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Effective parenting of children with special needs: A Handbook for parents, special educators, counsellors and related professionals

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Book review

Reviewed by Orim, Samuel Orim

This textbook is written as contribution or support to parents who have responsibility to nurturing children with special needs. It appreciates and reiterated that exceptionality is a norm in very society whether developed or underdeveloped consequently, parents and other stakeholders should brace up the challenges of disabilities. In the introduction, the author defines special needs children as those who deviate from the general norm of human growth and development in a significant way to the extent that they required special education services to function either in school or at home. The author notes that having special needs does not translate to being sub-human and inferior that is why policies and legislation are put in place to facilitate and increase access to quality of life through education /vocational training. Parents are seen as the first teacher of children including those with exceptionality. They should work with guidance counselors, psychologists, and special educators, medical and paraprofessionals in partnership to give a better meaning to children with special needs despite some prevailing negative attitudes, discrimination and most importantly avoid sympathy.

Structurally, the book has six chapters. The first one focus on parental reactions to the birth of a special needs child. Here the author describes the high expectations and celebrations the awaits the birth of new baby in different cultures in African and Nigeria in particular unfortunately, if the baby has disability the fidelity of the woman become questionable. In addition, emotional stress, shock and swift swing in the pendulum of expectation changes from being positive to negative. More specifically, the writer highlighted different types of parental reactions to birth of child with disability to include among others, shock and disbelief, guilt and shame, grief and sorrow, bitterness and resentment, depression and denial. Different types of parents are also discussed in the chapter are, articulate, assertive, educated, angry, submissive, ill-informed, uncaring and special needs parents. Each type of this parent has unique disposition which influence the discharge of responsibility/task of bringing up the child. The author concludes the chapter by encouraging parent to seek for support from professionals rather than looking for escape route where it does not exist. The second chapter is primarily devoted to impact of a special needs child on the family. It confirmed that family is the most affected aspect of the society because the presence of a special needs child hurls it into various crisis and conflicts among members. The writer succinctly discussed how family relationship is unexpectedly weakened by physical, emotional, and financial stress. Among effect of the child with disability on the family discussed in the chapter are, weak family ties/unity. Isolation, learned helplessness, reduction and pressure on income, sibling jealousy, social stigmatization, superstitious beliefs and explanations and very importantly marital instability. The combined effects of these unlikely keep the family ever united as it was before the arrival the child with disability.

Chapter three deals with strategies for coping with special needs child. The author notes the presence of a child with disability in this century is not just demanding but has legal

implications hence parents must exploit available opportunities for information, facilities, support network etc for services that could build capacity require for effective parenting. Coping strategies are broadly grouped into two, preventive and remedial strategies. Preventive strategies involve all possible efforts that be humanly done to prevent disability. This includes pre-marital counseling, good and professional maternal care, conduct of medical tests like amniocentesis, blood analysis, karyotyping and genetic analysis, etc. Remedial strategies help to manage a case that has happened already, according to the writer these strategies can be tailored to child and the parents. For instance, building the confidence of the child reduces the stress on the parents. Strategies articulated for the parents are namely, parental programmes and services, formation parent network for partnership, self-education, professional counseling, access to financial aids, sharing/learning from other parents experiences, strong advocacy and open mindedness.

Next chapter centers on working with families of special needs children. As complimentary effort to the aforementioned strategies the author discussed the relevance of special educator in assisting families to successfully handle all challenges. The book sees special educator as resource family should work for enriching and rewarding parenting. In assisting parents, the writer recommended and highlighted the following roles of special educator; help parents to understand the nature and cause(s) of the child's disability, advice and help parents to access relevant services, provide direct intervention for the family, assist the family to positively adjust to the reality of the disability, and help them to understand the child. To ensure that the specialist work successful with the family, it is reiterated that special educator should update knowledge on current, global and evidenced based interventions because failure will further complicate the family challenge which could lead to learned helplessness.

In chapter five, the author advocated for what is called ring service (early identification, intervention and care). The provision of these services depends on how fast parents learn about the child's disability through self-education and other coping strategies discussed in the book. She suggested that parents should make concerted and focused efforts in learning about disability to be able to make observations and layman's referral. On intervention and care the writer said it should be based on Chinese proverb, "as the twig is bent, so the tree inclined" which means the needs of the child determined the intervention/care; this is the same thing as individualization principles in special education. The chapter stressed that meeting all round needs of the child should be the target of the parents and other stakeholders that is why various organizations such National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Centre (NECTAC), Self-help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH) web site /contact are provided for possible assistance where necessary.

The last chapter emphasizes the need for partnership among professionals and organizations. The author mentioned that no profession or professional no matter how skilled can single handedly and adequately meet needs of child with special with disability. Ethics of professional collaboration, role and the need for parent-professional partnership as well relationship are highlighted. The book concludes that the task of parenting children with special is quite

challenging, amorous that only patient, determined, loving, assertive and tolerant parents can succeed.