This is Part II of three parts.

PART II.

How to Construct a Person

Part II deals with the other half of being a parent: the job of constructing a person. In chapter 11, general techniques are discussed, for building self-esteem and self-confidence in children of all ages. The skills of active listening and positive communication are explained. In chapters 12 through 16, I deal with specific problems that arise in the preschool years, in the elementary-school years, and in adolescence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Building Self-Esteem and Competence

The things we parents are most concerned about cannot be dealt with in our family rules. Our ultimate concerns have to do with decisions our children are going to make when they are alone or with their peers, outside our knowledge and supervision. We are concerned about their motivation to do their best; about their compassion and consideration for others; and about their ability to negotiate the obstacle course of adolescence, with its peer pressures and its mood swings from grandiosity to despair.

Our best hope to affect those decisions comes through building strength within our children. We do that by supporting their emotional vitality and competence in many different areas: academic skills, physical skills, social skills, and creativity.

Negative consequences for violating rules, though necessary, do not make children more competent and do not build up their self-esteem. Pruning a rosebush may be necessary for its health or appearance, but what really makes it grow is good soil, sunlight, and water. Our goal is not to manage our children but to give them the resources they need in order to manage their own lives.

The "fertile soil" for children consists of the lifestyle and values with which their parents surround them. More than the material comforts of life, the personal comforts of family life–mutual respect, affection, and honesty—are what form a good

foundation. This includes relationships with grandparents, cousins, and others who share the children's heritage. And it includes the values of the communities in which they are raised.

The "sunlight" is the stimulation children get from exposure—at home as well as at school—to music, art, history, and literature; from exploring how things work, like magnets, cars, and computers; from family trips; from sports and games; and from being encouraged to develop and pursue their own interests and talents.

The "water" is praise and acceptance. Pour it on. One shouldn't drown children in praise, but, like plants, they can survive an occasional excess better than they can survive a drought. By acceptance, I don't mean accepting everything they do, but I do mean accepting their weaknesses, their fears, their bad feelings as well as their strengths and talents.

This chapter discusses principles for providing these essential resources to children. The following chapters apply those principles to specific issues that arise at different ages.

Praise the child

The most direct way to build children's confidence and self-esteem is to praise them frequently. However, praise only works when it is specific, sincere, and unadulterated.

How frequently? There is no such thing as too much praise for a child. There is such a thing as too much *nonspecific* praise—or too much *adulterated* praise, as I shall explain shortly. But what child was ever harmed by too many sincere, specific, straightforward compliments?

EXAMPLES: "You did a terrific job of setting the table."

"Your hair looks great."

"Okay! You took a good swing at the ball."

"Wow! You used every crayon in the box!" Or "That's quite a drawing-and all with one crayon!"

"Ninety percent correct on the test? I'm impressed!" Or, "Sixty percent-three points higher than last time! Well done!"

"You looked so graceful out there on the ice!" Or "That was great the way you picked yourself up and went on skating."

"Congratulations on winning." Or "You played well—you can't win them all." Or "Well, we all have bad days but you were good losers."

How often do you say things like that to each of your children? Try to count the times over a period of several hours. Perhaps you and your spouse can keep records on each other. At the same time, count the number of reprimands, criticisms, and negative consequences you give out. What is the ratio of positives to negatives?

Roughly speaking, if your ratio is 3:1 or better, you deserve a gold star. If it is less than 2:1 (less than two positives for every negative), you get no praise from me. Less than 1:1 means more criticism than praise, which is counterproductive.

Contrary to what you might guess, the worse your child is behaving, the more you need to *increase* the positive-to-negative ratio. That is hard to do. As a child becomes more difficult, it becomes harder to find anything to praise him for, as well as harder to contain one's criticism. Yet it becomes more and more important to do that.

For example, a child who frequently whines and clamors for attention should be ignored as much as possible during those episodes. It is obvious that he should receive no positive attention, but neither should parents attend to him with complaints and criticisms. Instead, he needs to be heavily rewarded with praise and attention for all kinds of appropriate behavior that might be taken for granted in the average child. If he is reproached or punished ten times in a day, the best strategy is to find forty or fifty occasions for complimenting him. That is how psychologists treat severely disturbed children in hospital behavior-modification programs. You have to reward appropriate actions if you want them to replace the inappropriate ones. In contrast, a child who rarely has to be chastised for anything can thrive on one or two compliments a day.

Don't wait for children to "earn" compliments. Get in the habit of looking for any opportunity to give meaningful praise. Sometimes your children's greatest achievements may be in areas

for which you yourself have little enthusiasm: performing rock music, building go-carts, or playing billiards. Who is to say that those activities are less worthwhile for children than classical music, science projects, or tennis?

It is a mistake to only praise your children for doing things you value. Their self-esteem depends just as much—perhaps more—on being complimented for the way they pursue goals they themselves have chosen. There is a better chance of their channeling those same energies into productive activities later in life if you support them now in pursuing *anything* with dedication. Don't disparage the one thing they happen to be interested in at this age.

MISTAKE: "You took piano for a year and dropped it; then you took guitar and dropped it right after we bought you the guitar; then it was soccer—after one season you quit—and now it's the same with Scouts. You never stick with anything."

BETTER: "You really are incredibly good at Nintendo, Michael. I'm impressed with how you stuck with it until you had mastered the game."

I agree with you that the same amount of persistence and energy invested in the piano or Scouts would do more for a child in the long run than Nintendo. But you are not given that choice. The reality is that this child did not find those particular activities as interesting as Nintendo, at this point in his life. So your choice is either to build up his confidence in the area in which he has shown persistence and energy, or to tear it down because of your own disappointments.

Be specific. Try to make the child feel good about specific things that he has control over. Self-esteem can only be built up one brick at a time. The child may have missed the ball and struck out, but he took a good swing at it. When you specifically mention his swing, you are doing two constructive things. You are calling the child's attention to a specific aspect of his skill that should be maintained (building *competence*), and you are making him feel better about himself (building *confidence*). He was not rewarded by hitting the ball, but your positive response will help him get a hit next time.

Earlier I pointed out that specific criticisms of actions are better than generalized criticism of the child as a person. Now 1. am saying that specific compliments are better than general ones. Generalized flattery can actually be harmful. Compare "You're brilliant" to "That composition was brilliant." The former may create anxiety in the child: Can he live up to your superlatives? The latter, on the other hand, refers to the specific thing he has accomplished, which was excellent. It does not imply that you will be disappointed if he is sometimes less than brilliant.

Don't say it unless you mean it. As I tried to show in the examples above, you can almost always find some honest way of complimenting a child. It is not necessary to be insincere. In fact, it is a mistake.

MISTAKE: Claire has had her first permanent, which her Aunt Marge admires in glowing terms. Later, thinking that Claire is out of earshot, her mother asks Marge, "How could you tell Claire you like her hair? Isn't it awful?"

"Ghastly!" Marge agrees, unaware that Claire is in the next room. "But what could I say? She seems to think it looks good."

Insincerity leads to inconsistency, which destroys credibility. It also says that the person making the compliment doesn't really care about the recipient at all. One or two incidents like this are enough to render Aunt Marge emotionally worthless to Claire.

BETTER: Aunt Marge could have told Claire, "I think it's going to be hard for me to get used to the change. But how daring of you to try it!"

MISTAKE: George, sixteen, has been studying the clarinet for about four years. His father tries to compliment him: "You're the next Benny Goodman!" He assumes his son knows it is meant as a supreme, though exaggerated, compliment. But for children in a certain frame of mind, it can be more discouraging than encouraging.

George knows that he is *nowhere near* Benny Goodman. He is skilled enough to have fun with the clarinet and eventu-

ally to play jazz or chamber music with friends, but not to become a virtuoso. The implied message from his father is,

"Benny Goodman is my standard of good clarinet playing." In that case, why not quit right now?

