

# Disabled children's parents may get help at work

**United Press International**  
Parents of disabled children may find help in the workplace for family and offspring. Some corporations, through employee assistance and counseling services, want to help such parents stay on the job, says Dr. Sheila Akabas, director of the Industrial Social Welfare Center of Columbia University's School of Social Work. Eight percent of the estimated 3.6 million infants born in the United States each year have a disability. To help firms aid parents of disabled children, Dr. Akabas and associates have launched a project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is titled Families with Disabled Children: Help from the Workplace. "We're going to develop a guide for the corporation," she said.

In the process, Dr. Akabas and associates will work with three trade unions to identify workers with disabled children under two and a half years of age and assess family needs. The project also will develop new programs, including one in which retired union members would be trained to look after disabled children whose parents have jobs. "Information has a monetary value when it is in the right place at the right time," the social scientist said, noting the guide will contain information about resources for both married and single working parents of disabled children.

Dr. Akabas said employee assistance programs at many corporations already are helping workers with health and personal problems, including alcoholism, money management, and sources of crises that affect

mental, physical and emotional health. "Helping parents of the disabled would be making use of this existing structure," she said. Management isn't just being humanitarian. Corporation leaders know that an employee with problems is not happy or necessarily productive. Management also knows, the professor said, that if a worker must quit a job to take care of a disabled dependent it usually is not the best for any of the parties.

Further, in the instance of the birth of a disabled child to a worker, the corporation insurance plan will pick up a lot of the expenses until the child is 21. Seeing that the disabled child gets proper medical treatment, rehabilitation services and training is good business. "Disability and poverty," Dr.

Akabas said, "all too often go hand in hand. "If a parent has to stop working to care for a disabled child it

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can push him or her over the brink into poverty. "Confident that their youngsters are receiving good care, parents would not only be able to keep their jobs, but would retain the network of social support and a sense of personal ac-

complishment that an employed person enjoys." Dr. Akabas described her project as "an innovative pulling together of public, private and educational resources that is very much in keeping with the Reagan administration's promotion of shared responsibility."

A workshop connected with the project was attended by representatives of major corporations, unions and social welfare agencies. "The financial issue was almost to all," Dr. Akabas said. It was felt money could be saved if the diagnosis was proper, and suitable treatment and training given. The goal of training would be to help the disabled function independently, if possible, as an adult. At the forum there was general agreement that companies and workers may want to arrange work so the parent of the

disabled could be at home when other help was not available. "Companies allowing the employee to take vacation time a day at a time or using sick time on the same basis was one idea," Dr. Akabas said. Flex-time came up, too — allowing parents of a disabled child to share a job so one or the other would be at home with child, reducing the need for help from a paid home aide.

There also was agreement at the forum that people should go to the corporation employee assistance office for counseling when a child is born disabled. "The corporation people said some people feel ashamed but they shouldn't," Dr. Akabas said. "And the corporation people need to say to the worker, 'We understand and we have the capacity to help you find help.'"

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# Romantic trying to help others put romance into relationships

**United Press International**  
BOSTON — "When was the last time you wrote 'I love you' on the bathroom mirror with a piece of soap?" the instructor asked his bewildered class. "How about running a bubble bath for your wife or girlfriend?" he asked when the first query failed to awaken a single memory. The blank expressions confirmed what Greg Godek suspected all along, that "there just isn't enough romance" in today's relationships.

Godek, a romantic since his teens, is helping men and women put the spark back into comfortable but boring marriages and affairs, and even adding zest to first dates. Single, divorced and even long-married men, confused by the attitudes of liberated women, are signing up for Godek's evening adult education class, seeking to resolve such basics as "whether it's still all right to open her car door." "With women's liberation, roles are no longer sharply defined," Godek said, "and men wonder if all that old-fashioned romance is offensive to the modern woman."

more romantic improves the quality of life." He quickly cautions that "romance is not going to save a bad relationship — resolve major faults or improve your sex life in the long run. Women typically complain that a man just doesn't show he cares, while men respond defensively, 'she knows I love her.'"

The feminist movement had not resolved "the gap between what women expect and what men think is OK, remember to do and feel comfortable doing," Godek said. "Be a little bit outrageous," he advises aspiring romantics, male and female. "Here is a part of life that most of you haven't focused on as much as you could. The smallest little things can be romantic." His suggestions include a note in a plastic bag under the

windshield in case it rains, mailing a card with a LOVE postage stamp every day for a week, packing a "trip kit" for the traveler filled with "corny things like a roll of dimes and a note saying 'Call Me,'" and giving one another \$5 to spend on a shopping spree.

"The coed classes are particularly effective because the participants don't need to just take my word on something," Godek said.

Women tend to doubt that men really want romantic expressions, he said, but their male counterparts in the class shatter any misconceptions.

Roy Anderson, 27, a businessman who signed up for Godek's course "because my girlfriend accused me of not being romantic enough," said, "I'd love it if a girl sent me flowers. There's nothing unmasculine about enjoying what's beautiful in life."

Anderson has not only written "I love you" in soap on the mirror but on the bathtub bottom as well. He's even taken his girlfriend on a surprise trip to Bermuda in the hope that she'll eventually "pick up the hint and realize I would love a romantic surprise, too."

While the breakdown of the classes includes single, married and divorced men and women in their early 20s to 50s, Godek said many of the males are enrolled by wives or girlfriends seeking a cure to insensitivity.

"Sometimes guys are just dropped off by their wives or girlfriends without even knowing where they are going ahead of time," Godek said.

Carol Cone is delighted with the change in her fiancée, Hank Shafron, who took the class out of curiosity.

"He's wonderful about keeping my favorite wine in the re-

frigerator, leaving notes saying, 'I love you,' and even bought me a beautiful diamond bracelet for Valentine's Day," she said.

Shafron, deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Commerce, said Godek "made me think and reflect about my relationship with Carol."

Shafron, who is divorced, said, "I wanted to see if Carol would notice any difference, and she did. I'm hoping my romantic inclinations will extend through our marriage. They certainly make a difference."

Godek is not as enthusiastic about "obligatory" romantic occasions such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, anniversaries and birthdays as he is about impulsive expressions.

To make holidays special, "do something out of the ordinary," he suggests, even if that means sending "flowers because you never sent them before."

Godek does warn his students to be aware of the subtle message that romantic gestures may convey.

"Sometimes someone says, 'If I start doing these things, the girl is going to think I want to marry her. I don't want her to get the wrong idea,'" he said.

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