

## **How Nurses Can Help New Parents**

**Nurses and medical staff can help parents cope with the diagnosis that their baby has Down syndrome. You can be a wealth of support by following these suggestions:**

- **Make sure that mother, father and baby are together when the diagnosis is presented. It is important for bonding to continue between parent and child.**
- **Congratulate parents on the birth of their beautiful baby. Be calm, comforting and reassuring.**
- **When you need to hold the baby, hold him in a tender and caring way. Your body language may be viewed as a gauge by the parents as to the acceptance of the baby.**
- **Intertwine the baby's positive features and the features that indicate Down syndrome. Point out similar features between parent and child.**
- **Help the mother breastfeed if she wants to. The DSAGC can provide booklets on breastfeeding a baby with Down syndrome.**
- **Make sure the family has written information from the DSAGC to take home with them.**
- **Avoid patronizing statements such as, "You must be special people to be given this baby."**
- **Assure them that nothing they did or did not do caused the baby to have Down syndrome.**
- **Respect the feelings that the parents have during this time. Some may cry or be angry; others are completely accepting. Some parents cannot grieve because there is an assembly line of professionals wanting to talk to them. Oftentimes, grieving will occur at home. Do seek the advice of a social worker if you feel it may be beneficial.**
- **Do not suggest adoption unless the parent brings up the subject.**
- **Learn the facts about Down syndrome; unlearn stereotypes and myths.**



- Do not give parents too much information at one time, unless it is requested. Some parents crave information; others don't want to hear it.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know," if they ask a question you are unsure of. The DSAGC can help connect you with the information you need.
- Some parents find it helpful to talk with another family of a child with Down syndrome. We can connect families with our Parent To Parent Mentoring Program.
- Make sure that the hospital photographer asks the family if they want a photograph of their baby.

A major reason that a parent may be devastated by the news is the uncertainty of the future and their ability to cope with raising a child with a disability. Reassure parents that the time will come when their child with Down syndrome will be just their child; Down syndrome will only be a small part of who he/she becomes. The difficult beginning will be replaced with happier times.

*For more information, please contact:*

*Sally K. Tilow*

*Outreach Coordinator*

*644 Linn St. Suite 1128*

*Cincinnati, OH 45203*

*513-761-5400*

[sally@dsagc.com](mailto:sally@dsagc.com)

*Excerpts reprinted with permission from RN. Article can be found in it's entirety in the February, 1990 edition of RN.*

*"Jennifer's Life is a Success Story"*