

THEO is a registered Trust that aims to reach out to Special Children studying in Special Schools. It tries to fulfill their needs such as payment of school fees, hostel fees, expenses related to occupational therapy and physiotherapy, purchase and supply of orthopaedic aides and appliances such as crutches, splints, wheel chairs etc.

THEO also facilitates interaction between special children and interested volunteers.

THEO speaks... is a monthly newsletter published to create awareness about the needs and welfare of children and for reporting the monthly activities of the organisation.

PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

This section is an attempt to familiarise personalities in the welfare field. The personality of the month is Dr.M.I.F.Nirmala, Head of the Department, Social Work Department, Hindustan College of Arts and Sciences, Chennai. Dr.Nirmala, in conversation with K.Monica Arogyamary...

Madam, please tell us about yourself...

I am Dr.Nirmala. After a degree in Economics, due to interest in the field of Special Education I went on to do my Masters in Social Work specialising in Medical & Psychiatric Social Work. The same interest led me to do a teachers training in Special education. After that, even though I was teaching in one of the famous city colleges, the desire to acquire more knowledge about Persons with Special Needs made me pursue my Doctorate about Associations of Parents of the Mentally Challenged. I am at present heading the Social Work Department in Hindustan College of Arts and Sciences, Chennai. I am also planning of working actively with Persons with special needs.

Please tell us about the role of parents in taking care of their special children and in helping them in their development.

Parents of special persons have to play several important roles besides their basic parental role. In case of other disabilities, the individuals themselves can represent themselves and demand for the satisfaction of their needs. That's how we find powerful associations of the Visually Challenged, Physically challenged etc. Advocating for their interests. But when it comes to the intellectually Challenged, they would not be able to associate on their own. Hence their parents who know all their needs and wants have to play the role of their representatives. The basic needs of persons with mental retardation can only be fulfilled if the parents can take the lead.

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How important are the Parents' Associations in helping parents cope?

The birth of a healthy and normal child brings much joy whereas the birth of a differentially abled child seems to shatter the dreams and cherished desires of the parents. The news comes as a sudden blow to the parents whose response to it resembles that of a grief reaction. It has been observed that the parents go through five stages in the parental response viz: (i) Shock (ii) Denial (iii) Sadness and Anger (iv) Adaptation(v) Re-organization. Also parents are reported to experience various degrees of stress or emotional disequilibrium including symptoms of insecurity and anxiety during this trying process of emotional re adaptation and redefinition of their bruised self-concept of being the creator of an "imperfect child". After many weeks and months and sometimes even years of searching, worry and disagreements some parents recognize that they must make the best of the fact that their child is intellectually challenged. When parents reach this stage they are then ready to make a more intelligent adjustment to the situation. As parents embark upon an intelligent investigation