BETTER: "You're the Benny Goodman of Elmwood Avenue!"

But-less praise. The final criterion of worthwhile praise is that it should be "but-less," by which I mean unadulterated with buts.

MISTAKES: "It's a good picture, but why didn't you use more crayons?"

"Great swing, but why didn't you hit the ball?"

"Sixty percent correct is an improvement, but what about the other forty percent?"

"Congratulations on winning, but if you can't score more than two goals a game, you're not going to win often."

"Dear Granddaughter, Congratulations on your acceptance at Northwestern. Mrs. McGinty's granddaughter is going to Harvard."

"I'm proud to have a daughter with a Ph.D., but couldn't you have studied something that would be more useful in the job market than medieval Italian poetry?"

"A Nobel Prize! Good for you; did you know that Marie Curie won *two* Nobel Prizes?"

Comments like these should be counted in the negative column when estimating your positive-to-negative ratio. Don't count the part leading up to the "but" as praise, because it is more than wiped out by what follows.

When children show real ability in some area—sports, music, academics, a job—it is natural to encourage them to strive their utmost for ever-higher levels of achievement. Yet the more talented they are, the more they already know what the higher levels of achievement are, so the more the push has to come from within themselves. Reminding them how limited their present accomplishment is, and how much greater they can be if they work at it, is not telling them anything they don't already know. This is discouragement, not encouragement.

This unnecessary suggestion of "room for improvement" is the mistake I most often make as a parent. It takes a serious effort to keep it to a minimum, I shall have some suggestions in chapter 13 for motivating children to do their best. Adulterated praise is not a way to do it.

Praise in connection with rules. Mr. and Mrs. Green were working hard in family counseling to agree on a set of rules and back each other up in enforcing them. They found that it went against their grain to impose negative consequences, until they hit upon the idea of a "Family Newsletter" to go on the refrigerator each week, below the rules. The results were so good that they contributed the first issue for me to share with readers:

GREEN FAMILY NEWSLETTER

Good work, Ben!! Fines being paid up on time. No food, glasses, or pop bottles have been left in your room. We also liked the way you took the time to look over Sarah's science books.

Good work, Sarah!! Lunch dishes have been put in sink and soaked. All dirty clothes were put in basket three times this week. We have also noticed your effort to be in PJ's by 8:30. Don't be discouraged about missing it a few times and having to go to bed early the next night. The normal bedtime will soon be "routine."

Dad— Thanks for taking more active role. Love, Mom.

Mom— Thanks for this good newsletter. Love, Dad.

What had actually happened was that Ben's name-calling showed no improvement the first week, and Sarah tested the bedtime rule several times. But the parents were able to express some compliments about other things, including the fact that Ben had paid the twenty-five-cent fines every time he called his sister a name.

Over the course of several weeks, the Greens had more opportunities to congratulate Ben and Sarah in their family newsletter and fewer occasions to apply the negative consequences in their list of rules.

Stimulation

It is not enough to water your plants. You also have to give them the right amount of sunlight. With children, you look for ways to stimulate them. You take them places, you read to them when they are young and suggest books when they are older, you urge them to pursue activities offered at school or church, and you pay for all kinds of lessons.

But a plant can wither from too much sun, just as it can from too little.

I Children benefit more from pursuing one or two activities in which they are truly interested than from being pushed to dabble in many. Parents should provide lessons and other opportunities to get started with new interests. The child *might* choose to pursue them. After providing an opportunity, you have to ask whether the motivation for the child to continue with that activity is coming from him or from you. If it is only coming from you, you can probably find a more productive use of his energy, as well as your money.

> EXAMPLE: Laurie's parents pay for her piano lessons, remind her to practice, and praise her profusely whenever she plays. She also takes figure-skating lessons. In neither activity does she show much talent. But she loves the skating and pursues it without being urged. Although she verbalizes an interest in piano, the enthusiasm is obviously not there.
>
> Her parents say, "We've noticed how enthusiastic you are about skating, but there's only so much time to devote to it. Would you be interested in stopping piano for a while, in order to work more on your skating?"

The child might decline the offer. Nonetheless, you have conveyed a certain attitude. You can also make a rule about how much time she must spend practicing if you continue to finance the lessons.

The various enrichments you offer should be items on a menu, not a whole program. The child is bound to pass up some of the items on the menu.

"Fertile soil": Communication and active listening

As vital as praising children and providing them with i enriching activities is creating a foundation of personal comfort and security within the family. Children's self-esteem depends upon feeling heard and understood, especially by their parents.

Dr. Haim Ginott, author of *Between Parent and Child* and other books, taught us what an enormous difference open dialogues can make. Parents can learn to use one of the principal techniques professional counselors use, reflecting back what the child has said. This shows the child that you have listened and that you care about his feelings. At the same time, you can stand firm if necessary, without alienating the child. Ginott developed a whole style of discourse for doing this, by making the child's actions, rather than the child himself, the subject of the sentence.

You may also have heard of Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) courses. If you have taken the course or read one of Dr. Gordon's books, then you have had thorough instruction in the four listening skills of *passive listening* (paying attention without interrupting), *acknowledgment* (nodding, smiling, saying "uh huh," etc.), *invitations* ("I'd like to hear your feelings about that"), and *reflecting back* what you have understood.* I think a fifth skill is an important part of the package: formally requesting the floor before replying. I shall try to teach you these "active listening" skills in a simpler way than Gordon does. But the idea is really the same.

Marriage Encounter and other relationship-improving seminars similarly emphasize active listening and communication skills. So do management-training courses. And this is an important part of every professional counselor's training. Whether one is a counselor, a manager, a friend, a spouse, a parent, or a child, the goals of active listening are:

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* Dr. Gordon calls the fourth skill "active listening," but I want to use that phrase for the whole package. All five components are really active, not passive.

1. To understand clearly what other people are saying, including the motives and feelings behind their words.
2. To make them feel that they have been fully heard and clearly understood, and that whether you agree with them or not, you respect their point of view.
3. To increase the likelihood that they will do (1) and (2) for you, in return.

In actual daily life, good communicators use their active listening skills informally and unobtrusively. This is easiest, however, after you have first learned a strict, formal routine. The formal routine is also the one that works best under conditions of stress, to prevent a disagreement from turning into a fight.

The formal rules of active listening. Suppose a father and daughter are arguing about her lackadaisical attitude. Without some rules to govern the conversation, it might get out of hand, like this:

MISTAKE: *Father*: Why don't you go somewhere instead of moping around the house?

Daughter: All my friends have summer jobs. And I can't do anything because you won't give me an allowance anymore.

Father: Why don't you get a job?

Daughter: All the jobs were taken.

Father: Well, you didn't look around.

Daughter: I did too! Dad, the only jobs are lifeguarding and fast food, and they weren't hiring any more kids.

Father: They must have been hiring when your friends applied.

Daughter: They applied months ago! And the only reason Sandra got hired at the pool was because her brother works there.

Father: People don't ring the doorbell and offer you a job—you have to pound the pavement. You have to ask people.

Daughter: Dad, get off my back, will you? I asked plenty of people.

Father: How many of the fast-food places did you try?

Daughter: I wanted to work at Bigger Burger, but how can I get there without a car? If you'd let me take the car every day, I could work there.

Father (exasperated): Why don't you just tell the truth? You don't want a job; you just want to complain.

This father is not going to convince his daughter of anything. All that will come of the conversation is more mutual irritation. And because the daughter never wins a point, she winds up more defeated and unmotivated than she was in the first place. Dad has logic, conversational experience, and greater knowledge of the world on his side. His daughter has nothing but fifteen years' experience of being in the wrong.

