

XIII.

THE CHILD VERSUS PARENT
(Psychology of Adolescents for Parents)

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PREFACE

From the beginning of the century there has been an awakening and dawning consciousness of the psychology of childhood and adolescence. It is a new era which may, if it continues, be called the "century of the child". Personality development has come to be regarded as highly important. Through our deeper knowledge of medicine, philosophy, sociology, and psychology, we are beginning to see the connection of the associations formed in childhood on evolution and future civilization. Exhaustive study and research have founded a new specialized science, call it what we please, that has possibilities of influencing our whole social set-up.

Gone are the days of the belief that "a healthy body necessarily comes with a healthy mind". A child born into our complicated scheme of life must be completely overwhelmed at all the unmeaningful intricacies of behavior he finds before him to follow. Do we wonder that that child becomes a problem so often when so little explanation is offered him of "why?"

My efforts in the foregoing paper are confined chiefly to parent-child relationships in an attempt to point out what I believe to be as near the ideal situation as possible. Individual freedom of the child is the goal set as the desired end in rearing a child. The principle of "because you are smaller than I, you have to do as I demand" is the thing intelligent psychology of adolescence seeks to eradicate. By correlating the work of some very prominent child psychologists

and adding a few original thoughts, I hope to give what I believe to be highlights in rearing children intelligently in the average home with the average parent and the average child.

CHAPTER I

Granted that a healthy body does not always harbor a sound mind, yet we do admit it is a large constituting factor. For that reason it seems worthwhile to list a few of the standards compiled by the Department of Agriculture and the American Child Health Association as signs of physical and mental health in the optimal child as a basis of judgment in whether or not the child has the prerequisite of good adjustment--health.

Following is a list of the outward manifestations of a well-built, well-functioning body;

1. Hair--plentiful with luster.
2. Eyes--bright and clear, moving normally with no squinting or dark rings beneath and free from inflammation.
3. Breathing--through nose with mouth closed.
4. Teeth--regularly and evenly formed with only the minimum amount of caries peculiar to childhood.
5. Skin and mucous membranes--skin color is changeable with complexion but should be smooth, clear, and pink, mucous membranes definitely pink.
6. Subcutaneous tissue--fat beneath skin plentiful and firm so skin cannot be raised in deep, thin, folds between fingers.
7. Muscles--firm and strong with general muscle development rather than certain areas being exceptionally developed.
8. Shoulders--sloping or equally built but not rounded forward.

9. Chest--broad and deep with good expansion.
10. Arms and legs--long straight bones, joints strong and not enlarged out of proportion.
11. Ankles--inner and outer sides equally prominent--not projecting abnormally.
12. Feet--arches strong and limber, inner borders straight from heel to tip of great toe.
13. Weight--suitable to age and height.
14. Tongue--moist, red and clean.
15. Breath--sweet.
16. Posture--good with prompt, efficient, muscle coordination.
17. Bodily repose.
18. Reasonable amount of physical endurance.

Physical and mental health aspects are inseparable in their connection, making the finest physical perfection quite valueless without a correspondingly good mental adjustment. Heretofore, the child's mind was thought to develop as a natural phenomena and it was on bodily needs that all the stress was laid. Now we have come to feel that the body is a mirror of the state of the mind wherein all reflections are flashed as warning signs. Signs of mental health;

1. Motion--growth of the nervous system depends on free movement without restriction in order to broaden the sensory experiences. Movement is one of the first natural responses of infancy.

2. Imitation--"Mental Copying" is the rudimentary pattern

after which the child fashions his life. One of the most natural of childish instincts is to copy those whom the child admires. Wherein lies a hint to parents to be a worthy pattern.

3. Suggestibility--due to their lack of experience and background in being able to make decisions unaided, children are open to any suggestion thrown before them. Anyone can readily see the consequence of favorable suggestions at this point as well as unfavorable ones. If mother tells a friend that, "Alice is the most nervous child I ever saw." Then, consciously or unconsciously, Alice, through the power of suggestion will be "the most nervous child I ever saw."

4. Curiosity--is a manifestation of every normal child, and a lack of curiosity is considered as an absence of mental integrity. Their seemingly nonsensical questions by all means need be regarded with utmost seriousness. Disregard or treat laughingly his eager questions and the very foundation of a child's trust in you topples, and you will have laid the first cornerstone of an inferiority complex. By offering assistance in finding satisfactory answers, parents keep their offspring from seeking their information at dubious sources. Do not fail to notice, however, that I emphasize "satisfactory," because inaccurate or falsely-colored facts will soon be discovered for what they are.

