

## Book Review: Married With Special Needs Children

Contributed by Daniel Werges, MSW

Book review of Married With Special Needs Children. Reviewed by Daniel Werges.

Marshak, L.E., & Prezant, Fran P. (2007). Married with special-needs children. A couples' guide to keeping connected. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House. 296 pages, \$24.95 paperback

Married with Special-Needs Children: A Couples' Guide to Keeping Connected is an excellent, comprehensive, and well informed resource for couples who have children with disabilities. The danger of such a book is that it could focus only on the negative and individual aspects of disability. While disability can often be the source of stress in families and marriages, the stereotype of inevitable divorce is dispelled in the introduction, in which parents report on healthy and lasting marriages.

The strength of this guide lies in the authors' personal experiences with raising children with disabilities in healthy marriages and their professional experiences with supporting other parents and couples who have children with special needs. Nearly every page features quotes from parents about their struggles and successes in relation to their marriages and families. These quotes have been collected from hundreds of individuals through questionnaires and interviews. The book is therefore a useful resource for people in various situations and manages well to capture the diverse and complex experiences of disability in families.

The book is organized into fifteen chapters, which address not only foundations of a good marriage, communication, sexual intimacy, and dealing with marital troubles, but also provide practical advice on mastering everyday problems and using supports outside of the nuclear family. The rich and informative chapters are supplemented by appendices with additional advice from parents, a resource list of disability related organizations, and a suggested reading list.

Married with Special Needs Children is clearly a useful resource for couples who are confronted with the task of raising a disabled child and those who struggle to maintain a healthy relationship. In addition, it is valuable for social work practitioners who support families with special needs children, as it gives insight into the challenging and also positive experiences of so many wives and husbands.

The book is also useful for social work students, educators, and practitioners, as different chapters speak to various modes of social work practice, including individual and family therapy and mutual aid and peer support groups. A number of examples also show the potential need for community organizing or political social work practices. Furthermore, social workers are reminded that much still needs to be done on a societal level to improve services and to change attitudes toward disability.

Overall, the authors have created a practical, easy-to-read, and inspirational guide for other parents of children with disabilities. Considering the high divorce rate in society in general, many of the suggestions and strategies outlined in this book could be useful for any couple faced with marital challenges. The authors show the importance of nurturing marriages to help couples cope with the stressors of raising children with special needs. The book also demonstrates that it takes more than two parents to raise a child with a significant disability, and that it is important to make use of outside supports. This advice seems reminiscent of the old African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child."

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