



# Family Trouble: Middle-Class Parents, Children's Problems, and the Disruption of Everyday Life

*Ara Francis*

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Our children mean the world to us. They are so central to our hopes and dreams that we will do almost anything to keep them healthy, happy, and safe. What happens, then, when a child has serious problems? In *Family Trouble*, a compelling portrait of upheaval in family life, sociologist Ara Francis tells the stories of middle-class men and women whose children face significant medical, psychological, and social challenges.

Francis interviewed the mothers and fathers of children with such problems as depression, bi-polar disorder, autism, learning disabilities, drug addiction, alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome, and cerebral palsy. Children's problems, she finds, profoundly upset the foundations of parents' everyday lives, overturning taken-for-granted expectations, daily routines, and personal relationships. Indeed, these problems initiated a chain of disruption that moved through parents' lives in domino-like fashion, culminating in a crisis characterized by uncertainty, loneliness, guilt, grief, and anxiety. Francis looks at how mothers and fathers often differ in their interpretation of a child's condition, discusses the gendered nature of child rearing, and describes how parents struggle to find effective treatments and to successfully navigate medical and educational bureaucracies. But above all, *Family Trouble* examines how children's problems disrupt middle-class dreams of the "normal" family. It captures how children's problems "radiate" and spill over into other areas of parents' lives, wreaking havoc even on their identities, leading them to reevaluate deeply held assumptions about their own sense of self and what it means to achieve the good life.

Engagingly written, *Family Trouble* offers insight to professionals and solace to parents. The book offers a clear message to anyone in the throes of family trouble: you are in good company, and you are not as different as you might feel...

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