4. Love of Power--A natural reaction displayed by nearly every child is to have the thing he desires prompted by the fact that he has been the center of attention and has not yet

fully realized why he cannot have every little wish immediately gratified. And whether or not we like morals there is one here. Realize that your children, if they are normal, love to assert themselves and will attempt to do so. An understanding attitude and a carefully selected explanation will prevent serious maladjustments, unhealthy emotional trends, and much unhappiness.

5. Savagery--has been explained on a psychological basis as an early manifestation of the realization of the struggle for existence and the satisfaction derived from victories, no matter how trivial. Marked roughness at play may be the only expression, or if the child has a pet he may treat it rather badly. This appears to be an instinctive reaction exhibited before the child knows he is inflicting pain on another object.

6. Romancing--The harmless flights of fancy of childhood can better be grouped under the term "romancing" than any, since they are not deliberate falsehoods, but merely a failure to discriminate between truth and fancy. And how well we contribute to such a trait by tales of Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, and the "boogy man." Such fanciful deviations are, nine out of ten times, harmless and can be removed by diverting the child's interest into another channel.

7. Emotions--Just as some of us are blands and others brunettes, so some of us are more emotional in our make-up than others. A child who seems to possess abnormal fear reactions, for instance, probably needs only a bit of guidance and an insight into a pleasanter side of the thing he fears

to disassociate his connection of fear with that particular thing. Teach the child to control his basic emotions and not be dominated by them.

8. Morality--Moral standards seem to be fairly closely tied up with emotional control. Where we find poorly controlled emotions we are apt to find also what we might be prone to term "loose morals," which is a misnomer in any individual not beyond the adolescent period. Thinking of the child's mind as a sapling that can be bent and twisted by the food and light it gets, we need to thoroughly survey the child's environment to find where he has received the improper guidance that is forcing him to grow mentally distorted. Here the moral is self-evident. If you wish your child to acquire a right sense of moral values, see that you, yourself set the proper standards for him to follow.

9. Mental Capacity--A seemingly dull and stupid child should receive a thorough examination in the hands of a competent psychiatrist to determine what retards his progress. On the other hand too much is often expected of a mentally alert child by fond and doting parents who yearn to make a budding genius from an only--average child, so wrecking his chances for a well-adjusted, normal life.

Chaplin, Hugh, M. D., and Stricker, Edward, A., M. D., Signs of Health in Childhood, American Child Health Association,

1927

CHAPTER II

The Optimal Home-----

"One in which the rights of individuals were recognized-----, where interests were broad and varied and shared-----, where there was love. The individual members would be frank-----, but frankness would be tempered with insight and understanding-----. Each member would feel affection for the other. The parents would work together in close harmony and cooperation." (1.)

This would constitute the ideal situation, which, for innumerable reasons is found more in storybooks and less in reality than is comfortable to admit.

Basic requirements of the home might be tabulated as follows;

1. Adequate shelter and nourishment and essential material needs of life.
2. Security--especially against emotional disturbances.
3. Influence and control behavior in a consistent and desirable way.
4. To provide education in acceptable modes of response to social situations. (2)

Too much stress is probably being laid on providing material things. Breadwinners of the family will and do sacrifice health and happiness in an effort to gain for their children the means to an education, better cars, better homes, better clothing, and generally a higher scale of living than

the family is able to maintain without stress and strain. The efforts put forth to keep up such a standard are not cooperative but are usually concentrated attempts by either or both parents to lay at their childrens feet the things that their schoolmates have.

Such parents are defeated before they reach first base. They lose personal contacts with their offspring. Honesty and cooperation might then be said to be the first two requisites of home and family life. Children derive a certain sense of security which comes from having their own part to play in the family machinery. Pride is a natural outgrowth of the things we ourselves create, whether they be trivial or otherwise. A son or daughter who will invite friends to their home because they feel it represents the things they are, rather than because of the depth of the rugs or the overstuffed furniture, will have a better adjustment to living simply because they have been able to drop feelings of shame and insecurity that go with pretense.

Psychologists teach us that honesty is an innate quality. (3) We are not born with the "keeping up with the Jones" complex, which necessitates false representation, pretending and sacrifices.

Home life looms first among factors which mold the individuals' personality and determine how he will develop as an adult. The child up until adolescent and even beyond that is extremely impressionistic and patterns his adjustments after those of adults around him.

