

New York World-Telegram

The Sun

Cloudy with rain tonight. Fair tomorrow. Details on Page 2.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1965 ★★★

Despair Haunts the Parents of Retarded Youngsters

By MAXINE LOWRY
Of the World-Telegram staff

"Why me? What have I done to have this happen?" This anguished cry is the first reaction of most parents when they are told their child is mentally retarded.

These immediate feelings of guilt and despair are amplified by the frantic, often expensive, always fruit-

less search for a more hopeful verdict.

"You spend as much as you can possibly afford to find someone to tell you it isn't true," said Mrs. Israel Epstein, whose retarded son died 12 years ago at the age of 9. "I went from doctor to doctor, convinced that he was suffering from a psychological block."

Mrs. Epstein is president of the Benevolent Society

for Retarded Children, a volunteer group of parents who have or have had children in Willowbrook State School on Staten Island or its facilities at Gouverneur Hospital or the Bronx State Hospital.

It is not enough to tell parents that their child is mentally retarded; they must accept it. And that is never easy.

"Many parents become

mentally disturbed over this and it's hard to know how to help them," Mrs. Epstein said. "I've known people who have given up something, like smoking, as a kind of penance for having a retarded child."

There is a "pitiful lack of counseling" available to such parents, she said.

She has been told, she said, that most medical students, unless they are spe-

cializing in mental health, receive only two hours of instruction in the field of retardation.

"So when you do have a child and turn for help to your obstetrician or pediatrician, he is unable to help. Often, parents are told that nothing can be done and to institutionalize the child."

There are severely retarded children who must be institutionalized because they

need constant, 'round-the-clock care—an impossibility in most families, particularly if there are other children.

But there has been more effort in recent years to keep retardates at home whenever possible. Many, with the proper training, can hold jobs and live in the community; more could if more funds and instructors were available.

For parents whose chil-

dren have not been trained or are untrainable, there is always the fear that the retardate will outlive the parents.

"I've been told many, many times that I'm fortunate that my son died," Mrs. Epstein said. "A mother told me just today that she prays every night that her child will die before she does. Who will care for him? It is a constant concern."