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How to Raise Your Child 1

“What is Ryouiku in Japan?”

Experts say that it is necessary to make an effort to provide external stimulation to children with Down syndrome as they tend to develop at a slower pace. Ryouiku (Rehabilitation Services) can be started relatively early since Down syndrome can be diagnosed fairly quickly after birth.

Japan started offering Souki Ryouiku (Early Intervention Services) to children with Down syndrome on a professional level in 1980. Institutions such as Tsukuba University developed a number of programs at that time. Later, other programs such as “Baby Gymnastics for Children with Down Syndrome” (Akachan Taisou ©JSPCDDS), the “Portage Early Intervention Program” (NPO Japan Portage Association), and the “Washington University Method” (Kodomo no Shiro General Incorporated Association) were introduced. All of these programs are recognized as effective in encouraging development in children with Down syndrome and in offering support to parents.

So what is the actual meaning of Ryouiku? Some people might mix up Ryouiku with “formal” Education. However, Ryouiku is not a strict method of teaching or training a child. Ryouiku takes a softer, calmer approach. Children learn little by little every day in a relaxed environment to build up their skills.

When you hear the term Souki Ryouiku, you also might think that your child needs to start right away. You might feel nervous or frustrated if you cannot find any facilities nearby that offer such services.

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Some people might misunderstand what Ryouiku really means. They might feel satisfied simply sending their child to a facility that offers Ryouiku services. However, what would you do if your child cried the whole time he/she was participating in these services? What would you do if going to this facility tired your child out so much that he/she did not have the energy to do anything at home? Would you or your child feel calm and at ease if this were the case?

Please understand that your child does not need to go to a facility for Ryouiku services. Simply reading to your child or playing him/her your favorite music while relaxing together is beneficial. Going for a walk on a nice day to get some fresh air while showing your child flowers along the way or just letting your child have fun spending with siblings or friends is also helpful. Sometimes just playing “horse” (i.e., having your child sit on Dad’s shoulders) can help build up your child’s sense of balance. Talking to your child while engaging in physical contact is also very important. (This is especially important while your child is still

young.) In order to raise your child in a relaxed environment with a sense of ease, you just need to figure out what works best for your family. Being able to do this is an example of excellent parenting or, in other words, Ryouiku.

We have one request for you. Before you start thinking about Ryouiku, please make your child's health a top priority. A healthy body is essential. You can start Ryouiku once your child is in good physical condition. Please don't worry – it will not be too late to start.

Let's be patient when raising our children. Let's go at their pace and take it day by day.

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How to Raise Your Child 2

“I want to participate in my neighborhood's Oya No Kai (Parent Support Group), but the thought of it makes me nervous...”

One of the first things a doctor at your hospital or a Hokenshi-san (Public Health Nurse) will tell you about are Parent Support Groups called Oya No Kai. Some people might feel hesitant to contact their local Oya No Kai when they first hear about it. So what is an Oya No Kai anyway?

To put it simply, an Oya No Kai is a place where you (parents) can cleanse your heart and mind. It is a place where you can talk about your painful feelings, worries about the future, health concerns about your child, schooling, siblings, etc., with others who have felt the same way and can empathize with you. Just talking about these things with others can really help.

In addition to the above, you can obtain whatever information you may need from your local Oya No Kai including information about welfare services or hospitals in your area. This is a strength of having community-based parent support groups. You can ask others in your group to let you know which ENT doctor they recommend, what the system for getting your child enrolled in a nursery school or a kindergarten is, etc. Please get any information you may need from your local Oya No Kai.

If you cannot find an Oya No Kai in your area, then you might want to consider connecting with people from all over the world via the Internet! You can read blogs or use SNS. You can even join the “21+Happy” group on mixi (SNS) which created this handbook.

Once you have received the friendly support from others that you might need and have come to the realization that you are not alone, please share what you have learned with others who might need your help

in the future.

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Those who help you get through difficult times are lifelong treasures. Please always cherish them.

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How to Raise Your Child3

“Am I going to be able to work again? Is that even possible...?”

Yes - it is possible! There are lots of moms who go back to work! They have different types of jobs, and they lead different lifestyles. Let's hear what some of these moms who have returned to work have to say.

Name: Masako Yamamoto

What kind of work do you do?

I am a Director in charge of planning, editing and ensuring that production is carried out.

How old was your child when you returned to work?

My child was one and a half years old. My job requires me to continue working even after returning home for the night, sometimes until very late. Since there are days I need to take my child to the doctor or to Ryouiku appointments, I had my company change my working hours to flex time.

Admission to Hoikuen (Nursery School)

When I was trying to find a nursery school for my child, public nursery schools required that a child with special needs be at least 2 years old to be considered for admission. There also had to be a slot available in order for him/her to be admitted. Because of these requirements, I observed a private Ninka Hoikuen (a licensed nursery school that satisfies standards regulated by the government) instead. I spoke directly with the assistant principal of the school. After doing this, my child gained admission to that school. A number of other parents also felt that it wasn't right that they could not return to work in a more timely manner due to the fact that their children with special needs had to wait until they were two years old to be admitted to the public nursery school. These parents voiced their needs to their municipal office. As a result, public schools changed the entrance age requirement for children with special needs from age 2 to age 0.

