

PARENTS & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEED

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ABSTRACT

The children with special needs are the integral part of society. But deviated form the normal with reference to education & social adjustment. The experience of disability can be explored by perspective of social participation and by looking at the whole family experience in children with special need. It is valuable to look after the inter-personal experience of disability with reference to possible related consequences for childhood experience and personal development, rather than perceiving barriers or environmental features. There is therefore a significant need focusing on children's participation in their families and within their local communities.

Another important concern is the support families require to ensure that children with special need and their sibling and parents can have and maintain a quality of family life without vulnerability to social exclusion. This paper is an attempt to explain the experience of disabling barriers and how this can be challenged and removed from the community & society level.

Key Words : Disabled, Children, Parental Involvement, Community Involvement, Social Sensitization.

Introduction

Family is the first unit of the society. Mother is the teacher to her child. Initial development of behavior such as sitting, walking, eating, asking for things needed begins at home. This learning depends on the perception and the attitude of parents toward their child. The parent's behavior affects development of a sense of security in a child which in turn affects later learning. The visually impair child's perception of parental behavior is important as it determines acceptance first in the neighborhood, in the community at large. In a developing country like, India education of children with special need is provided through education in special school, integrated education and also through inclusive education. Where integrated/ inclusive education strategies are adopted, children remain with their families and they are a part of all the social, educational cultural and economic activities of the community.

In such programs, the local resource has to be used optimally to provide maximum benefit for the children with special need. Available human resources should be utilized properly for the all round development of children with special need. It is therefore necessary to sensitize the family members and the members of the community so that they may promote education of the visually impaired children and youth. The primary goal of habilitation and rehabilitation of children and adults with special need can be achieved only when the community participation is ensures at all level of educational development, viz., physical, educational, functional, emotional, cognitive, social and societal level. Government and non-government organizations conduct a number of programs aimed at sensitizing the parents and the community member toward problems faced by the children with special need and youth. They also create awareness but how the needs of these people can be met. For example, the National association for the blind, in India promotes itinerant model of integrated education in rural communities in a big way.

Visually impaired children stay in their homes and efforts are made towards integrating them in the social, educational and cultural activities of the community. For this purpose, need-based programmes are essential to educate these members about the roles they are expected to play in fostering healthy development of these children.

Parental involvement in development of special need children :

Disability, in general, evokes the emotional sympathy of the public. For an instance Blindness in a person has impact on education, physical independence, emotional stability, intellectual and social development, etc. As experienced by many visually disabled people all over world, the attitude towards blindness is the hardest thing to bear. Normal people in daily life have limited contact with visually disabled persons and therefore their opinion regarding the life of being special need is mostly stereotype. The attitude is too general. People carry the attitude which they develop with limits exposure to one or two visually disabled people and thus generalize it to the entire population. We come across stereotype attitude like "Blind are beggars", "Blind people have more concentration", "All blind people are musicians". "Blind people have god given abilities", etc. These may be true in case of particular individuals, but need not hold good for all children with special need. There are very few people who truly regard children with special need as individuals. This stereotype attitude has direct relation with the family acceptance or rejection of visually disabled people.

Needs for Parents Involvement :

Parents are the most important people in the life of the life of the sighted child as also that of the children with special need. The habilitation and/ or rehabilitation of the children with special need should, in fact, start from the family. The parents are generally ignorant about implications of blindness on the personality development of the child. Early blindness in particular has a lot of effect on the personality development of the child. Parents can play a significant role

in the life process of the non-seeing child. In most of the places, parents also like to render maximum assistance to the children with special need. But their unawareness of the right methodology in the treatment of such children keeps them away from providing possible assistance. This is the time for the schools and organizations working for the visually disabled to offer guidance and counseling programmes to the families of these children. It is therefore very evident that the parents of these children should be involved in planning the educational programmes for them. In doing so, the parents would be able to appreciate their role in assisting the child to get ready for this total habilitation and/or rehabilitation.

Providing Opportunities at Home :

It is generally thought that family is the foremost non-formal agency in the rehabilitation process of disabled children. But in practice, this is not a reality. The reasons are manifold.

1. By having a child with special need, parents acquire an emotional shock and it takes time to overcome such a shock which leads to dejection. Dejected parents have little faith in the independence of the child and do not sustain the prolonged efforts in developing the skills of the child. The main fact is that the results in the children with special need are not immediate and therefore parents lose interest.
2. Unawareness of the implications of disability on the personality development of the children with special need is detrimental to the provision of appropriate service at appropriate times. As children with special need services at the right time, absence of this facility retards them further which cannot be bridged easily at a later stage.
3. Poverty of low economic condition is another factor which adversely affects the opportunities for disabled children. Most of the children belong to families in rural areas and poor parents do not have resources and manpower to take care of the disabled individuals. The parents have little time to attend to the disabled child thus neglecting him or her.
4. Some families over-protect the disabled child, thus restricting many experiences of life around him.

Help in Overcoming Deprivations :

It can be observed that teachers of children with special need start with readiness activities for teaching any skill to the child. The importance of pre requisite skills is very well understood. In schools, teachers spend considerable time in teaching the pre requisite skills. Sometimes, it takes six months, one year, two years, depending upon the abilities of the child. Moreover, children may find it difficult when they are expected to acquire those pre-requisite skills at a later stage. For example, the child who likes to develop proper eating habits should possess proper and efficient finger dexterity skills. These skills which are expected to be developed before the age of two would be a little difficult for the child to learn at the age of two enormous practice is therefore necessary for undoing many unwanted behaviours which have already been acquired by

the child for just satisfying his then needs. If parents of visually disabled children understand this factor and cooperate with the teachers, natural growth would not be far away from the non-seeing child. The list below describes the activities in which parents would be of more help to visually disabled children.

