

Respite Care -- Part II

Benefits of Respite Care

Introduction

In the last PTCH Respite Care was defined and explained as a service for parents of children with severe disabilities. This PTCH will explain the benefits to parent of respite care

In addition to providing direct relief, respite has added benefits for families, including:

- **Relaxation:** Respite gives families peace of mind, helps them relax, and renews their humor and their energy
- **Enjoyment:** Respite allows families to enjoy favorite pastimes and pursue new activities
- **Stability:** Respite improves the family's ability to cope with daily responsibilities and maintain stability during crisis
- **Preservation:** Respite helps preserve the family unit and lessens the pressures that might lead to institutionalization, divorce, neglect and child abuse
- **Involvement:** Respite allows families to become involved in community activities and to feel less isolated
- **Time Off:** Respite allows families to take that needed vacation, spend time together and time alone
- **Enrichment:** Respite makes it possible for family members to establish individual identities and enrich their own growth and development.

Often, we hear the question, "Who takes care of the caretakers?" Caretakers can include not only parents, but also brothers and sisters, grandparents, and extended family and friends. Respite gives caretakers the opportunity to have a rest, to take care of personal matters, to enjoy some leisure time, and occasionally to be relieved of the constant need to care for a child with a disability or chronic illness.

The child or youth with disabilities also benefits from respite care, gaining the opportunity to build new relationships and to move toward independence. In many families, it is common for children to attend day care or after-school care, interact with peers and adults outside the family, and stay with a child care provider while their parents enjoy an evening out. Respite provides these same opportunities for children with special needs.

For older individuals with a disability, respite can assist in building skills needed for independent living. Since the most appropriate living situation for many adults with a disability is in a group home or other supported environment, out-of-home respite care can enable families to test this option, explore community resources and prepare themselves and their family member with a disability for this change.

States and communities are recognizing that respite care also benefits them. On average, the costs for respite services are 65 to 70 percent less than the costs of maintaining people in institutions (Salisbury and Intagliata, 1986). The cost-effectiveness of respite services allows scarce tax dollars to be used for additional community-based services. During the previous decade, over 30 states passed legislation for in-home family support services, including respite care, using either direct services or voucher systems (Agosta and Bradley, 1985).

With the 1986 passage of the Children's Justice Act (Public Law 99-401) and its amendment, the Children's with Disabilities Temporary Care Reauthorization Act (P.L. 101-127), respite care has gained support at the Federal level. This legislation authorized funding to states to develop and implement affordable respite care programs and crisis nurseries. Unfortunately, while this Federal funding provides relief for some families, access and affordability continue to be issues for many families in need.

As Brill (1994) observes: Families soon discovered that the law fell short of providing national guidelines for respite care. Every state dispensed different versions of the services, and individual agencies devised their own criteria for length of time and funding allotments. (p. 49)

Thus, in spite of the availability of government funding in some areas, many respite care programs must charge for their services. This practice reduces expenses for providers and makes it possible to serve more families. However, charging for respite services can limit their availability to those families who can afford the fees (Cohen and Warren, 1985).

For children and youth with disabilities, their families and communities, and Federal, state and local governments, the benefits of respite care are enormous. However, the need for maintaining and expanding the levels of available respite services is tremendous.