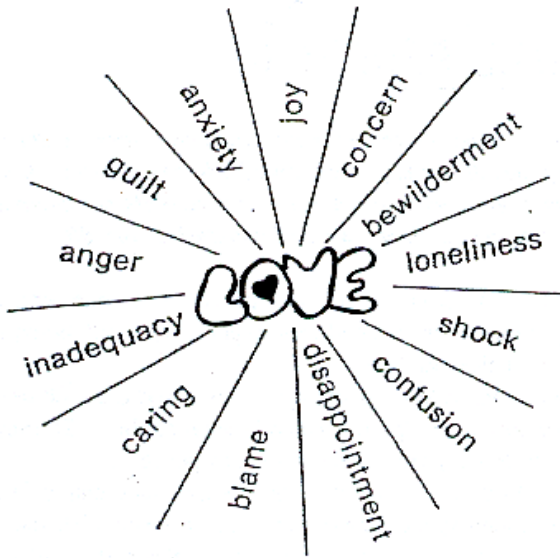




CLEFTPALS VICTORIA

THE CLEFT PALATE & LIP SOCIETY

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Many parents spend considerable time, when their baby is born with a cleft, wondering 'why' and 'how' it happened. There are a few myths still around and many people who are not experts have theories they are anxious to pass on. There would be few parents who haven't heard "Oh, I read Somewhere that Clefts are caused by"

Even among professionals there is not always complete agreement on the causes, despite considerable research. However, it seems that about 1 in every 700 babies is born with a cleft, and in about one third of those births, there is someone else in the family who was also born with a cleft.

When a baby is born with a cleft, there is much for new Parents to accept and absorb. Sometimes the birth of a Baby with a medical problem can draw a family together,

Other times coping with unexpected news can place added strains, not only on the new parents, but on other family members. Early difficulties in the extended family scene can sometimes stem from the confusion over why clefts occur. Some relatives feel a responsibility to declare their family innocent of blame with the oft-heard, "Well, it's not on our side of the family". This can cause uncomfortable feelings all round.

When there is a known history of clefts there is often less shock, but there are different feelings to be worked through, whether or not the new parents had received any genetic counselling.

While the parents are busy learning about the cleft condition, and working through their own feelings, other family members also need to sort out their memories and feelings. Sometimes grandparents have childhood memories of someone they knew who had a cleft, perhaps someone who didn't have the benefits of today's surgical expertise. These memories can understandably increase their anxieties for their new grandchild, particularly to those who grew up in country areas.

The old-fashioned term 'hare-lip' is sometimes used by relatives and family friends who find it difficult to remember to say 'cleft lip', even when reminded. (For new members, the old term 'hare-lip' came from the medieval days when it was believed that a mother gave birth to a child with a cleft is a hare had jumped across her path while walking in the fields! Needless to say, we prefer the term 'cleft lip'.

Sometimes it is hard for new parents to accept the different points of view from older generations and to realise we all take our own time to accept unexpected news. It's also hard to believe that what appears to be hurtful comments are often someone's way of saying "I care, but I don't know how to tell you". Please remember you can share your feelings about other people's reactions with CleftPals, either by phone or letter, and that given time and understanding, most people will sort out their feelings.

As the child grows, to have loving family members to take an interest in their development will add enormously to his or her self-esteem.

Don't forget there is always more information available from:

- ❖ your appropriate medical specialist
- ❖ CleftPals library in your State
- ❖ your contact parent

This information is intended as a guide only. It is not intended as a substitute for professional advice and no liability is accepted.