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How does it feel to be parents of a special child? Child is a blessing for the parents but can it become a burden for them? Such may be the case for parents having special children. Fortunate are the parents who are blessed with normal and sane children.

A special child has many names in our society. He may be called as 'exceptional', 'mentally retarded', 'disabled', 'handicapped', 'abnormal', 'autistic' etc. However, in this article the term: special child includes all kinds of abnormalities be it mental or physical.

A special child may be defined as being deprived of normal strength or power and made unfit resulting from a disability. It may be a mental condition (autism) characterized by complete self-absorption and a reduced ability to respond to or communicate with the outside world.

Parenthood is an awesome responsibility and parenting any child requires tremendous physical and emotional energy. All parents share a great deal in common. However, parents of special children sometimes experience added stress caused

by a child's physical, emotional and financial demands.

Parents living with a special child face numerous problems in our society, which responds discriminatory to such children. People look down upon these children and they are not accepted as active members of the society. The negative attitude of the society and relatives makes it even more difficult for the parents of such children and adds to their anxiety.

It has been generally observed that parents of handicapped children have to go through a lot of psychological and emotional problems. After suffering the initial shock of child's disability, parents often experience intense feelings of sadness, anger and anxiety. This leads to a continuous feeling of helplessness, dejection and embarrassment. Most of the parents suffer from guilt feelings, shame and fear of stigmatization. They usually hide such children and hesitate to take them out along with them as they think that people

would ridicule and make fun of them.

"Our movement in social circles has become limited as we don't want to expose ourselves to others", said Mr. and Mrs. Amer Saeen, who have an autistic child. Even the most educated parents are reluctant to take their children to social gatherings as they are afraid to answer the questions propping in other people's minds regarding their child.

In contrast to this attitude, we also come across the heart rending attitude of parents who bestow their love and care equally to their special child and the other normal children. Their happiness and content lies in God's will.

One such father of an abnormal child, Anwar Ali, said, "We have stoically accepted our handicapped child. We know that we are the only ones to take care of him and we are more concerned about his future than our other children".

Such children are relatively un-responsive to stimulation

from their parents. They cannot be commanded or made to understand a thing, which makes it even more difficult for the parents to carry or interact with them. Such parents have to take extra care of their children i.e. 24 hours a day they have to be on a standby. Feeding, hygiene and clothing of these children is also a big concern for such parents.

Most parents are deeply concerned about the well-being and safety of their children and are afraid that if left to their own, the children may harm themselves. Such parents have a great sense of insecurity and are much concerned about their child's guardian after them.

These children have special needs and requirements, which are usually very costly. Excellent institutional care that provides physical therapies, social programmes and personal contact is too often expensive for the parents to afford.

Mr. Naeem, who is a businessman by profession, admits

that he spends more than Rs.30,000 on his special child's psychoanalysis and special training course. The financially weak parents, on the other hand, cannot even provide adequate facilities for their special children.

Working parents are also unable to pay proper attention to such children. Such parents live under more stress and find it more difficult to devote time and energy to working on behalf of their children.

Parents of special children are confronted with the biggest challenge of their lives i.e. how to choose a life partner for their children. They are also aware of the indifference of the society to provide them with adequate jobs and facilities.

Parents may also have to deal with the problem of constantly trying to protect their children from inferiority complex. A special child may feel himself misfit in a society of healthy and competitive people.

Some parents claim that the birth of their special child actu-

ally have some un-anticipated positive results. Some parents have become more aware of the social and moral issues. Moreover, some parents believe that the birth of their disabled child has brought the family closer to each other while in many cases; it has resulted into the breakdown of marital relationship.

Parents of such exceptional children should recognize the fact that they are special parents. God has chosen them to be 'special parents' of 'special children', which need special affection and care. The attitude of the society should be changed; such parents need to be encouraged than being sympathized, as they are 'brave parents' who have been given such a daunting task by God. 'Special children' should not be looked down upon and burden on the society. The mere acceptance of the inevitability relieves the parents of many other psychological hindrances.

Let us pray to God that if He chooses us as the selected parents of His special human beings, He may also give us the moral courage to rise up to the occasion and fulfill wholeheartedly the duties of being the special parents.

Parenting a special child