

Children have great strength and the ability to bounce back from rough times. After a divorce, children may even develop much closer relationships with each parent.

Adjusting Children to Social Living



Overcoming the spirit of competition within the family and especially between the children is one of the most difficult, yet most urgent tasks for conscientious parents. Just as this competition inhibits the children from enjoying each other, any experience of mutual enjoyment lessens the competition. What the family needs is united activity and common interests to increase this feeling of belonging together, which is the best antidote to segregation through competition. Games, which give everyone an equal and fair chance, tours and outings, alluring common interests, discussions inviting everyone to express his opinion, are extremely effective, especially if both parents participate. But without deliberate effort, real group activity will seldom develop: The games may sustain the competition by permitting to one child his customary superiority while assigning to the other his customary submissiveness. Although some kind of equilibrium always exists, it is not necessarily a happy one and if it is unhappy it can be definitely destructive psychologically. Each child should be trained for occasional leadership and for occasional submission if democratic ways are to develop within the family and thence extend to broader social groups.

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One word as to the pressing problem of whether children should be saved from the «ugly» influences of the outside world. One hears persistently the cry,



Do not criticize people in front of your child or when your child might be listening to a conversation you are having with someone else.

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«Let's protect our children!" This demand is well intentioned but dangerous. Our children are protected too much anyhow. By protecting them we do not prepare them to face life later on. What they need is not protection, but encouragement. Let them face the facts of life squarely; one can't conceal them anyhow. But parents can help their children to develop a correct attitude toward life, to be courageous and sympathetic, understanding and helpful. Instead of forbidding children to listen to the horror stories of the radio, parents can help them to evaluate the stories correctly and to scorn what is just cheap and sensational. They can't successfully forbid their children to play with guns, if their playmates do so (by the way, playing with guns is not appropriate preparation for being a soldier and serves only to foster a misguided sense of superiority); but parents can teach their children the true meaning of gunplay. They can give them a better approach toward achieving superiority and demonstrating their own value.

Given this help, the child will become, in his group, a force of enlightenment. He will spread moral values which he learned from his parents. We cannot prevent our children's learning about the horrors of war, but we can discuss with them the ideals of democracy and liberty. We can make them understand that fighting is not an effective way for establishing superiority, but a necessary means of self defense. The child can find adequate ways of dissolving friction and should be strong and self confident enough to resist aggression.

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Interference by parents in the conflicts that children have with each other is mostly harmful. If the friction is within the family, the parents' meddling increases the competition and encourages only more fighting, which gives wonderful opportunities to evoke the parents' attention. If the fight is outside the family, parental influence helps little to lessen the tension and undermines the child's ability to take care of himself. In emergency, of course, educational considerations must be put aside in favor of safety. Such situations, however, are far less frequent than timid parents believe. If siblings quarrel, don't think that they will kill each other. I like to put two children who are fighting vigorously into a room by themselves, with the remark that I will see which one comes out alive. Usually that device helps. After a short while each child is sitting in a corner, or both are playing harmoniously together.

Yes, bringing up children is difficult. We know that we must have sympathy with parents. If there is only one child, he is in the difficult position of living among giants.

If there are two children, strong competition develops and the children fight and quarrel. If there are three children, one is always the middle child, and, comparing his position with the privileges of the older and the younger one, he is inclined to feel neglected. If there are four children, we often find two antagonistic pairs of first and second children, but, as a rule, with four the situation improves considerably. But who can wait until he has four children?

Thus, we must have sympathy for the poor parents, or at least the poor mothers, because fathers tend to withdraw from a job which is often more difficult than their daily work. Parents are the real problem-not children. We must help them so that they will be able to enjoy the deepest pleasure human beings can experience-having children. Whoever learns to enjoy his child is glad to pay the price demanded-sleepless nights at the bedside of a sick child; fright and consternation at dangers; disappointments and concern when the child fails. Watching the child grow up is a pleasure unequaled. It reverses the meaning of time; every year lost to us is gained by the child. Our own stepping aside is more than compensated by our child's taking up where we leave off, not for our personal prestige, but for the maintenance of our ideals, of our convictions, of all that we consider worthwhile. Through our children we build the future, and the future alone can appraise what we do today.