BETTER: Now suppose, instead, this father and daughter take turns holding the floor. One will be the speaker and one the listener. They will exchange roles several times, with an important difference from the dialogue above: The listener has to request permission to take the floor; the speaker only consents when s/he is sure s/he has been heard.

Rules for the Speaker:

1. Can say anything s/he wants.
2. Must not yield the floor until s/he or she feels listened to.
3. Should not ask a question until s/he or she is prepared to change roles and listen to the answer.

Rules for the Listener:

1. Must not reply, express any opinion, or signal disagreement with any of speaker's statements.
2. Must reflect back what s/he is understanding (for parents, it is especially important to acknowledge and accept any and all negative feelings that the child expresses).
3. Must ask questions to clarify anything s/he does not understand.
4. When s/he feels sure s/he has understood, and wants to reply, must check his/her understanding and then get permission to be the new speaker.

So the discussion would go something like this:

Father: Why don't you go somewhere instead of moping around the house?

Daughter (speaker): All my friends have summer jobs.

Father (listener): Oh. So you're feeling bored?

Daughter (speaker): Yeah, I'm bored and also broke, since you won't give me any allowance.

Father (listener): Is that creating a problem for you?

Daughter (speaker): What do you think? I can't go anywhere, because I don't have any money.

Father (listener): Could you get a job?

Daughter (speaker): No. *Father* (listener): if you could get one, would you want one?

Daughter (speaker): Sure.

Father (listener): Do you need any advice on getting a job?

Daughter (speaker): No.

Father (listener—after a pause): Well, I hear you saying that you're frustrated because you're bored and broke. I can understand how frustrating that must be. It also sounds like you're angry with us for deciding that you were too old to be given an allowance.

Daughter (speaker): No, that would be okay if I could get a job, but there aren't any.

Father (listener): And I also hear you saying that you'd really like to have a job like some of your friends.

Daughter (speaker): *All* my friends.

Father (listener): Like all your friends, but you're pretty sure you can't find a job. (Pause) And I also understand you to be saying you don't want my advice.

Daughter (speaker): Right.

Here, if the two had formally agreed to take turns actively listening to each other, Dad would ask, "Can I have a turn?" and his daughter, if she felt she had been heard, would become the listener. In a spontaneous conversation, Dad would probably just ask:

Father (listener): Well, can I tell you how I'm feeling?

Daughter (speaker): I know what you think.

Father: I know you think you know what I think. But I listened to you, and I'd like a turn.

Daughter (still with a sour tone): Fine.

Father (speaker): First of all, since I contributed to this problem by stopping your allowance, I'm sorry. I think you're justified in being a little angry or hurt about that. (Daughter shakes her head.) Secondly, I'm feeling real frustrated because you're frustrated, and I'd like to help. But all my experience tells me the ones who get the jobs are the ones who really hustle and check out every fast-food franchise within bicycling distance. I just don't have any better advice to give.

Daughter (listener): How many fast-food places do you think there are?

Father (speaker): Let's see. About seven, within a mile of here. About another half dozen that you could get to by bus.

Daughter: They don't have any "Help Wanted" signs.

Father (speaker): Wait. (Refuses to respond to the last remark, because daughter has stepped outside the role of listener.) Hear me out, okay? You said you didn't want advice, so let me just talk about what I'm feeling. It wouldn't really bother me if you just took the summer off and didn't work. It's the combination of your complaining and yet not doing anything about the problem that I find exasperating. When I hear complaints and yet I'm told to keep my advice to myself, it drives me crazy. And I guess it makes me irritated with you, which probably hurts your feelings.

Daughter (listener): Do they ever hire people even when there's no "Help Wanted" sign?

Father (speaker): Yes, often. Or they take your name and call you in a week or two when somebody quits. Or they tell you to come back on a certain date when they expect to have an opening. Sometimes they'll say, "No, but the bakery next door is looking for somebody."

Daughter: Okay, I get the idea. I'll try that.

Technically, the rules of active listening allow the speaker to say anything that is on his mind, even if it insults the listener.

However, in practice, as in this example, when a parent is in a conversation with a touchy child, he is wise to put the added restriction on himself of staying with his own feelings and frustrations, referring to particular actions of his daughter that have made him uncomfortable, rather than impugning her motives or her personality. (Ginott, incidentally, would have carried this an extra step, suggesting statements like "when I hear moping and complaining" instead of "when you mope and complain.")

The reason this second conversation worked better than the first is that Dad carefully laid the groundwork for his own chance to be listened to, by making sure his daughter felt that her position was heard before he attempted to reply. This is easy to do if you keep reminding yourself that a listener may only ask clarifying questions:

EXAMPLES: "Do you wish that you ... "
"Does it feel unfair because …"
"Are you saying that …"
"If I understand you, …"

You might catch yourself at first asking pseudoquestions that really express an opinion or imply disbelief.

MISTAKES: "Can you really sit there and tell me …"
"Don't you realize that's not why we have this rule?"
"Haven't I told you a thousand times ... ?"

You will learn not to make such mistakes after a few of them lead you back to the kind of exchange illustrated in the first dialogue above. If the child seems unable to listen to you without hostility, pause for a moment and reflect. Are you being aggressive (attacking) instead of assertive (expressing your own feelings)? Try again.

With practice, active listening will become more natural and successful. However, don't expect your kids to listen actively to you right away. After years of tense encounters, they won't trust you at first. I will guarantee an improvement in your dialogues with them, but only after they notice consistent active listening on your part, over a period of several weeks.

Dr. Ginott's and Dr. Gordon's books, along with others recommended in connection with this chapter, contain many examples of active listening by parents in different situations. But you can't learn to do it by reading about it. You learn by trying it. The best way is to have another family member observe your conversation. Have that person stop the listener every time he interrupts, stops paying attention actively, or expresses or implies a response. *Before responding, the listener must check whether the speaker feels understood and is ready to yield the floor.*

Making children listen. Can you insist that your children be active listeners, too? Of course you ran. Just make a rule—for example, "No changes or exceptions in rules will be made unless the requester engages in an active listening dialogue lasting until each side has had at least three turns to be heard."

I know of no better time to train children in the courtesies of adult conversation than when they come to you wanting something. It has to be clear that you *sometimes* modify rules when they have been discussed in an adult fashion, but *never* when the complaints take the form of harangues or other provocations.

EXAMPLE: *Son*, *age seventeen*: I shouldn't have to be in by 10:30 on weeknights in the summer. I don't have school the next morning.

Single mother: Do you want to discuss it?

Son: No. Just change the rule.

Mother: I'll discuss it, if you want to have a polite discussion where we take turns doing active listening.

Son: Okay.

Mother: I'm listening.

Son: As I said, I shouldn't have to be in by 10:30 when I don't have school. It's stupid.

Mother: Don't your friends have to be in by that time?

Son: Only the ones that are in summer school. Kenny can stay out till midnight, same as weekends. Bruce doesn't have any curfew.

Mother: I see. Well, I understand why it seems silly. From your point of view, weeknights are no different from

weekends. Now, can I tell you the problem from my point of view?

Son: Sure.

Mother: I have to get up at 6:30, same as during the school year. My bedroom being right next to the door of the apartment, you wake me when you come in. The 10:30 curfew is for my benefit, not yours.

Son: So I'll be quiet! I'll—

Mother: Wait a minute, you don't have the floor.

Son: I understand what you're saying. Is the only reason I have a 10:30 curfew so that I don't wake you up?

Mother: Yes, that's the only reason. That's why I let you stay out till 1:00 on weekends—because I don't usually go to bed before then anyway.

Son: Are you saying that if I would come in without waking you, I could stay out as late as I want?

