

Your Child Is Slow



Your child may learn more slowly than others. This is not necessarily a sign that he is below normal in intelligence. Sometimes a child who is mentally normal is kept from doing his best by difficulties that are physical or emotional. But it is true that slowness in learning may be an indication that your child has definite mental limitations.

If there is serious doubt about the progress of your child, he should be given a thorough clinical examination. This service is available at little or no cost at mental hygiene clinics. (A directory of clinics available for this purpose can be procured from the National Association for Mental Health.) The results of such an examination will be kept confidential, and the clinic may offer advice which will help you make plans for your child.

If the examination shows that your child is handicapped mentally, this little booklet will help you to understand him, so that you can help him make the best of the abilities he has.

CAN MY CHILD GO TO SCHOOL?

If your child is mentally deficient (feebleminded) there will be a definite limit to what he can do. He will not be able to compete with children his own age, and it is unreasonable to expect him to do so.

Whether he should go to school depends on his ability. If he is a high-grade mentally deficient child, he may learn manual arts in special classes. If he is in the middle grade, he can perhaps go through the third grade in school. Schools as a rule are not equipped to deal with children who are low-grade. Talk this problem over with the principal of the school and the clinic. They will help you arrange for the proper placement of your child.

Don't try to keep your child in school beyond the point where he can learn. Some parents are over-anxious to push their child along. This causes the handicapped child to become discouraged and he may

not try to do even the things he can do. The teacher can gauge your child's rate of learning and is the best judge of how much he can benefit from further school work. Some schools have special classes for retarded children. If your school does not have provisions for mentally deficient children, take the matter up with the principal.

WILL HE BE A BEHAVIOR PROBLEM?

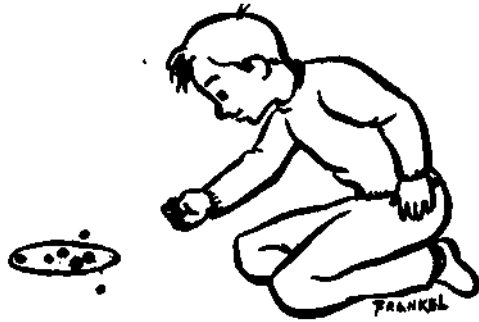
Not necessarily. Some mentally deficient children are restless and unmanageable, but a mentally deficient child need not be a behavior problem. He can become a likeable, attractive person. Like normal children, he has his own personality.

Only a small percentage of mentally deficient children become delinquent. Since they are more suggestible than normal children, the mentally deficient may be misled by unscrupulous persons or older delinquent

boys. Adequate supervision is needed to protect your child from harmful influences.

WILL HE BE ABLE TO EARN A LIVING?

A large number of mental defectives are able to support themselves under proper guidance and supervision. Others earn spending money and can do simple but useful jobs at home and in the neighborhood. It is not possible to make any general statement about what your child can or cannot do. The chances are that if his ability is not too limited, he can do some suitable routine work under supervision. Proper training will help him make the grade. He should be helped to spend his earnings carefully.



WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR HIM?

You can do much to help your child by giving him good training and proper discipline at home. Nearly all methods which are recommended for the care of normal children apply to the care of the mentally deficient child. You will need to have patience and make allowances for his slowness. You can train your feeble-minded child to have agreeable manners and a pleasing personality. This will help him to get along well with other people, and will do much to offset his mental limitations.

You can discipline your feeble-minded child by giving rewards and withholding privileges, much as you would a normal child. Many parents are too lenient, others too severe. A good rule to remember is that discipline does not have to be severe to be effective, but it must be consistent. You will find that, like the normal child, your mentally deficient youngster will not always do as you would like.

Don't make the mistake of keeping your child penned up like a prisoner. He needs recreation just as normal people do. If he cannot play with children his own age, try to find a group with whom he can play and who will accept him.

If the strain of caring for your child becomes too great, or if he becomes unmanageable at home, it may be wise to engage someone to help you with him; or to place him for a few hours a day in a nursery or for a continuous period in a foster home. You may be able to give him the advantages of an institution. Here he will be supervised and trained, and find companionship with others. If he responds well to the training he receives, he may return home after perhaps two to five years. On the other hand, it may be wise for him to stay at the training school indefinitely. Arrangements for placement of your child can be made through one of the welfare agencies or mental hygiene clinics in your community.

You may be able to find two or three mothers of other feeble-minded children who are willing to take turns with you in caring for each other's children. This will give all of you more free time.

You should face the fact that if your child is feeble-minded he cannot be made normal. While he can learn to do some things, he will never be able to do all the things that normal people do, or have the judgment that normal people have. This may seem hard to accept, but once you do accept it, you will want to set about doing the best you can for your child. You will help him to make the most of the abilities he has, but you will not expect him to do more than he possibly can do. But by enabling him to gain good emotional balance, and keeping the demands on him at a simple level, you can help him to become self-sustaining even without supervision. And



remember to give him credit for doing his best. As long as it is his best, he deserves just as much credit as the most brilliant child in the world — indeed, even more, since most of us with normal minds seldom make the best use of them!

An encouraging pat on the back and your affection will do a lot to spur your child on.



Published by
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH, Inc.
1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y.