

Reprinted from "Those Flustered Feelings," Understanding those Feelings, by Eugene T. McDonald, Stanwix House, Pittsburgh, 1962

L. Recognize your embarrassment and how it affects your behavior.

Embarrassment has certain physiologic and psychologic characteristics which, when present, interfere with rational behaviour. Responses made when one is nervous and lacking in presence of mind are likely to be undesirable responses. Parents should learn to check their embarrassment or wait until the peak of physiologic and psychologic change has passed before responding to a source of embarrassment. A delayed response will probably be less emotionally toned than a response made in the heat of embarrassment.

2. Recognize that most people are naturally curious.

Much of man's progress has resulted from his curiosity about everything he sees. Anything different is likely to attract his attention. This means that handicapped children will come under the observation of many people. Parents are likely to call this observation "staring" and react to what they think the behavior is rather than what the other person intended it to be. Parents of handicapped children themselves have considerable curiosity about other people. Identifying evidences of their own curiosity may help parents become more tolerant of curiosity in others.

3. Become aware that some embarrassing situations may be of your own making.

Parents of handicapped children sometimes become hypersensitive about anything having to do with their handicapped child. They unconsciously look for evidences that other people are staring at them or talking about them. With their minds set in this way, their imaginations are apt to play tricks on them and they become embarrassed for no good cause. Also embarrassment sometimes arises because parents put their handicapped children into situations for which they are not ready. When what seems like a "catastrophy" occurs the parents become embarrassed.

4. Operate on the philosophy that parents of handicapped children should function as public relations representatives for all handicapped persons.

Parents of handicapped children have an especially important role as good-will ambassadors for all handicapped persons. Realizing that their reactions to incidents relating to their own handicapped child might rebound unfavorably on other handicapped people, parents should become sensitive to the feelings of others and avoid offending them. Whenever possible they should turn potentially embarrassing situations into opportunities for furthering public education concerning the interests of handicapped persons. Following these suggestions will not mean that one will never be embarrassed again. Embarrassment usually comes on us unexpectedly and hence, cannot always be guarded against. Attention to these suggestions will reduce the number of times embarrassing incidents arise relating to your handicapped child and will help prevent embarrassment from developing into anger and hostility.