Like normal children, the visually disabled child also needs the warmth from his/her parents, In the early days, if the parents are dejected and the experiences to the child are denied, the child would not be realizing the loss immediately. The after-effects of these are serious. Parents should be oriented by the teachers to have optimistic views about the development of the child. This very feeling helps the child to maintain emotional stability during his schooling. First of all, parents should talk to the child freely and enable him or her to get out of fear in his ability to express. The expressive skills of the child could be developed in the family. Tactual and auditory discriminations have great relevance to the education of the visually disabled child. This orientation need not wait till the child is admitted in the school. The parents should allow the child to explore the objects in the environment and very often he should allow the child to explore the objects in the environment and very often he should be encouraged to see the likenesses and differences.

The child should be allowed by the parents to touch and feel the objects. Parents should be apprised with the importance of this skill for the education of the child. Through auditory clues, the child should be made to discriminate between the sounds and associate words or object or activity to such sounds. This development would help the child to fare better in his orientation skills. The family members can orient the child to the environment. The orientation should start from home. The child should be made aware of the different locations of objects inside the house. The child will be able to develop a mental picture and move freely without much dependence on others. Parents and family members should be told that this would assist the child in having better concepts regarding the position, direction and distance in reading and environment tactually. When these skills are developed at home, the teacher can straightaway use tactile maps, etc., for teaching the child.

Daily living skills ought to be taught by the family. The learning at home is so natural and the teaching by the teacher in a simulating environment may not be of more value for the child. In general, parents are scared to allow visually disabled children to use electrical, fire, etc., but it should be borne in mind that without these experiences, the life of the child would be incomplete. Mother have to play a big role in developing these skills. The household activities are very vital for visually disabled girls and boys on any account natural learning would not be possible in school. Home is the right venue for this to happen and the mother is the best teacher to teach those skills. The adjustment of the visually disabled child to the society starts with his ability to adjust to his own family members. The child brought up with affection and care in the least restrictive environment would be able to cope up better with the sighted world. This practice at home makes him/her behave better in society

too. Therefore, the family shapes the social integration of the child more than the formal school.

Involving Parents in Educational Programmes :

1. Acceptance of Responsibility :

Education begins in the cradle, continues through life and is broader, deeper and richer than "academic" training. Parents should play a significant role in the educational programme for children with special need. They should participate in it economically as well as socially. This should make them realize their responsibilities in the making up for the child. Parents are carried by some misconceptions which are necessarily to be overcome through right type of educational programme.

- a. Parents think that the child is not going to be a productive member of the family and is, therefore, a liability. This generates in them a feeling that the investment on the children with special need would go waste. This misconception should be overcome.
- b. There is a common trend among the parents of children with special need to expect everything free. It is true that children with special need should get all possible help from various agencies for their upliftment, but at the same time, the contribution of the parents is also expected for their education, etc.

2. Parent-Teacher Association :

It is very pitiable to notice that there is inadequate teacher-parent consultation in the education of the visually disabled. Parent-teacher meeting should be conducted often for the implementation of the programme for disabled children. The parents should be encouraged to attend these meetings and due weight must be given to their suggestions. In these meetings.

- a. the development of children with special need should be discussed and the comments of the parents should be sought.
- b. The teacher should appraise the potentialities of children with special need and explain the role of the parents and other siblings of the family in raising that child;
- c. The teachers should appraise the parents with what to expect out of their children who are special need at different ages.
- d. Parents of general children should be asked to observe the activities performed by children with special need and the comradeship developed between the general children.

Hence the Parent-teacher Association become the social agency and the parents of both general and children with special need become the agents in changing the attitudes of the public towards disability.

3. Orientation for Parents of Disabled Children :

Parents should compulsorily be oriented to the educational and other implication of disability. They must be associated with the teachers in planning the skills development programme for the children. Most of the basic skills can be developed by the parents with the guidance of the teacher. In case of a visually impaired child who studies, one member of the family can be encouraged to learn Braille in order to assist the child in a better way.

- a. Parents can serve as counselors for children with special need.
- b. They can help the teachers to identify children with special need in the villages for school placement.
- c. They can act as para-professionals for educating children with special need, especially in the non-academic areas.
- d. They can act as social agents in working with Government agencies for claiming the rights of children with special need.
- e. They can talk to the employers for employing children with special need in their factories.
- f. They can describe the success of children with special need as well as their problems through mass media for educating the public on matters of blindness.
- g. They can explain the problems of children with special need encounter at home so that the teacher preparation programmes can expose the student-teachers to those problems and make them better teachers of children with special need.

Social Sensitization and Awareness Building :

A part from the village level workers, there are others like the education officer, school inspectors, local government authorities such as Child Development Project Officers, Block Development Officers (BDOs) Transport Officials, Health Officials, local non-governmental organizations like service clubs and others are to be sensitized to the specific needs of visually impaired children. Social sensitization programs need to be organized to bring together officials of various departments and the stakeholders to discuss about the needs of the visually impaired and to help them realize the role of each department in facilitating education of the disabled children. This kind of awareness and sensitization of the government department officials, service clubs and the community in general is vital for the growth and sustain ability of all programmes aimed at facilitating the education, training and the rehabilitation of the children with special need and youth. This activity, in turn, promotes advocacy.

CONCLUSION :

It is crucial, therefore, to involve members of the community as partners in education. The members must be trained to acquaint themselves with the needs, strengths and limitations of children with special need. Their help should be sought in meeting the social, educational, economic and personal needs of involvement is sought at different levels of program implementation.

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