

How do our children learn right from wrong? How do we teach them to be people who enhance rather than diminish the quality of life in our society? How do we pass on to them a sense of morality, values and social responsibility?

Common Mistakes in Rearing Children



Indulging and pampering a child can never prevent friction but always lead to warfare. Underneath and beside the display of love and tenderness, we can always find expression of open or concealed hostility. Very few of these "loving" parents recognize the hostility and terrific warfare in which they and their children are involved. All the behavior problems of children are symptoms of hostility. It is difficult to make a mother aware of this. She cannot understand that the child may resent her, as she is firmly convinced that she gives him everything and loves him deeply. Yet how many mothers break down when they can no longer prevent the child from gaining independence? How many tragedies occur, especially during adolescence, when the child must grow up or become a complete failure—one being as distasteful to the mother as the other.

In protecting and dominating the child, not only mothers but many fathers try to prove their own superiority which is so badly threatened by our present life conditions. Once hostility starts, there is no relaxation, no peace. In a family shaken by discord and mutual hostility, shortcomings of the children are emphasized and actually fostered. Children's faults serve as the basis of mutual recrimination, as opportunities for each parent to excuse his or her own lack of social adjustment, and for pretexts to justify their own expressions of hostility. The hostility may even start as soon as the child is born, without any original period of love and affection. Fortunately, complete rejection of children occurs less and less frequently since man has learned to prevent undesired offspring. In any case, the friction between parents and children, the warfare inside of the family, deprives many parents of the full gratification of having children.

It is no wonder that parents so often fail in the rearing of their children, for it is one of the most difficult tasks



Children develop morality slowly and in stages. These stages are founded in a secure attachment and basic trust beginning in the preschool years and continuing to develop even in the adult years.

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in marital life. Teaching is an art. It needs skills in which its practitioners must be carefully trained. But how much training do parents have? What do they know about education? The situation is the worse because what little they know is very often wrong and even harmful. No shoemaker would venture to open a shoe repair shop without being duly trained. But parents often open an educational workshop with almost no preparation-with only the training that they have received from their own parents.

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Ironically, parents try to imitate the acts of their parents, completely forgetting what they themselves as children had to suffer from their own parents' inadequacy. A father who has been beaten as a child will be much inclined to beat his own children. He forgets completely the humiliation

he felt as a child, the hatred and opposition growing under the whipping with the parental hand or rod. This is the reason why it is difficult to convince parents that their procedures and techniques are wrong, unsuccessful, or even harmful. Each parent represents in his attitude generations whom he imitates. Any attempt to influence the educational procedure characteristic for any specific family is confronted with this unbreakable wall of traditional educational conceptions which are carried from one generation to another. This spiritual heritage is even stronger and more decisive than any physical inheritance. It may well be possible that certain national or racial characteristics are based less on biologically inherited qualities than on the educational methods used in the particular group and handed down from generation to generation.

To break this traditional circle is difficult indeed. Let us consider the simple traditional device of beating a child who deviates from the behavior desired by adults-who does "something wrong." What is the effect on the child? These cruel and terrifying episodes distort character, create a disbelief in human kindness and fellowship and a distrust of his fellows. Beaten children, in their revolt, provoke situations where they will be whipped again, physically as well as mentally. If, on the other hand, the spanked child keeps up courage and social interest, he will, as an adult, carefully avoid any situation in which he may be victimized again. He may cultivate "strength" and "toughness," and attain that rigidity and cruelty of character which is the high price paid by many strong and able persons. They punish rather than submit; and they alienate the affection of friends, relatives, and children.

Yet the custom of spanking was for a long time universally considered an adequate method of training children and still is accepted as such by most parents. Even those who recognize intellectually that spanking means humiliation and violation of human dignity, resort to this insulting technique for the preservation of their own superiority and excuse the practice by reference to their "uncontrollable" emotions and "nervous distress." The custom of spanking is one of the most forceful obstacles in the development of a democratic, peaceful, and cooperative atmosphere within the family, a relic of times which had little conception of human dignity and of human rights.

The problem of educating is not distinct from other problems of living together. The process of educating reveals one's general outlook, one's philosophy of life. The social atmosphere in a family is, therefore, a very important factor in the education of children. All the shortcomings, faults, and errors of a child can be traced to faulty approaches used by members of the family in dealing with each other. The child is adequately prepared for life only if the family has observed those rules which should govern the relations between human beings. For since the family is the child's first community and social unit, it represents to him a picture of life in general, and all depends on how closely and truthfully the family pictures the larger world outside. A favorable home atmosphere will encourage the development of a correct attitude in the child who, when he faces the world, must interpret it in accordance with the experiences and conceptions he has gained at home.

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Unfortunately, the relationships within our present-day family do not correspond to those in life outside. Our children, especially if they are few, are usually overprotected, and they become self-centered. In a world of grown-ups, they live not as equals, but as dependents. They have few opportunities to become useful, to contribute to the group, and to achieve a proper niche by themselves. Their way of seeking the assurance of being accepted is demanding; demanding service from others, demanding gifts, or at least attention. What they can receive is for them a symbol of their importance; what they can do is insignificant. This principle of getting along with people contradicts all the rules of cooperation discussed earlier.

The more parents behave in accordance with the rules of cooperation, the easier it is for them to bring up their children properly. The child can adjust himself spontaneously to the right way of behavior, for he has a keen apprehension of what goes on around him, and how one must conduct himself to get along. Too often parents employ one set of rules for themselves and another, quite different, for their children. What excitement there is if a child lies! The parents are bewildered, they feel actually insulted. They completely forget the occasions when they

have lied openly to a neighbor, or even demanded of the child that he lie for them. They expect their child to be industrious, whereas the father and the mother regularly complain about their own work. They are surprised by "improper" language from their child and ask accusingly where he learned to speak thus, when the child is merely repeating what he has heard from them. Is it so foolish for a child to say to his mother, "If you are not nice to me, I won't clean my room," if the mother

demands that the child be "nice" before she fulfills her own obligation to the child? Yet the demanding mother is horrified by such statements.

It is difficult for parents to realize that children are human beings like themselves. Parents not only demand privileges which disrupt social order and destroy the feeling of belonging; but often they permit the child privileges that they would not grant to anyone else. Indulgence is as disastrous as suppression. Only rules which govern the life of the whole family, which include parents and children alike, train for the recognition of right and wrong. Where strong and impartial moral rules regulate the family life, no particular educational techniques are required for the child to grow up willing to contribute his share, confident of his own strength and ability, a useful vital force in the community at large.

Where is there a family with such background and atmosphere? Where are there parents so courageous and cooperative? As has been mentioned, our times are unfavorable to the development of such a family and such parents. A deep feeling of insecurity and a constant concern regarding our prestige hinders us from being as good human beings as we could be. Parents are no exception.

We cannot expect parents to be more cooperative with their children than they are with other competitors. And it is as foolish to expect more peace within the family than within our society as a whole. With sufficient social feeling, we find our way everywhere-without it, nowhere. Children are not different from other human beings. They can threaten the prestige of their parents as much as business competitors, perhaps even more; for parents are very vulnerable to their children's opposition. They believe that parental love or parental indulgence can buy submission. They demand acceptance and obedience just because they are parents. Any opposition and disobedience they regard as a personal affront, almost as a heinous sacrilege against the "divine idea of parenthood." The more they try to impose their will upon the child, the less they succeed in winning his cooperation, and their sense of disappointment deepens. Chagrined and embittered by life, they take their disappointment home and return it through their children back to the world.

