

THE VULNERABLE CHILD

When the care of a child is not straightforward, it is sometimes because there is something about the particular meaning that child has for the parent(s). It can be helpful to ask:

1. What is special about this child?

We know that the so-called vulnerable child is at risk for physical and psychological morbidity. Vulnerable states can come from: a history of serious illness; a child whose life, or mother's life, was perceived as at risk during pregnancy or delivery; a child who a physician said might die; a child who is born after a history of abortion, still-birth or perinatal loss. (Reference available)

2. Who does the child most remind the parent of?

A child who reminds a single mother of his violent father will be more troublesome to her; a boy who reminds his father of the father's dead brother may seem more vulnerable to illness.

3. What was the parent's life like when he/she was the child's age?

A mother's preoccupation with her 14 year-old daughter's apparently normal periods was clarified by the discovery that the mother had herself become pregnant aged 14.

4. What did the parent(s) think parenting was going to be like?

And how differently have things turned out?

