theories, social systems theories, and concepts of stress and adaptation.

"From the foregoing discussion, we have learned that families are remarkably complex and dynamic, as there are many factors that make up and impinge on family life. The family does not remain static but changes as new events occur. Also, families change as they progress through the life cycle. A contributor to family stress is disability/disease, which influences the life goals of family members. To be successful in interventions with families with children who have disabilities, professionals must be well grounded in the static and dynamic features of family life." (pp. 34–35)

The authors go on to explore the impact of the birth of a child with a disability on the family and how family reactions are, in turn, influenced by the social and cultural context, personal history, developmental phases of the family and child, and the processes of mourning and adaptation.

Discovery of the disability usually leads to a period of intense mourning. Since subsequent coping is profoundly affected by the resolution of that phase, the authors believe that professional intervention should begin then, that it should be offered not forced, and that it should be family centered and family directed.

The intensity of the reaction to the disability varies with its nature and severity and its meaning to the family which, in turn, depends on culture, values, resources, conflicting needs and pressures inside and outside the family, personal history and dynamics, and the availability of social supports. In the chapters devoted to "Effects on the Family as a System," "Effects on Siblings,"