There is a sense of security and belonging and peace that every individual should experience when he thinks of his own home. It should be the place he seeks for comfort when he is hurt and defeated, rather than the place he feels compelled to run from because he can find no contentment there. Being important to someone and knowing that they care about the things we do is the primary stimulus for human behavior. Particularly is this true in children whose first source of personal satisfaction is in their own respective homes--the place where they normally expect to find approval and also disapproval. Modern youth may seem independent and able to carry its own burden on its own shoulders, but, nevertheless, there is a genuine awareness of a need for stable guidance as expressed by the following excerpts from a series of interviews by a competent social worker;

"My parents have done everything for me as far as physical comfort and education go. But they have never given me the affection I always wanted-----only a few times did I wish I was dead. These were caused by visits to my friends homes and seeing there the love and companionship I did not have". When asked why he spent so much time drinking and carousing, one boy replied, "There is not much else to do. I get lonesome and there is never anybody home at my house". Another added, "You want parents to love you. That's what a home is--where someone loves you." (4)

In conclusion I should say the above few statements express in a nutshell the basic needs for an optimal home, which,

in turn is the first requisite that assures the development of a well-rounded adolescent personality. Against the background of a happy home all other obstacles that might ordinarily stand in the way of a good adjustment will have a comparatively small chance, including financial difficulties. Security, companionship, love, honesty, and compatibility in the home are the building stones. More than that, they are the whole framework that every developing child should have the advantage of.

1. Cunningham, Bros, Family Behavior, W. B. Sanders Co., 1936 pp. 53
2. Cole, Luella, PH.D., Psychology Of Adolescence, Farrar and Rinehart, New York. 1936 pp. 387
3. Shaffer, L. F., The Psychology of Adjustment, Houghton, Mifflin Co. 1936
4. Taylor, Katherine Whiteside, Do Adolescents Need Parents, D. Appleton Century Co., 1939 pp. 16

CHAPTER III

Role of the Parents of Pre-Adolescents----

Pre-adolescence, the time when the parents are the child's mirror, after whose reflections he begins to fashion his own pattern of adjustment, is unfortunately the time when many children receive unfavorable impressions. Parents fail to realize that their actions have any bearing on the child's behavior, mainly, because they fail to realize the degree of his alertness until he is six years or so old. The first decade in life is the important one in determining how the child will handle the responsibility of social independence which fifteen or sixteen brings.

Parents, then, must be a worthy pattern for their offspring to follow. One of the fundamental rules is that they present a united front to their child. It cannot be expected that two people with varying temperaments can always be in perfect accord about principle of child-rearing and other personal matters, but whatever differences occur should be compromised upon in private. Few adults fail to realize what effects their incompatibility resulting in constant bickering, quarrels, jealousy, accusations, verbal abuse, and physical harm do to the personality development of their child. They labor under the delusion that a little boy or girl busy with their playing will catch no import of their words or actions. Children are extremely alert to such scenes and carry them along as mental pictures to be pondered over long

after parents have forgotten and gone on to some new bone of contention.

From birth to the time the child has established himself as an independent being capable of carrying on his existence alone control must be exercised over him, the object of which is to enable him to get along without it eventually. The question is "how and to what extent should my child's behavior be controlled?" There has been some argument here for the instinct theory and the spontaneous unfolding of the child's inner nature. However, psychologists hold such a theory obsolete. Animals may develop by instinct, but human beings are equipped with powers of judgment which parents must help their young to develop and mature.

How is control of behavior to be exercised? Working on the principle that children choose their mode of behavior because it is more pleasant or less painful, gives a means to a beginning--a beginning which requires an endless amount of ingenuity. Rewards, when they are well-earned and not too frequently employed, serve a fine purpose in satisfying a desire for recognition and creating a desire for attaining a higher goal. The policy of rewarding requires delicate discrimination. Too much may cause a spineless child who seeks to do the right thing only for the praise he will receive. Each individual child and each individual parent differ so greatly that only generalizations as to what is expedient and what is not are all that is possible.

Hand in hand with reward for good behavior comes punishment for undesirable behavior. Conforming by punishment is based primarily in fear--a thing which we seek to avoid. Punishment often causes a truthful child to be deceptive by doing in secrecy things that he would otherwise be open and above board about. Slapping his hands does not get at the motivation of the action and it may make him resentful, defiant, and rebellious.

Much depends upon the attitude of the rewarder or the punisher. If they use either, as a means only of gaining conformation to their own wishes because such actions on the part of their children will make life more desirable for them, the parents, then we can readily see the crime of punishment and reward. Chastisements that are administered in a moment of temper and regretted later, and rewards that are given the child for good behavior so he won't disgrace Mother while her bridge party is in progress are the ones which thwart the original goal.

