DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 506 EC 180 914

TITLE	Being at Ease with Handicapped Children. 1984 Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, Reston, Va.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	84
CONTRACT	400-81-0031
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091 (one free copy).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Attitude Change; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Mainstreaming; Normalization (Handicapped); *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The digest focuses on being comfortable around handicapped children and offers suggestions for classroom teachers working with mainstreamed handicapped students. The importance of treating the child as normally as possible is emphasized. Questions of pity are dealt with. Teachers are urged to handle children's frustrations and accomplishments in normal ways; i.e., to provide realistic praise and reinforcement appropriate to the achievement. The question of providing too much help in some instances is raised. Complicating effects of speech and language problems are noted, as are special accommodations for children with specific disabilities (visual impairments, hearing impairments/deafness, mental retardation, and orthopedic impairments). A list of resources available from The Council for Exceptional Children concludes the digest. (CL)

ERIC®
Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children
1920 Association Drive,
Reston, Virginia 22091

1984
DIGEST

BEING AT EASE WITH HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

WHAT TO FOCUS ON?

For years handicapped people have been segregated from the rest of society as if they were truly different from non-handicapped people. Because of such federal legislation as Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973, individuals who have handicaps are being integrated into the mainstream of education, employment, and community activities. It is sad that attitudes cannot be legislated too, but fears and anxieties toward those who are different cannot be decreed illegal. It is hoped that the present generation, growing up in situations where people with handicaps are a natural part of school and community life will put to rest forever the notion that people with handicaps are "different."

However, for those people who have never known a handicapped person, and are suddenly faced with the new experience of having a disabled child in their classroom, scout troop, or community activity, it helps to focus on the fact that a child with a handicap is a child first. A child with a handicap has many attributes, such as brown hair, brown eyes, a turned up nose, an inability to hear, and so forth. By thinking of a child's disability as just one of his many characteristics, the anxiety often anticipated when a youngster with a handicap is scheduled to join a program can be greatly reduced.

WHAT SPECIAL TREATMENT SHOULD BE GIVEN?

Children with handicaps need to be treated, as much as possible, like any other child. It is unfair to the child when he or she is not allowed to compete. The world at large is mainly inhabited by people with the ability to see, to hear, to speak, and to move about freely. Children with handicaps need to practice meeting the standards of the "normal" world while they are growing up so they can gain confidence and independence.

HOW CAN ONE HELP BUT FEEL SORRY FOR CHILDREN WITH HANDICAPS?

If you perceive the disabled child as someone to be pitied, someone from whom little should be expected or demanded, probably little will come. If, on the other hand, you expect the child to succeed and grow, to learn to act independently, then chances are good that the child will become a successful, growing, independent student.

HOW SHOULD FRUSTRATIONS OR TEMPER TANTRUMS BE HANDLED?

Such problems should be handled the same way they would be handled if the child did not have a handicap. It is easy to assume that disabled people exist in a continuous state of frustration. This is not true. Of course disabled children may feel frustrated at times. These frustrations should be handled with good sense, remembering that a certain amount of frustration is healthy and promotes growth but that too much frustration can be defeating.

HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND TO EVERYDAY ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

It is a joy to see a child with a handicap able to do the same things that other children do, such as read, play on the jungle gym, or go through the lunch line. It is important, however, to distinguish between accomplishments that are attained with about the same degree of effort that is required from most children, and those accomplishments that really represent a challenge to the handicapped child. If people react to ordinary accomplishments that were not particularly difficult to attain as if they were extraordinary, children can develop unrealistic views of themselves—either an inflated view of their capabilities and accomplishments, based on the continual amazement elicited from others, or a deflated view, based on the obviously limited expectations others hold for children with handicaps On the other hand, encouragement and reinforcement should be expressed when youngsters accomplish tasks made difficult by their specific disabilities, for example, dressing for a child with cerebral palsy.

HOW MUCH HELP SHOULD BE GIVEN?

One of the benefits of mainstreaming is that children can help their disabled classmates. But too much help can become a

hindrance if it robs the child of opportunities to learn and practice independence. Generally if a child cannot handle some procedure or material, she or he should be taught how to do it if at all possible.

