



Poster Presentation

Counseling Parents of Children with CHARGE

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Presenter Information

Tim Hartshorne is a professor of psychology, specialized in school psychology, at Central Michigan University. His doctoral degree is from the University of Texas at Austin. He also has a master's degree in counseling and is a licensed professional counselor. He is the grant holder for DeafBlind Central: Michigan's Training and Resource Project, which provides support to children who are deafblind in Michigan. Much of his work is influenced and motivated by his son Jacob, who was born in 1989 with CHARGE syndrome. Tim's particular interests include understanding the challenging behavior exhibited by many individuals with deafblindness, CHARGE, and related syndromes, and also how severe disability impacts the family. He is the lead developer of a deafblind intervener training module on behavior for the National Center on Deaf-Blindness. He has been awarded the Star in CHARGE by the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation. His research was recognized in 2009 with the Central Michigan University President's Award for Outstanding Research. He is a frequent presenter on CHARGE and deafblindness.

Presentation Abstract

Early research suggested that families of children with severe disability were likely to be hopelessly damaged by the experience, with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, loss, guilt, feeling overwhelmed, and marital troubles predominating. However, many researchers have begun to recognize that many families do quite well, and many report positive experiences and perceptions and even personal transformations. Some parents may turn to counseling for assistance. The question is, how counselors can work with families, and parents in particular, to help them cope with the negatives, and come to appreciate the unique, positive aspects of raising a child with severe disabilities. To accomplish this, counselors need to understand that personal transformation is possible, and that what on the surface appears to be an overwhelmingly negative experience, can develop into something very positive. For the general conference, this presentation will emphasize the potential benefits of going to counseling for support in coping with the guilt and stress of raising a child with CHARGE. Issues addressed include guilt, stress, siblings, marriage, the future, and behavior. Pitfalls for counselors include misunderstanding the nature of this kind of grief, not understanding the parent experience, mistaking courage for denial, and seeing "specialness" in the parents (you are so strong). Objectives of counseling include focusing on strengths and good enough parenting, helping parents make connections and network, developing marathon skills, and personal growth.