Equally unfair are the "do this if you love me" and "this hurts me worse than it does you" attitudes. They may secure the desired end by an appeal to emotions, but there isn't that wholesome, good will of doing the thing because it is the right thing or because it will please the desired person.

How, then, to secure obedience? Obedience in the sense of psychological child training is more than mere submission to a stronger person--parent or otherwise. It is the

means to happiness, and adjustment of conduct to the pattern of living. All through our lives we are obedient to customs, mores and laws. To be well adapted to life and to society, every child, must learn that his wishes have to be sublimated at times or take another course in order to comply with those around him. I quote the following as golden rules to parents;

1--"If a habit of obedience is to be built up, first of all study your child. Know what he thinks and how he reacts.

2--Give a few well-thought-out commands and see that they are fulfilled; a command worth giving is worth carrying out. Avoid overcorrection and an autocratic manner; children are as quick to resent domination as adults.

3--Gain the child's attention, then make the directions clear and simple and, if possible, explain the reason for the request. The child who has learned by experience to expect only reasonable requests will be prepared to act in an emergency when immediate response may be a vital matter.

4--Gain the child's interest, show him the value of the desired action, be interested in his accomplishment and in the outcome.

5--Make requests positive instead of negative--"Do" rather than "Do not." Give a suggestion which will draw the child's interest away from the forbidden act and focus it on something else.

6--Consider promises carefully before making them. Once they are made keep them or explain the reason for failure to do so. Do not break trust.

7--Be consistent; have one set of rules. Do not allow at one time what is forbidden at another. In this way the child will know what to expect.

8--Be generous with praise and appreciation of effort. Too often children receive attention only when they disobey. Let them learn to obey because the request is reasonable and because compliance brings pleasure and approbation rather than because it brings material reward.

9--Above all things expect obedience. Do not let the child feel that you are uncertain as to his response or that you are sure he will disobey. Everyone likes to live up to what is expected of him--particularly the child. He may as easily live up to your pride and confidence in him as to his reputation of being the most undisciplined little scamp in the neighborhood."

Since habits play such an important role in adult life and since they are acquired to a large extent in early life we can see the desirability of good habit formation in children. Unscientifically, a habit can be defined as the tendency to repeat what has been done before. One develops habits in ways of acting, thinking, feeling, all of which affect our manner of living.

Suggestibility and lack of being able to discriminate right from wrong coupled with the natural tendency of the child to acquire the already formed habits of those about him makes the acquisition of bad habits as easy as good ones;

the moral being to set a good pattern.

Care of the body and of health become habits, good or bad. Eating, sleeping, bathing, all become more or less habitual. Manners are habits. Usually one is habitually courteous or rude. Attitudes toward other races, toward sex, toward smoking, drinking, crime become habits, which is reason enough that care should be taken to see that children are taught habits and attitudes that will help them to adjust to the best end of life. The home is the workshop where character and personality are being molded.

Every individual child is an individual problem to be solved. One error too often committed is the attempt to train the child too early in life. Some parents think the sooner the better, but pediatricians contradict such principles. According to them the first two years are for growth alone. The baby should live as a plant, for it is at this time that actual brain growth takes place. After approximately two years the brain does not increase in size, then the time begins to grow ripe for child training. Hitherto, only such impressions as the baby assimilates easily in regard to behavior should be bothered with. Certainly no strenuous efforts toward habit training are in order earlier than two years.

A child governed for his own sake and not according to the likes and dislikes of others, one who has some explanation of "why" will make a much happier adult and will rem-

ember his childhood as something more than a series of "do's" and "don'ts". He will learn to respect ownership and rights of others when he becomes old enough to see that those rules apply to him. The exact opposite of a good principle is illustrated in the following remark of one mother who said to an older child, "Go and see what Tommy is doing and tell him not to do it."

Child Management, Childrens' Bureau, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture,
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Mannon, Ethel, Common Sense and the Child, Lippincott Co.,
1932

CHAPTER IV

Role of the Parents of Adolescence----

In this changing era where modern youth seems able to stand on its own two feet, where schools, colleges, church groups, social interest groups, YM and YW organizations, appear to be supplementing parental guidance of a century ago, many parents are beginning to ask themselves, "What is my role in the life of my child or am I just a figurehead that seems to serve no purpose?"