DO CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS ALSO HAVE PROBLEMS IN THINKING?

One disability that people have trouble coping with involves speech and language. Whether the communication impairment results from a physical disability such as cerebral palsy or a speech handicap such as stuttering, the listener tends to anticipate what the disabled person is trying to say and not allow the person the time she or he needs to communicate. It is easy to mistakenly perceive people who have severe communication disabilities as also having impaired intelligence, because of their simple, poorly articulated speech. It is a natural tendency to respond to this kind of language pattern with a simplification of your own speech. This should be avoided. Individuals who have problems expressing themselves, unless they are also hearing impaired, generally have no problem understanding normal, complex language.

ISN'T THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

There are special considerations that can be helpful to children with specific disabilities. For example, keep in mind that children who have visual impairments depend on what they hear and touch to bring them information about their surroundings. Provide opportunities for visually impaired children to handle things that children with normal vision can simply look at. It is also helpful to describe new people, things, and events as they come into the child's environment. Allow time for the child to ask questions about what is going on.

Children who have hearing impairments or who are deaf must depend on sight for most of their knowledge. Make sure the hearing impaired child can see the face of whoever is speaking, since many cues are picked up through lipreading and facial expression. Arrange for seating near the teacher or leader. Do not assume that a youngster understands you just because you have his or her attention. Ask whether you have been understood.

Children who have a mental retardation problem can get along better when directions are short and clearly stated. Break down tasks into a series of steps that can be completed in sequence. Maintain a routine, teach new procedures, and give time for practice.

Youngsters with orthopedic impairments should be asked whether they need help and, if so, what kind. Do not assume the child needs more help than he asks for.

RESOURCES

Available from The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091.

Attitudes and Attitude Change in Special Education. Theory and Practice, Reginald L. Jones, Editor. (1984) The definitive text in attitude research and change in special education. Documents research on how people feel toward various handicapping conditions. Critiques existing research methodology. No. 260. ISBN 0-86586-137-4. CEC/ERIC ($20.00)

Everybody Counts! A Workshop Manual to Increase Awareness of Handicapped People, M. J. Ward, R. N. Arkell, H. G. Dahl, and J. H. Wise. (1979). A workshop designed to provide simulation experiences and assist groups toward a fuller understanding of the needs of disabled individuals. 25 simulation activities that allow participants to feel what it is like to be disabled. A tape cassette, "An Unfair Hearing Test," is also included. No. 189. 80pp. Manual and tape cassette. ISBN 0-86586-027-0. ($14.95)

Handicapism and Equal Opportunity: Teaching about the Disabled in Social Studies, James K. Shaver and Charles K. Curtis. (1981). Designed as a "how to" manual, ready for immediate use at junior and senior high levels. Discusses the effects of "handicapism", depriving disabled people of opportunities for participation in the political, economic, and social life of society. Contains numerous instructional suggestions and activities to help nondisabled students understand the "normal" qualities of handicapped people. Relates handicapism to employment, education, health, housing, accessibility, and social issues. No. 272. 85pp. ISBN 0-939068-01-X. ($7.50)

Reflections on Growing Up Disabled, Reginald L. Jones, Editor. (1983). A unique sharing of the childhood feelings, insights, and self perceptions of disabled people. Frustrations related to learning and socialization are expressed. An invaluable aid in gaining insight into the problems, fears, and triumphs of handicapped students. No. 258. 112pp. ISBN 0-86586-134-X. CEC/ERIC ($7.50)

Social Environment of the Schools, Maynard C. Reynolds, Editor. (1980). A "how to" book dealing with the social aspects of mainstreaming. No. 206. 104pp. ISBN 0-86586-103-X. CEC/ERIC ($4.50)

Studies of Attitudes toward the Handicapped: 1980-1984. A computer search reprint containing approximately 100 abstracts. No. 535. 1984. $10.00.

Note: Much of the information in this fact sheet was based on "Questions Teachers Ask," a chapter in the publication, *Supporting Visually Impaired Students in the Mainstream*, by Glenda J. Martin and Mollie Hoben, (1977). No. 159. 73pp. ISBN 0-86586-079-3 ($5.00)

The National Institute of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. NIE-400-81-0031. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.