

Women with Disabilities and Parenting

Society's Attitudes

When a non-disabled woman decides to have a child, her friends, family, and doctor will often support her in her decision. A disabled woman often has a different experience.

Society thinks that a disabled woman cannot be a good mother. If she cannot fulfill some day-to-day functions without assistance, she may be seen as depriving her child of a "normal" life. A disabled woman may be discouraged from having a child. In fact, some doctors and counselors will suggest she abort the fetus, sterilize herself, or give up the child for adoption.

Counselling

Some women with disabilities are pressured by doctors to seek counselling. The counselor may then suggest that they choose abortion or adoption. Disabled women have a right to the same choices as non-disabled women. They have the right to choose counselling which can help them with birthing or parenting. No one has the right to force a disabled woman to make choices against her wishes.

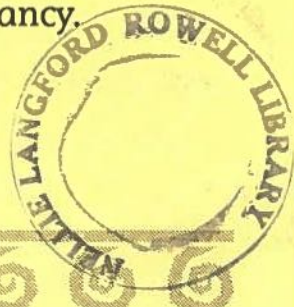
Information

Literature on pregnancy in relation to women with disabilities is very limited. Textbooks, popular literature, and medical schools seldom acknowledge the existence of disabled mothers. Some doctors may believe that women with disabilities have only high risk pregnancies. These doctors may tend to recommend unnecessary Caesarean sections.

Support Services

Because of society's attitudes about what makes a good mother, disabled women often cannot access basic services which are available to non-disabled women. Even after giving birth in a hospital, a woman who is a wheelchair user cannot look through the nursery window at her newborn child if the window is too high. Birthing and maternity centres are just now beginning to address the issues of disabled mothers.

Pregnant disabled women now have the option of using the services of a midwife. A midwife will be able to provide care for a disabled woman during and after her pregnancy.



Some disabled mothers may need support services such as home care, child care, attendants, or technical devices. Many child care centres provide no access for women who have mobility needs.

Transportation

A disabled mother, like a non-disabled mother, may need to stop at the child care centre on her way to and from work. Some disabled mothers rely on transportation services for disabled persons. However, this service does not provide the necessary accommodations—a stop to first drop the child off at the child care centre, then a stop at the mother's workplace.

Adoption and New Reproductive Technologies

Adoption agencies are known for having rigid guidelines and long waiting lists for people wishing to adopt. The agencies can be biased against disabled parents. We need access to alternatives to traditional childbirth and to the new reproductive technologies. We need access to the information on new reproductive technologies in order to make an informed decision.

Resources

DAWN Canada. **The Only Parent in the Neighbourhood: Mothering and Women with Disabilities.** 1989.

DAWN Ontario. **"I want to be a mother, I have a disability: What are my Choices?"** 1993.

Rogers, Judi and Matsumura, Molleen. **Mother-to-Be: A Guide to Pregnancy and Birth for Women with Disabilities.** New York: Demos Publications, 1991. 156 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10010.

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