The need is greater than ever before for understanding parents by virtue of the fact that our age is a changing and confused one. Teachers, scout leaders, and young peoples groups each contribute a fragment, but no one but parents can carry the child along and weave a meaningful pattern out of all the bits. As pointed out in the previous chapter, no one but parents can supply the love, security and feeling of belonging which is essential to a well-rounded personality.

Parents have the most difficult role in society to play. They are protectors, providers, and interpreters of life. They must do more than rock the cradle, or, so to speak, bring home the bacon. They, themselves, must have a sound personality in order not to pass their own maladjustments along to their offspring. Since marriage and parenthood are relatively voluntary, unwanted children should not exist. Yet they do because many parents tire of the responsibilities which par-

enthood imposes.

The man and woman who marry are faced with readjusting their two lives harmoniously together. A happy family is based upon a happy relationship between the father and mother. If the coming of children were postponed until their personality conflicts, finances, sexual relations were all satisfactorily ironed out, the advent of children would cause only minor problems with negligible ill effects on the child's personality. There would be no maladjustments to pass on to him, which is important, when we consider how children reflect in themselves fairly accurately the home conditions from which they come. Because the young child has not yet developed the power to reason and to discriminate between right and wrong mode of behavior, he identifies himself with those closest to him, usually his parents.

Parents have two roles--one which they assume up to the adolescent age of their child, and from then on they must function in an altogether different capacity. As Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt puts it, "After the age of fifteen or sixteen parents, as such, cease to be and instead should become counselors and friends." At that time adolescents make their declaration of independence and begin to think of fashioning a life of their own. The problem then is how not to control the child yet still aid him in gaining his own freedom and be able to maintain a well-balanced life of his own. There are a few simple ways; (1)

1. Handling money--by a definite allowance to be spent as wisely or as unwisely as the child chooses and not to be

supplemented because it has been spent foolishly.

2. Choosing friends--An attempt to choose who shall be a child's friends will often cause him to assert himself in open revolt and retaliate by unwise choices which he does not desire. Parents can contrive to see that their children are meeting desirable friends without letting the child be aware of their motive. Usually he will carry on the friendship because "birds of a feather."

3. Formulation of vocational plans--The adolescent will make many unjustifiable choices and change them as frequently as he makes them unless he has a definite goal set for himself. The role of the parents should be as unbiased as they can make it, supplying guidance and much information but trying not to influence the choice.

4. Allow adolescents to solve their own difficulties--such as offending their friends, misunderstandings with their teacher, buying something they don't want.

One of the hardest parts parents have to learn is to stand aside and watch their youngsters make mistakes, to let life pound in her own lesson, but the mother or father who can "let go" to a desirable extent is the one to whom confidences are brought in an open, above-board fashion.

Adolescent needs are many; experiences of their own, a chance to an independent share in the risks of living, a feeling of adequacy which comes with certain responsibilities, satisfying hobbies, satisfying recreation, friends, a living

religion, an occupation, a mate, and finally a home of their own.

We have granted a changing era--a faster moving generation. Could the difficulty be in so many homes that parents have ceased to grow, too, that they remain static in their beliefs and standards? Adolescents are adopting a defense not merely to guard against parental interference but to protect "old fashioned" parents from being hurt. Most parents are unable to see that what they consider bizarre actions of the younger generation are only a modern manifestation of basically the same motives and emotions differently expressed a half century ago. In other words, human nature doesn't change, only the way in which it is expressed.

1. Cole, Luella, Ph.D., Psychology of Adolescence, Farrer & Rinehart, New York, 1936 pp. 391
2. Taylor, Katherine Whiteside, Do Adolescents Need Parents, D. Appleton Century Co., 1939

SUMMARY

The foregoing has been intended to cite some of the underlying, common-sense principles of child psychology, which is a matter of adjustment of parents to child, child to parents and to society, and parent to parent.

Parents only need to realize that in dealing with a child they are dealing with another human individual, who needs all the intelligent guidance they are capable of giving, and not with a possession that they are to dominate at random. This small individual has all the rights of the parent except that of asserting himself.

For a happy home I would consider the following necessary and sufficient;

1. Satisfactory adjustment of parents to each other and to society.
2. As much courtesy, consideration, and fairness in actions of members of family to each other as to friends outside the family circle.
3. Love, and demonstration of such, in the finest sense of the word.
4. Sharing of family responsibilities and the right to expect without question that each will do his bit. Cooperation is born of such expectations.
5. Honesty and absence of pettishness and pretense.

On such a background the average child will develop healthily both mentally, morally, and physically. It won't be a case

of child versus parents but, ideally, child and parents in close understanding and kinship.

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