Mother: Let me think about that a minute. Well, yes, you've never given me any reason not to trust you.

Son: Would you be willing to drop the curfew if I carry a key to the back door and don't wake you?

Mother: I'm willing to try it. *But if you do* wake me, we'll reinstate your curfew. Or if *anything* happens to make me feel that I need to monitor what time you're coming in, we'll reinstate your curfew.

Son: It's a deal.

As I mentioned in chapter 10, you do not need to defend your policies continually. One good, full explanation is enough. You can make a rule about how frequently, and at what length, you are willing to discuss your decisions. When your child feels the need to protest a rule, one good dialogue in which you insist on both sides listening to each other before responding will satisfy the child better than twenty of the chaotic discussions you may have had in the past.

Understanding is a two-way affair. On the parents' side, it is a matter of listening and questioning children directly about their feelings, needs, and concerns. It is a matter of understanding them through their actions by tuning in to their implied messages: "I'm angry"; "I'm scared"; "I'm no good." This is where modern parents

have the advantage of learning from the great students of children's play, including Anna Freud, Erik Erikson, and Selma Fraiberg, whose wonderful book is listed at the end of chapter 12. We realize, as our grandparents did not, that turbulent mixtures of conflicting emotions are acted out symbolically by perfectly normal children.

Parents' understanding is also a matter of analyzing, sometimes with the help of a family therapist, what function is being served by the misbehavior we are concerned about.

As I have said, however, it is at least as important to make your children understand you. I do not mean analyzing you or empathizing with you fully—after all, they are children—but understanding exactly what reactions they can expect if they act in certain ways.

This kind of understanding does *not* come only from rules and consequences. When rules are enforced, questions are generated in children's minds. They need not only answers to the questions they ask but help in asking the ones they may not be able to express. That is the purpose of active listening dialogues between parent and child.

It is also the purpose of family meetings. Besides the mechanical details of who should do which chores when, the real purpose of meeting formally as a family is to have everyone feel listened to. Each member should also leave the meeting feeling pleased with himself for having understood everyone else. If you aren't anywhere near that ideal, then your meeting isn't ready to adjourn.

EXAMPLE: Betty, the mother whom we met in chapter 1, loses her temper when eleven-year-old Doug is mean to his younger brother. She drives the eight-year-old to school and makes Doug walk. Afterward, she recognizes her mistake: Her unusual firmness is experienced by Doug as "picking on him." Betty sits down with her husband to make a formal list of rules with consequences specified in advance.

When the list is ready, Al and Betty call a family meeting. Betty begins by talking with Doug about what happened: "You must have been angry with me for not waiting for you."

Once Doug has had a chance to express his feelings, the parents explain to all three kids that they realize they have sometimes been unfair in the past. "We are changing. Here are the rules. The things on this list are important to us. We're going to try not to hassle you about anything that's not on this list of rules. We're also going to try to stop nagging and complaining about things that are on the list; we'll just follow through with the consequences." The children have some things to say about the list of rules. Their feelings are acknowledged. They make several reasonable suggestions for simplifying and clarifying the rules. The amended list is posted on the refrigerator.

Parents' communication with each other

In the realm of "fertile soil" for child development, nothing is more important than the quality of life demonstrated by the parents themselves. Not the material quality of our lives—possessions, recreation, and so on—but the emotional quality and the interpersonal quality.

Whatever your values are—whatever religion, whatever race and culture, whatever political stripe—the only effective way to pass them on to your children is to live them. In the long run, children do what we *do* more than they do what we *say*.

This does not mean parents should be perfect. We cannot prepare our children to be competent, self-confident adults in the real world by pretending to be more competent or more self-confident than we really are. Instead of worrying about how to produce "successful" children, perhaps we should prepare them to deal with success when it comes, and with disappointment when it comes, too. Do we do that by a training course? Or do we do it by sharing with them the vicissitudes of our own lives? Personally, I learned more from the ways my father handled his own successes and disappointments than from any lessons he consciously tried to teach me.

Our children learn much that will be of value to them when we acknowledge problems in every aspect of our lives and set the example of adults working to solve those problems rather than denying them or caving in before them.

Parents should not pretend to live in constant harmony when they don't, nor should they live in permanent disharmony. It does not depress children, upset them, or decrease their self-esteem to realize that their parents are in disagreement. It does depress and upset them—and greatly reduce their confidence in many areas of their lives—to feel that their parents have resigned themselves to permanent tension or depression. There may be issues in your marriage that you feel have nothing to do with raising your children. Yet resolving those issues, with professional help if necessary, will make an enormous improvement in the environment from which your children draw their most important resources for the future.

They are not the only ones who are growing. When the process of family development is working right, the growth of the children enhances their parents' continuing development, and vice versa. In fact, the great child psychologist Erik Erikson has revised the Golden Rule in a way that especially applies to parents: "Do to another what will advance the other's growth even as it advances your own."*

Advancing the growth of parent and child

The next five chapters discuss some of the specific issues that arise as children develop from infancy to young adulthood and as their parents grow from adulthood to maturity.

The course of childhood is divided into three main periods—preschool, primary school, and secondary school—because the parents' and child's agendas go through fundamental changes from each of those periods to another. The agenda for the years from age one to six is primarily *communication*; the child has to learn language and the basic rules of social relationships. From age six to about twelve, the agenda is *competence*; the child is busy acquiring hundreds of skills and evaluating himself in relation to other children. In adolescence, the agenda is forming an *identity*, asking "Who am I?" and balancing youthful ideals and aspirations against an increasing understanding of reality.

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* Erik Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, New York: Norton, 1982, p. 93.

These fundamentally different concerns at different ages mean that, inevitably, parents will need to make different kinds of rules. For example, the parents of preschool children are most concerned with rules about control of aggression, destruction, and selfish impulses; children have to learn to subordinate their desires to the needs of others. In the next period, parents are more concerned about children working seriously in school and in outside activities. With adolescents, there are concerns about the influence of peers and about experimentation with drugs, sex, and other risky activities.

Although rules are needed at every age, as children develop, less can be accomplished with rules. Parents' concerns about their children depend more in the later years upon the self-esteem and competence that they have managed to build within their children during the early years. When the issues are learning to put toys away and not to crayon on the walls, rules are practically the whole story. But when the issues are motivation in school, responsibility about drugs, safe driving, and so forth, parents' rules are only an indirect (though necessary) aid. More important are children's feelings about themselves. They have to make an increasing number of decisions on their own, away from their parents' supervision; many of those decisions are of life-or-death significance, yet their parents will not even know when the decisions are being made. Therefore, the parents' influence has to have occurred earlier, through the attitudes and strengths they have managed to implant within their children.

SUGGESTED BOOKS: Building Self-Esteem and Competence

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Preschool Years

The child's agenda for the first five or six years of life is to learn his parents' language. Talking is only part of the task. In order to communicate with others, the child has to learn the basic concepts we take for granted in daily life: distinctions between edible/inedible, for example, or clean/dirty, safe/dangerous, inside/outside, mine/yours, past/future, girl/boy.

From one point of view, the child's parents' task is to transform a naive ape into a civilized human being. *Socialization* is the psychologist's word for that remarkable transformation. But socialization would not occur without the use of language and the basic concepts that languages refer to. Nor could the child learn to communicate without being socialized.

So your basic agenda and your young child's basic agenda are compatible. If there is a struggle, it isn't really between you and him. It is between the part of him that wants to be civilized like everyone else and the part of him that resents any restriction upon his impulses.

Those two conflicting desires are successfully resolved only when parents manage to instill *understanding* and *trust* as well as *self-control*. Socialization means more than conforming to rules. It is not just a matter of whether a two-year-old, for example, is toilet-trained or whether a four-year-old puts away his toys at the end of the day. The child has to understand the *reasons* for those rules. He also has to trust that his needs will be met even though he suppresses his impulsive desires. He has to feel in control of himself even while he submits to his parents' limits.

