

Dear Parents,

You are the parents of an exceptional child. We are, too, and we've been working on this handbook in an effort to develop a tool which you can hang on to as you begin to manage the care and development of your child.

Raising children is a hard job. When you have a child with a handicap of any kind, you are going to be faced with many important issues in dealing with the care of your child. There are some 300,000 infants born every year with some type of birth defect. There are also many children who become the victims of trauma. This certainly means that you are not alone. You will need immense energy, self-knowledge and dedication as a parent. You will learn a lot about yourself - mainly, that you are strong and you can endure. Reactions of anger, fear, guilt, denial and grief are all very normal at this time. Don't ever hesitate to ask for help.

Let us share a few basic hints with you:

1. Always be aware that you as parents are, in fact, case managers of your child's care.
2. Trust your instincts when it comes to the care of your child.
3. Learn to be assertive.

This is advice from parents who have had many experiences. Here are some personal notes:

Mitzi: Although there will be times you'll feel you can't go on, there will also be times of happiness, fun and laughter. The sad tears you cry now will be happy tears as this special child of yours will bring a whole new meaning to your life. You will cherish those smiles and hugs. This little human being loves, needs and depends on you, and will complete your life in ways you never dreamed possible.

I sincerely hope you find this handbook useful many times; but, I'm sure that if even just once you may find some guidance and comfort, we will all feel richly rewarded. I wish you well.

Christine: As I was watching George Bush's inauguration with my five year old son, he said, "Mommy, I don't like Mrs. Bush's white hair." "Well," I answered, "I read a story about her, and it said her hair turned white when her little girl was very sick and died." My son thought this over for several minutes and asked, "Mommy, if Mrs. Bush gets very very happy now will her hair turn brown again?"

"No, Eric, some things cannot be changed."

Your life is changed now too. Everything is quite different. Some things are more difficult and some things are more special. Grow with all of this. Don't be afraid to ask for help in this management role. It is a job that can be learned. It can be done!

In working on this handbook our group came across this quote from Kahlil Gibran:

The deeper that sorrow carves in your being, the more joy you can contain.

May your joy sustain you!

With great respect and love, we are
Mitzi Adams, mother of Trevor
Shari and Scott Duros, parents of Staci and Scott
Christine Felde, mother of Kara
Dixie Gasparini, mother of Ashley