

PART V

GENERATING NEW KNOWLEDGE
FOR SOCIAL WORK

Coping with the Dual Demands of Psychiatric Disability and Parenting

The Parents' Perspective

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The experience of parenting by individuals who have severe mental disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, major depression, and bipolar disorder) has rarely been addressed from the viewpoint of these parents. While there is extensive literature on parenting and the development of parenting skills, most of the research on parents with psychiatric disabilities focuses on their pathology and the potential for harm to their children (Gopfert, Webster, and Seeman 1996; Jacobsen and Miller 1999; Mowbray, Bybee, Oyserman, MacFarlane, and Bowersox 2006). Although some parents with severe mental disorders may present a potential risk to children in their care, often it is only those families that experience a serious crisis who receive attention because of their involvement with the child welfare system (Blanch, Nicholson, and Purcell 1994). The experiences of parents who manage to cope with their mental disorder and successfully raise their children have not been a focus of research. Although community mental health services have enabled many individuals with psychiatric disabilities to live productive lives in their communities, the parenting role of many of these clients has typically been overlooked by the mental health system (Nicholson and Blanch 1994; Oyserman, Mowbray, and Zemencuk 1994; Zeman and Buila 2006). We are just beginning to appreciate the importance of parenthood for these individuals, along with the challenges they