This chapter will discuss the special tasks that parents of preschool children face. After a reminder about the diversity among children, I shall make some generalizations about this age period—particularly about the problem of communicating with a not-yet-logical mind, the problem of trust, and the problem of organizing and controlling a young child's energy.

Individual differences

Part of the wonder and joy of parenthood is the discovery, in each child, of a unique person with unique talents, unique feelings, and unique interests. Nothing I say in this chapter, as I generalize about "the preschool child," can possibly be true of every child. Let's start by looking at some of the ways children differ from one another during these years.

Girls versus boys. Researchers have recently found evidence that boys' personalities and temperaments already begin to differ from girls' personalities and temperaments by age two, if not earlier. For example, girls tend to be more verbal, boys more aggressive and belligerent. On the other hand, preschool boys, on the average, are more creative in exploring new toys than girls are. These differences are the beginnings of lifelong inequalities between males and females. Women are more often superior in language tasks; men are more often superior in conceptualizing things spatially, imagining how they look from different angles. The difference in creativity, beginning at age two, may be closely related to this ability of males to see things from new perspectives more easily.

However, when we make such generalizations, we have to add that there are millions of perfectly normal boys who are less aggressive than the average girl, and millions of perfectly normal girls who are more mechanically creative than the average boy. Furthermore, innate differences between boys and girls in their "typical" characteristics are less significant than the differences imposed by our cultural expectations: We dress boys and girls differently, we give them different kinds of toys, and we react differently to them even when their behavior is the same. Small differences are there innately, but in every culture parents make the gender differences greater.

In fact, it is possible that most of the differences we see between our sons and daughters are differences of our own making. And most of the remaining differences—the inborn differences—are simply due to their individuality, not to their gender. When we think about our children or describe them to our friends, we tend to highlight the characteristics that are consistent with our image of a boy or a girl. If we can avoid overdoing that, we can see them as individuals rather than as stereotypes. Thus we can free them to be themselves.

Active versus quiet. Regardless of gender, children differ enormously from one another in how long they can sit quietly engaged in one activity and in how much energy they can expend before needing to rest.

I am not discussing "hyperactivity"—leave that diagnosis to your pediatrician—but simply the normal range of differences among children. Observing your child's nursery school for a few minutes, you can see one child fidgeting constantly, a second child moving from one activity to another without sticking to anything long enough to complete it, a third absorbed in an activity and hardly aware of anyone else, a fourth passively watching the other children swirl around him. Each of these children's activity levels will rise and fall over the course of the day, yet the individual differences among them will remain fairly constant.

Is there anything parents should do to try to slow down the high-energy, low-patience child or to speed up the quiet, absorbed child? In truth, there is not much you can do, even if you want to. But it is worth keeping in mind that these children may have somewhat different needs. In order for the active child to get the satisfaction of finishing what he starts—for example, setting up a farm with his toy people—he may need to be protected from distractions across the room. At the same time, another child joining his game may not slow him down much. The quieter child is just the opposite. He may be less distracted by competing activities elsewhere in the room yet abandon his play if a more energetic child swoops in to dominate the scene. Rather than trying to change your child's temperament, you can provide him, for at least part of each day, with an environment to which his particular temperament is suited. This would mean a minimum of competing activities for the active child, a minimum of intimidating intrusions for the quiet child, so that both can explore the world, practice new skills, and enjoy attention from adults in their own ways.

Both the physically energetic, noisy child and the quiet child are actively learning and practicing their skills during all their waking hours. Both are watching, listening, exploring. One moves around more, but the other is picking up just as much information. The children to be concerned about are the ones who dash around the room without relating appropriately to the people and objects in it, even for a few minutes, or those who withdraw into themselves without watching the other people in the room. Any child might exhibit those extremes of activity or inactivity upon occasion; but if it seems to be a habitual pattern, alert your pediatrician.

Clingers versus explorers. Another dimension of the young child's personality is how secure he or she feels about leaving the parent's side to explore a new environment. Don't confuse clinging with "attachment"; the latter refers to the strength of the emotional bond between parent and child, and it is the securely attached toddler who has the confidence to move away from the parent or to be left by the parent for a while. Clinging shows insecurity rather than attachment.

How do you make a child feel more secure? Not by pushing him away. Nor by encouraging him to cling.

MISTAKE 1: Eva, two, refuses to leave her mother's lap when they visit friends. On one occasion, the host's children are one and four. Embarrassed by Eva's clinging, her mother pushes her toward the children: "Go on, stop hanging onto me. Play!" Eva sucks her thumb and buries her face in the couch by her mother's side.

MISTAKE 2: Eva's mother apologizes to her friends: "She's afraid of other children. She never leaves my lap when we're in a strange house." Mother strokes Eva's hair reassuringly. Eva continues to suck her thumb and bury her face by her mother's side.

BETTER: Eva's mother should let Eva cling to her until the child feels ready to venture forth. But Eva's mother shouldn't label it as a personality attribute, as though she ex-

pects her to continue clinging throughout the visit. She should provide a comfortable haven from which the child can survey the new surroundings and to which she can return as often as she wishes. Then Mother should ignore her and let the attractions of the other children's toys lure her away. Each time Eva returns, Mother should welcome her with a friendly pat and express an interest in whatever Eva shows her.

On the other hand, there is such a thing as too much independence in a young child—defiance when it is time to go home, for example. At home as well as elsewhere, all children need to learn the acceptable bounds of exploration and play. As early as the third year of life, they can learn rules about what things may be played with, what they need to ask permission for, what kinds of play are unacceptable. These decisions are up to you, but you probably need some such rules. Children cannot feel good about themselves unless they know, first, that there are limits to their behavior and, second, that they are usually successful in staying within those limits.

Slobs versus compulsives. Like the rest of us, young children vary in their dedication to neatness. To some extent, they reflect their parents' attitudes about this, responding to rules about bathing, wearing clean clothes, putting things away, having their hair brushed. But they soon develop their own self-concepts, which have more effect on their devotion to order and cleanliness, or to chaos and dirt, than any rules their parents can hope to enforce.

It is good for parents to realize that no rules, no matter how clear or how consistently enforced, are capable of changing the natural slob into a dedicated cleaner-upper. We have to adjust our standards and expectations for each child. One child needs reassurance that it is all right to have dirty hands or to go to bed without lining up all the stuffed animals on their shelf. The next child is so much the opposite that you give up trying to impose any serious standards of cleanliness; you settle for "Before eating, hands must be clean at least up to the wrist" or "There must be a path to walk from the door to the bed without tripping over anything."

There are many other differences among young children. The ones mentioned are probably sufficient to caution us that none of the generalizations I shall make in the rest of this chapter should be taken too literally with respect to your own particular children. No one knows them better than you do!

The logic of rules

Parents' actions and statements toward children convey many messages about family hopes, expectations, and fears; about mutual respect; about the child's importance. Are young children sophisticated enough to grasp those messages?

Intelligence develops through four main periods of childhood. It begins in the year and a half (roughly) before the infant begins to learn the meanings of words. Then, up until age five or six, the child learns more and more language, but no logical thinking. The preschool child cannot draw inferences. For example, he cannot solve a problem like this (a syllogism):

Jenny is bigger than Kenny.
Kenny is bigger than Lenny.
Is Jenny bigger than Lenny?

The young child (in that second period, from eighteen months old to five or six years) does not realize that he has been given enough information to answer the question. That is why formal schooling does not begin until age six. The first-grade curriculum requires basic logical inferences that most children do not make until about that age.

