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COUNSELING AND
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SERVICES

WAYS OF COPING OF PARENTS WITH A CHILD WITH MENTAL
RETARDATION (223 pp.)

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An assumption is made throughout literature that the parents of a child diagnosed with mental retardation suffer significant stress. Some families fit the stereotype of being unable to cope with the emotional strain and daily demands of parenting a child with mental retardation. However, other families do quite well, with or without the help of child care professionals such as counselors. Some families accept the reality of their child being diagnosed with mental retardation, have successful marriages, and are able to cope with the challenges of their lives (Taanila, Syrjala, & Jarvelin, 2002).

Hodapp (2004) further stated that children diagnosed with mental retardation are both a positive and negative stressor on the family system. Sandler and Mistretta (1998) reported, despite their high risk status, parents have reported to adapt and cope successfully and have shown more sophisticated family functioning when sufficient coping resources are available. Only limited research has been conducted on how parents of children diagnosed with mental retardation cope and make positive adjustments to the challenges of parenting a special needs child.

This study examined the research question, "What thoughts and behaviors do parents with children diagnosed with mental retardation perceive as useful ways of coping with their child?" The purpose of this research study was to identify how parents

cope with the daily hassles of caring for their child's needs and behaviors at home.

Participants in this study were 41 parents with children 4 to 22 years of age, diagnosed with mental retardation in the mild range. Q methodology protocol guided participants as they completed a Q sort of 53 statements of coping thoughts and behaviors as requested. Data analysis for Q methodology included correlation, factor analysis, and computation of factor scores of the results from the Q sort.

After data analysis was completed, three factors or clusters of parents with similar ways of coping emerged: *Parents as Educators*; *Parental Team Approach with Humor and Self-Growth*; and *God and Family as a Supportive Foundation*.