



The final chapter is a plea for therapists to consider incest revelations as valid unless there is strong evidence to the contrary. Moreover, the authors stress that victims who are prepared to acknowledge their problems and to work on the traumatic dynamics and effects of their experiences can be helped with psychotherapeutic techniques such as: Group Therapy, Individual Therapy, Psycho-drama and occasionally Family Therapy.

Despite the desperate and depressing cases presented throughout the book, the authors manage to conclude on a fairly positive note for many family members who have experienced incest in the past. They courageously open up a previously taboo area of human relations to the general public and to many members of the welfare professions who have often become overwhelmed when confronted with revelations of incest. The style is readable and I can see this book becoming a useful tool in supportive incest groups.

One of my major criticisms is that the book is psychodynamically oriented and therefore not geared to social change. It mainly looks at helping people who are suffering the effects of incest which occurred some time ago and who are amenable to psychotherapeutic techniques. Apart from an incidental insight (that removing a victim from the incestuous family only aggravates her feeling of shame and guilt because she sees this action as punishment) there is no light thrown on how to or even whether to intervene at the time of incest.

There is a significant gap in the available literature regarding the management and prevention of current incestuous situations.

While I appreciate the enormous complexity and impact of this problem perhaps the authors, with their obvious expertise and abundance of case material, could have offered some suggestions in this area.

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Parents and Mentally Handicapped Children by Charles Hannam. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth. 1975. 175pp. \$3.95.

Charles Hannam is an educator as well as the father of three boys, the eldest of whom is intellectually disabled. In this book he tells frankly about he feels towards his disabled son. It is refreshing because he concentrates on his reactions as a father and focuses on how his son's disability affected his life and self image. It is not common to hear the father's side of the story. If he had limited himself to telling his own tale the book would have been exceptional for its starkly unsentimental honesty; unfortunately, he tries to do more and ultimately fails. He tries to write a researched investigation and to collect portraits of families as well as tell his story. The result is an incohesive mish mash.

The book begins with an anecdote about the unreasoning opposition to a proposed hostel for intellectually disabled adolescents. This story serves as an illustration of the community's attitudes towards retarded people, but it is told out of context and is badly placed. If I hadn't been committed to read and review the book I would have put it down then and there.

The author's own story is much more interesting, and it was worth persevering to read his exceptionally candid account of his feelings about his son. He admits that he hasn't coped very well with his son, and he articulates some of his ambivalence towards his son's disability. His feelings are common to many parents of disabled children — feelings of guilt, failure, anger, resentment, disappointment, despair and feelings of wanting to kill the child.

"I had been present at the birth — a tremendous experience... I was terribly elated and excited at that time. We had done it, a boy, immortality achieved! ... Now I wanted to kill him and it was a very frightening thing even to think about. Here was I devoting my life to the problems of educating children of all abilities, having campaigned for the abolition

of the death penalty in the past and the moment my own child did not come up to my expectations I was ready to reject him and even prepared to consider killing him".

He talks about other people's reactions to his child's disability. Instead of support and practical help, he felt victim of the "aggressive sympathy of do-gooders" armed with tactless, well intentioned remarks like "Well, he'll never grow up and leave you" and later "It's marvellous how you cope!" but never, "let me take David for a while and give you a break".

He admits that he was not an easy person to help and that, although he seemed to cope, inside he was a seething mass of rage and aggression. He talks about his feelings towards his son and it is obvious that he never really worked through his initial reaction to come to accept his son and his disability. Disability looms large in the book, in fact it tends to overshadow the personality and humanity of the disabled person. The author consistently uses the term "mongol" and describes his son as a "mongol". He justifies this by saying that the term "mongol" is easily understood. This may be so in England and, although he argues that changing names doesn't change attitudes, I feel the connotations implicit in the term "mongol" are so negative that the alternative term "Down's Syndrome" is much more preferable. Its use indicates a change in attitude and is anyway more precise.

His son's disability seems to prevent any closeness between father and son. Mr. Hannam can't accept his son as a person who is disabled, rather he is forever doomed to be "a mongol".

David is considered a drag, a burden. The author is honest about his dislike of his son. David's behaviour grates on his nerves. For instance, David liked to dangle a coloured cylinder from a piece of rope.

"I hated this dangling activity, it was completely harmless but its very pointlessness underlined the limited range of his ability, a constant and painful reminder of the old pain and disappointment... we condoned the dangling because it would have been



cruel to stop him and we would have had to found alternative activities for him."

His reaction to the dangling activity best sums up his ambivalence towards his son. The rare moments of pleasure are contrasted with the "clumsy, monotonous tedium" of his company.

We learn a lot about the tedium, about how he would try to sit as far away as possible from David at dinner, how he dreaded the clumsy tread of his son on the stairs, how he longed for the school bus to pick up David in the mornings and how he dreaded its return in the afternoons. He does admit that perhaps he may have been at fault, in part, for their poor relationship.

"A few evenings ago I was thinking again that I could not stand his stupid face; thank God he was going to hospital for three months — if only they would keep him for good. Then David held out his hand to me and we sat hand in hand and I realised that his face isn't stupid all the time, he can smile warmly and he only looks stupid when he's anxious, and I often make him anxious".

He admits that he was never able to forgive David for being disabled. After his son is admitted to a residential institution he says that he is probably happier than with his family with whom "he led a static life conscious no doubt of rejection and exclusion". I can admire Mr. Hannam's stark honesty and while I understand and recognise many of his feelings I don't admire them. As his younger son said "It's harder for mummy

and daddy; they don't understand David."

I wonder why he wrote the book, which paints such a negative picture of life with a disabled child. Perhaps he wanted to shock people into an awareness of how hard life can be; but by emphasising the problems, almost to the exclusion of the good points, he paints a distorted picture and implies that life with a retarded child must necessarily be very grim.

The remaining chapters discuss different aspects of life with a disabled child; the effect of family life, how to cope with other people, discipline, other children in the family, and when the child grows up. These chapters are composed of snippets of conversation with several parents interspersed with his own observations. Each chapter is followed by a list of recommendations. His story sets the tone of the book; all the families described "coping" with their disabled children, but none of them seem to have come to terms with their child's disability. One woman describes living with her son as like having a little dog around the place!

Most of what he says, however, does make sense. There is a great need for more and more appropriate support for the families of disabled children. If, as he suggests, there were parent support groups, appropriate child care, early education, adequate financial support, family relief schemes, home help and appropriately supported group homes for intellectually disabled adults, life with a disabled child would be much

easier.

The whole thrust of the book is that life would be much easier if parents could "liberate themselves from the burden" of having an intellectually disabled child. Perhaps a more positive approach would be that the community should take responsibility for those of us who are disabled, and, therefore, support families and parents of disabled people. Life with an intellectually disabled child isn't all bad, but it could be easier.

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Board member of STAR Victorian
Association for Retarded Citizens.
Her two year old daughter Bridget is
multiply disabled.*

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Many of these books will be reviewed in forthcoming issues.

Furneaux, Barbara. *The Special Child*. Penguin, 1981. 3rd edition. 269 pp. \$6.95.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Lost in Care. Planning and Review in Out of Home Care*. 92 pp.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Voluntarism and Care*. 42 pp.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Who Pays for Care?* 44 pp.
Rutter, M. *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*. Penguin, 1981. 2nd edition. 285 pp. \$5.95.
Schrag, Peter and Divoky, Diane. *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child and Other Means of Child Control*. Penguin, 1981. 281 pp. \$7.95.