The third major period in mental development encompasses the elementary-school years, when the child can reason about concrete relationships, such as whether Jenny is older than Lenny. The fourth period, when abstract logical thinking becomes possible for the first time, begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood.

The question arises, therefore, whether adults' rules can be understood by one- to five-year-olds. Rules have a logic. If X, then *Y*: "If you throw the blocks, they will be taken away from you." Does this make sense to a preschool child?

The answer is yes. This is exactly the kind of logic the child can understand, and even thrives upon. Almost everything he does, from birth onward, can be viewed as an attempt to accumulate "if-then" information about the world.

If I cry, Mother comes.
If I bite instead of sucking, she takes the breast away.
If I shake the rattle, it makes noise.
If I pull up the daisies, Father yells.
If I say "doggie" when I see this kind of animal, everyone smiles approvingly.
If I cross the street without an adult, I have to stay inside for a while.

So the preschooler can learn "if-then" rules, provided that they are simple contingencies rather than syllogisms.

Furthermore, he soon comes to respect *written* rules, even before he can read them. Just as he remembers the stories that go with the pictures in his books, he will remember that what you wrote down says, "If anyone throws blocks, the blocks will be taken away." He sees that big people are terribly interested in the written word. That motivates him to try to become part of the world of reading and writing as soon as he can.

What can you expect? Apart from the question of logic, there is the question of whether the young child is physically or mentally capable of meeting your expectations. Most child-development experts would agree that children should not be expected to do the following things before (approximately) the ages respectively indicated:

Feed self with spoon	1 year
Learn to obey "No, no"	1 year
Undress self	1-2 years
Pick up toys after use	2 years
Use bathroom alone	3 years
Share toys	3 years
Put on shirts, pants, socks	3 years
Button clothes	4 years
Tie shoes	4-5 years
Help care for pet	5 years
Brush teeth	5-6 years
Play games with rules	6 years

Such a list can only be a rough guide, of course, but these examples may help you evaluate your own expectations. If you thought most of these activities could be performed-by children younger than I have indicated, perhaps you need to guard against unrealistic expectations; if you thought most of these items could not be performed by children this young, then perhaps you can be a little more challenging. In any case, you will have to be guided by your own children's individual rates of developing the various skills.

Self-esteem begins at one

In my book *The Mental and Social Life of Babies: How Parents Create Persons*, I suggested that the moment when the infant first shows self-consciousness is the moment when, just having learned to walk, he falls and looks around to see how people are going to react. If they laugh at him, he may cry; whereas if they smile reassuringly, he usually gets back on his feet.

Self-consciousness really means the consciousness of others seeing one and evaluating one as a person. Self-esteem comes to the child as soon as he realizes that other people are watching him and approve of him. Hence, at around the time he takes his first steps, if not earlier, he acquires the first bricks for that edifice of self-esteem he will be laboring all his life to construct.

It is important, therefore, even with the very young child, to do a lot of specific, sincere, unadulterated praising. Not just praise for being "good"—following rules—but even more for all the little achievements of preschool play. Drawing, stacking blocks, setting up toy people and animals, making a toy car go fast, singing, reciting the alphabet: All are major accomplishments deserving genuine praise.

You no doubt started on the right track with pat-a-cake, "How big are you?" and "Where's Mommy's nose?" You clapped your hands and made a big fuss when the infant performed the correct

response. You urged him to repeat the feat for every relative and visitor. He felt successful, and important to the whole family!

After about age two, those kiddie catechisms lose their value. The child outgrows the joy of repeating simple things and wants to be more creative. Just find something nice (and true) to say about what he has done, and go on with him wherever his play may lead.

EXAMPLE: *Parent*: Oh, you're setting up a town. It's a good town.

Child: This is the fire station.

Parent: Oh, right, they need a fire station in case there's a fire.

Child: There's a big fire. (Makes noise and destruction.)

Parent: Oh my, you're making a *big* fire!

Child: Now they build a new skyscraper.

Parent: Uh huh. How high is it going to be?

Child: Up to the sky.

Parent: Oh, wow, that's a tall building. Eight blocks, nine blocks …

Child: Ten blocks.

Parent: Ten blocks, without falling down! That's incredible. (Implicit message: "I think you're quite a kid.")

Messing up and cleaning up

There are many ways of looking at children's development. One way is in terms of the amount of time parents have to spend cleaning up after them. "At first the infant," Shakespeare wrote, "mewling and puking in the nurse's arms." On this dimension, the milestones of childhood go something like this:

Learns to eat without flinging mashed food all over self and kitchen.

Toilet-trained for daytime.

Helps put away toys.

Dry at night.

Responsible for own room and possessions.

* * *

Does own laundry.

Moves into own apartment.

The first few items on this list involve big issues for parents of preschool children: table manners, toilet-training, and putting toys away. You can make rules about all three. Keep in mind that they are all related:

- There is nothing wrong with making a mess if someone is willing to clean it up. Over time, from age two to about age six, parents become less willing to clean up their children's messes of all kinds; they make more demands on children to clean up after themselves.
- When young children make a mess with food, toys, sand, water, pots and pans, or anything else, their play is a metaphorical way of dealing with the major socialization task of toilet-training. To put this another way, toilet-training is one of several arenas in which the child has to resolve the conflict between sloppy pleasures and parents' standards.

Freudian psychologists may make too much of that insight, but others dismiss it too lightly. Children do need to be reassured that making a mess with food or toys is a natural, pleasant thing to do (just as moving their bowels is). Cleaning up is somewhat less natural. But the result is pleasant for everyone in the family.

So whether it is messy eating or going to the bathroom or pulling every toy out onto the floor, you don't have to give a negative message about the mess when you give a positive message about the clean-up. You can react positively to both the mess and the clean-up.

Toilet-training. About ten years ago, when my firstborn and all his playmates were two-year-olds, I suddenly acquired new respect in the other parents' eyes. My work as a researcher may have seemed rather abstract and theoretical, but I surely was an expert on one important subject: We trained our son to use the toilet in a couple of days, and, following my advice, so did all our friends.

The, simple method, which I learned from Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, is based on the fact that two-year-olds *want* to go to the toilet like everyone else.

Wait until the child expresses a definite desire to use the toilet ("like a big boy/girl") instead of diapers. I promise this will happen! You have nothing to gain by rushing it,* and a lot to lose. Before the child is interested, it is likely to be an aggravating power struggle, an unnecessary emotional stress, and an experience of failure for both of you.

Dr. Brazelton is a distinguished Boston pediatrician who makes a strong point of discouraging his patients' parents from trying to toilet-train them before age two. Based on a study of nearly twelve hundred children who were trained at an average age of twenty-eight months, he reports that 80 percent of them started using the toilet perfectly with only a few days' transition period. They had significantly fewer soiling and bed-wetting problems in later years, compared with children whose parents pushed them for earlier "achievement" of this milestone. Brazelton asks, Why is earlier better? Why should using the toilet be something a child has to be coerced into doing?

Any time between the second birthday and the third birthday is fine. There is nothing "better" about early toilet-training. Having lived in England, where many children are "potty-trained" before their first birthday, I am inclined to agree with the comment that it's really the mothers who are trained. And not that well trained, either: I saw babies spend inordinate portions of the day strapped onto their potty seats.

The fact is, toilet-trained toddlers are more trouble than those in diapers. When you are out in the car—or shopping, or in a restaurant—it is no treat to have a child who needs to be taken to the bathroom immediately. Only then does one appreciate the fact that the child carried his bathroom around with him for the first couple of years.

When your child thoroughly understands the whole process of how people use the toilet, and repeatedly indicates a willingness to do it that way, plan toward a significant day, no more than a week in the future. Tell the child that on that day he will get to wear training pants and "no more diapers." The day can also be

* Some day-care centers do not accept toddlers in diapers. If your child is not ready to be trained, my advice is to find a different day-care center.

celebrated with a new toy, such as a miniature car or a play-family set—anything the child can look forward to in advance.