Were there certain conditions that you had to meet in order to return to work?

I am very thankful because my workplace offered to support me as much as possible. I work full-time,

but they were flexible in regard to my schedule. Even so, there are still times that my job requires me to take overnight business trips to gather materials. There are also times I need to work late at night. At these times, my husband helps take care of our child, or we make full use of all the services available that provide help in taking care of children with special needs when parents cannot. This is how we are able to make it work.

A Message to Other Moms

It would be really difficult to try to do everything by yourself. When you need help, please go to the department in charge at your municipal office. Ask if there are any services available that might be helpful for you. If you just sit around and wait, your municipal government is not going to help you. However, if you consult them, there will always be someone there to listen. You might even find that there are services available that work for you. If the services you are looking for are not available, strongly voice your needs! Let's try to change the system! Don't worry. Everything is going to be OK. You will find that there are lots of people who will be willing to help.

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Name: Atsumi Yamada

What kind of work do you do?

I work as a nurse and a support counselor at a nursing facility.

How old was your child when you returned to work?

My child was one and a half years old.

Admission to Hoikuen (Nursery School)

I didn't have any issues.

Were there certain conditions that you had to meet in order to return to work?

My workplace told me not to hesitate to take off from work for my child. They were very understanding. That helped me out a lot. However, full-time employees are required to take on a great deal of responsibility. To reduce my workload, I requested that they make me a part-time employee.

A Message to Other Moms

I am sure you will experience many different emotions when deciding whether or not to go back to work. To be honest, it was something I really struggled with. However, I realized that I was very happy to have a place to work. Please try your best to enjoy yourself while working with others to get the help and support you need!

Name: Ayako Mori

What kind of work do you do?

I am a curator for art museums in charge of planning and managing the exhibitions.

How old was your child when you returned to work?

My child was three years and two months old.

Admission to Hoikuen (Nursery School)

My child started going to school for Narashi Hoiku (an adjustment period in which children are only kept at the school for short periods of time to allow them to get used to the new environment) when she was two years old. When I returned to work, she transitioned to full-time childcare. She started attending kindergarten in April. She attended kindergarten for the first part of the day. After that, she attended a nursery school from 2:00pm to 6:00pm. (A teacher from the kindergarten would bring her to the nursery school.) There were no special requirements we had to meet in order to get our child admitted to kindergarten or nursery school. Our child was treated the same as all other children.

A Message to Other Moms

Try to get along well with your child's teachers, his/her friends' parents, your colleagues at work, etc. so that you can lean on them when you need to. I am sure your child is going to be very well-liked by everyone at his/her school!

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Name: Miona Kanda

What kind of work do you do?

I do marketing and planning in the Distribution industry.

How old was your child when you returned to work?

I started working from home just four months after birth up until my child was one year old. (Nobody from my company had ever worked from home like this before, but my company was very nice about it.) After my child turned one, I returned to work full-time. Since I had to take my daughter to the hospital once a week, I adjusted my work schedule and received time off.

Admission to Hoikuen (Nursery School)

I went to the municipal office in our area to ask about entry into nursery school and elementary school. They assured me that municipal nursery schools, elementary schools, and middle schools could not deny admission to a child because of a disability. With the help of my parents, we enrolled my child in a 2-year

municipal nursery school. A teacher was placed in my child's class to help take care of him/her.

A Message to Other Moms

I went back to work full-time after my 1st and 2nd children turned 4 months old. I had planned to do the same with my 3rd child, but now I wasn't sure whether I would be able to continue working at all. When I received the results that my child had Down syndrome, my attending physician (a woman) asked me if I had any questions. I asked her if I would be able to continue to work as a full-time employee. Since this is what I was worrying about the most at the time, I felt like I wasn't qualified to be the mother of my child, but it was something I just had to ask. My doctor listened carefully to my question. She responded that I should definitely continue working. She told me that there are lots of working moms who have children with Down syndrome. Even now, I still remember how incredibly reassuring her words were. Just hearing her say what she did made it clear in my mind that going back to work was more than a possibility. In addition to deciding whether or not to continue working, you will also need to balance all of your child's doctor's appointments and Ryouiku appointments. I am sure there will be other things you feel conflicted about as well. If you start to worry about what to do, just go ahead and try doing something! If you want to try something new, just go ahead and do it! While trying these different things, you might find all sorts of ways to get things done. If you feel that things aren't working out the way you want them to, then you can just stop doing them. Try not to make any decisions right away about how things should be. I think it would be good to have a flexible mindset so that you can deal with changing circumstances and environments. You will be ok no matter what decisions you make. Be confident and enjoy life!