In the meantime, buy or borrow a toddler's toilet seat and let the child play at putting it over the grown-ups' toilet. Forget about the kind of potty chair you have to empty and clean—that is more work than diapers! If you had started toilet-training at a younger age, you might have needed a potty chair because the toilet might be too big and frightening. But if you wait until the child is really ready, you can go right to the kind of seat that fits over your toilet seat.

During the last three or four days preceding the big day, watch for signs that the child is about to have a bowel movement. Say, "Okay, let's go to the bathroom," and take the child into the bathroom to finish the job. If he fills the diaper before you have time to get him on the seat, dump the contents into the toilet and mention that if he tells you when he has to go, he can sit on his seat "like a big boy (or girl)."

Get in the habit of leaving the toilet seat down all the time, with the child's seat in place whenever possible. It makes the toilet look much friendlier. With the seat up, if you're only two feet tall, a toilet looks like a gaping chasm.

Use toilet paper to wipe the child, throw that into the toilet, and let the child flush it. (Sometimes children don't want to flush it; don't make an issue of it. They may even want to leave the room before you flush. You don't care who flushes it or when, so give the child the satisfaction of choice in the matter.)

On those occasions when you miss the signs, don't treat it as anything to be concerned about. Casually say, "Oh, you made a BM [or whatever word you want him to use for bowel movement]?" Next time tell me or Mommy [or Daddy], and we'll help you do it in the bathroom." Lead the child to the bathroom for the diaper-dumping routine. About once a day (no more, unless the child brings it up), mention that when he wears training pants, he'll be able to do it right into the toilet, the way you do.

This period of practicing before you start with training pants can be longer than a few days if you want. The only reason I suggest keeping it short is that a two-year-old has little sense of the future beyond tomorrow.

The important part of toilet-training is that you decide the child is ready for training pants on the basis of what he tells you. Don't wait until he always, or even usually, makes it to the toilet. Don't refer to it as "having an accident" when he has a BM in his diaper. As long as he is wearing a diaper, the assumption should be that he may use it for its intended purpose. The practice period when you have introduced the potty seat but not yet put him in training pants should be a time when using the toilet is merely an enjoyable variation for the child.

When you make the switch to training pants, then a BM without asking to go on the seat will be labeled an "accident." You won't go back to diapers just because there are occasional accidents. You will then make it clear that using the toilet is the right way and soiling the pants is the wrong way.

When the big day comes, put the child in training pants. Give him or her the promised toy. It is a ritual present, like a birthday gift, not a contingent reward (you won't take it back when the child has an accident). *Stop using diapers, except at night.* If you put the child in training pants some days but not all of the time, you are sure to drag out the toilet-training for months. Children are ambivalent about using the toilet, and if they get the message that you are ambivalent, too, they have no motive to change.

From now on, when you take the child to the bathroom, help him sit on his toilet seat (he will need a step of some kind for climbing up). If he does it in his pants without telling you, act disappointed, but not angry. Let him walk around with dirty, wet pants long enough to be uncomfortable, but not long enough to make a mess anywhere else. Then dump the contents into the toilet, and before flushing, let him sit on the toilet for a few minutes. The contingencies should be:

- If child does business in toilet: cheering and applause from everyone in the household.
- If child sits on toilet without doing anything: neither praise nor blame. If he wants to get down, fine.
- If child goes in pants: moderate disappointment, plus a natural consequence: the child's discomfort.
- But if child is upset about an accident: suppress your own disappointment and reassure him that it is no tragedy.

I can almost guarantee success within one to four days, if you stay with the training pants despite a few accidents. If you have no success, it means your child was not yet ready. Matter-of-factly say to the child, "It looks like you still need your diapers." Try the same method again in a few months. If the child is usually successful but continues to have accidents regularly, consult your pediatrician.*

Urination comes under control pretty much by itself once the child is in training pants. Again, give enthusiastic praise for success, matter-of-fact acceptance or moderate disappointment for accidents.

You don't have to "train" the child to be dry overnight. It is just a matter of waiting until the child prefers it. (In Brazelton's study, the average age was three years, or eight months after daytime training.) Wait until the child has been dry in the morning every day for a week. Then you can switch to training pants for nighttime, too; and once again, don't go back to diapers just because the child has an accident or two.

Other clean-up issues. The same period of time, between the second and third birthday, is a good time to begin setting limits on messes at mealtimes and making rules about putting toys away at certain times. You can convey the attitude that no one is expected to stay neat and clean but that there are simple ways we clean up after ourselves.

Anger and control

Issues of messing and cleaning are sometimes exasperating with preschoolers, but they rarely make parents feel so helpless and infuriated as the other major group of problems do. These are the problems of controlling anger, aggression, wildness, and refusal to cooperate. You *must* teach the child to behave within the bounds of certain rules, even when he is angry. But at the same time, leave him with the understanding that *the angry feelings are okay and can be expressed in ways that don't hurt anybody*.

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* Children normally regress a bit when a younger baby enters the home. Try to avoid toilet-training within three or four months before and after the birth of the new baby. The same applies if there is a divorce or death in the family.

Using the system of rules and consequences, deal with the first instance of hitting anyone (including you) by making a clear rule to apply the next time. Don't hit the child back. (Exception: some children who pull hair or pinch get the message from one good simultaneous demonstration of what it feels like to be the victim.)

Removing the child from the scene (leaving the victim in possession of the spoils) is a good consequence for antisocial behavior. Five minutes' ostracism is long enough for any one- to three-year-old. After about the age of three, you may need to increase separations to six, seven, eight minutes, and so on, until you find what works. Never put a child in his crib as a punishment—unless you want him to hate his crib.

You can make similar rules about throwing toys, refusing to share, loud aggressive screaming, or whatever you feel should not be allowed. But in all these cases, it is not enough just to follow through with the negative consequence. While removing the child, or the toy, or yourself from the room, you should ideally give a verbal explanation, including:

1. Acknowledging the child's feelings.
2. Reminding him that this way of expressing them is unacceptable.
3. Pointing out that it did not get him what he wanted.
4. Suggesting how he might have been more effective.

EXAMPLE: Three-year-old Jacob yanks a toy away from his infant brother, who naturally screams. Their mother happens to be relaxed, in a good mood, and at the top of her form today. She is able to take care of all four of the points listed above:

"Jacob, I know that it makes you angry when Todd picks up the cars you are playing with. But the rule is, we don't yank anything away from him. If you do, he gets to play with the toy longer." She gives the toy back to Todd. "What can you do if you don't want Todd playing with one of your cars? Don't leave it where he can reach it."

Incidents like that happen many times each day. It is important not to look upon them as abnormal. Jacob is not a "bad boy," nor is the fact that he behaves aggressively toward his baby brother any reflection on his parents. It is normal for young children to test all such rules time and again.*

So you don't need to escalate consequences for normal transgressions like the one just described. Probably there is no reason to escalate at all before age three, and from three to six you should only escalate consequences for truly destructive or dangerous behavior. For less serious problems, just keep following through with the smallest consequences that seem to make an impression on the child, even if they do not completely eliminate the problem behavior.

If you were to look upon these occurrences as abnormal behavior or think of the child as being "impossible," you could rapidly work yourself into a foul attitude that would permanently detract from your enjoyment of the preschool years. That attitude goes away once you realize that this is the young child's normal way of working out a kind of emotional balance.

On one side of the balance are the child's primitive feelings of anger and selfishness. On the other side are the standards of civilized behavior that you impose on him. After firmly but patiently correcting numerous unacceptable ways of expressing those feelings, civilization manages to worm its way into the child's brain. You might as well remain cheerful as you perform those corrections. They are a major part of the job you took on when you decided to have a child.

The energy problem: Organization versus disintegration. Dr. Brazelton has given us a sensitive picture of life with young children. In his books *Mothers and Infants* and *Toddlers and Parents*, he consistently calls attention to a problem the young child faces many times each day. It is the problem of harnessing enough energy to master new skills without "burning out" and crashing like a spent rocket.

Suppose, for example, that your daughter is concentrating intently on a set of blocks of graduated sizes. Suddenly and surprisingly, she hurls one of the blocks across the room and loses interest in carefully stacking them. Trying to impose some rational

* Habitual bullying is another matter, discussed in Chapter 21.

sense on the child's act, we might guess that she has become frustrated with the difficulty of the task she set herself and wants to express her anger at the blocks. Dr. Brazelton's observations teach us not to assume so much conscious thinking in the toddler's brain. The real explanation may lie at a lower level in the nervous system. It takes a lot of energy to focus on a challenging task and to coordinate the body's movements. When the child's emotional energy and concentration build up higher than her nervous system can manage, she "disintegrates," as Brazelton puts it.

If you start watching toddlers with this idea in your mind—that their batteries alternately get overcharged and drained—you can avoid feeling as though something is terribly wrong with them. What you are seeing is not a temperamental child but a situation in which the child can't maintain just a moderate level of concentration. Realizing that, you can take the child out of the situation. Discipline is not necessary; just decrease the stimulation.

MISTAKE: Eighteen-month-old Meghan suddenly flings a toy aimlessly across the room. The response is, "Bad girl! We don't throw our toys!" Mother puts Meghan in her room and closes the door, ignoring her cries during five minutes of strict ostracism.

BETTER: That consequence might be appropriate for a child who habitually throws toys at people and is being trained not to. In this case, however, the problem is not misbehavior but "disintegration." Mother could put the blocks away and invite the toddler to look at a favorite book, a less taxing activity because it is so familiar to Meghan. After the quiet time with the book, her energy for more challenging play may build up again, unless it is getting toward naptime. (Try not to put a child to bed as a direct consequence of misbehavior; get her quiet and relaxed first.)

Tantrums. There are times when children seem so far out of conItrol that they would sour the most perfect mother's or father's sweet disposition.

Actually, tantrum behavior is not necessarily "out of control." Sometimes it is a deliberate attempt to manipulate parents. Other tantrums come when a child is simply too tired to behave like a rational person. Those are a matter of disintegration, discussed above; getting them under control means reducing the energy demands upon the child.

In both cases, the child has gone beyond the bounds of civilized behavior. You do not have to be concerned about whether the tantrum is genuine disintegration or merely a performance. There are two absolute rules for parents dealing with tantrums:

1. Stop the tantrum, as described below.
2. Do not reward the child by responding positively to the tantrum in any way. On the contrary, show the child how the anger could have been expressed and how the result he wanted could have been achieved if he had *not* thrown a tantrum.

Most parents have little trouble dealing with the occasional tantrum as with any unacceptable behavior. It is only if tantrums become a way of life for the child that the parents are likely to call their pediatrician for help. In that case, a systematic program is needed in order to eliminate the tantrums.

As with all rules at any age, it is important for the child to know in advance precisely what will happen if he has a tantrum. Therefore you need to develop a routine response:

1. When the tantrum comes, holding the child tightly is often enough to stop it. Try kneeling or sitting behind the child and holding both his arms stiffly at his sides, at arm's length from you. Squeeze his arms as hard as you can for five to ten seconds. Then, if he calms down, comfort him and try to get him to relax in your arms. The security of being in his mother's lap will sometimes help him recover control over his rage.

This cuddling must be offered in response to the child's *stopping*, not in response to the tantrum itself. (Be sure that the child can get a hug from you without going to the trouble of throwing a tantrum.)

You will have to experiment with different methods of stopping the tantrum. When you find what works, do it every time. Some parents find it effective to throw themselves to the floor and feign an even bigger tantrum than the child's. If you

try that, overplay it, like a clown. Don't just outyell the child in an angry outburst of your own.

2. The next step, 2a or 2b depends on whether you are successful in stopping the tantrum.

2a. If the child does not calm down (I wouldn't expect step I to work the first time you try it), send him to his room just until he calms down. It may be necessary to station yourself outside the closed door of his room. Let him know that the price of freedom is sixty seconds of silence.

2b. When the child is reasonably quiet, *whether or not he lets you hug him*, ask him calmly what you can do to help him. The problem may be as simple as a construction toy that isn't fitting together properly or the refusal of siblings to play with him. On the other hand, if the tantrum came after you denied him something, you can let him know that you understood what he wanted, and you can lay out the long-term prospect for getting it by appropriate behavior. "Now that I know you like chicken better when it is fried, I'll make it that way next time. But tonight I've cooked it this way, and this is all that's being served for dinner."

Now I hear you objecting, "Oh, I've tried that and it didn't work." The problem was that you didn't stick to the same series of consequences enough times to make them clear and consistent.

Here is how this will work. You will probably have to go to step 2a two or three times. Then, to your surprise and relief, the child will start responding to you at step 1, even accepting your offer of physical comfort. Gradually, the tantrums will decline in frequency.

Throughout the above procedure, try to say as little as possible about the tantrum behavior itself. I would not say, "Big boys don't cry" or "I can't stand those tantrums" or "There you go again." That kind of comment refers to the undesirable behavior as if it were becoming a permanent aspect of the child. What you really want to do is give him a better way to express his bad feelings. You are not looking for an excuse to punish him. You want to understand what is hurting him, and you want to do everything you can to make that hurt go away. The child has to learn that there are some effective

ways of getting you to help (or at least to do your best) but that a tantrum will always lead to a firm, predictable, undesirable result.

Dawdling. With many children, crankiness and temper tantrums are less of a problem than their more passive cousins, dawdling and ignoring. Although the child who throws himself down in the sandbox kicking and screaming could hardly appear more different from the one who continues playing quietly while his mother calls him a dozen times, both reactions often have the same cause. As children develop skills, they naturally acquire greater control over objects and events. Their growing mastery excites a desire for even more mastery and gives them their first taste of freedom of choice about their activities. This of course collides head-on with adults' understandable attempts to control and contain the young child's exuberance.

A certain amount of dawdling is normal. But it should not become a routine power struggle between parent and child. If he has no way of exerting control other than to be slow as molasses every time you tell him it is time to do something, then you are in for a perpetually frustrating struggle. Sensing your impatience and anger, the child will become even more resistant. The more irritated you seem to be at his slowness in eating, putting toys away, or walking home from the playground, the more he will dawdle—and the closer you'll get to your boiling point.

The cycle has to be broken in two ways. Neither way alone will do the trick. Half of the solution is to stop nagging at the child and to make simple rules about dawdling. They can include one-time rules as well as more permanent ones.

EXAMPLE (permanent rule): Jason is in the "terrible twos." He would rather play with his food than eat it. His parents decide to stop nagging at him. They consider thirty minutes more than enough time for Jason to complete a meal. After twenty minutes, they give him a "ten-minute warning" by setting the kitchen timer. When it rings, all the food is removed from the table. Jason protests, but at the next meal he is hungrier and eats appropriately.

EXAMPLE (one-time rule): Lev does not want to leave the corner Tot Lot with his father, probably because he has nothing to look forward to but bedtime when they get home. He stops to inspect every crack in the sidewalk and the hubcaps of every parked car. Some parents might start nagging in an irritated tone. Lev's father says, "Shall we read a book when you're in bed? Which book?" Lev names his favorite one. "Okay, but only if we have time. If you keep stopping like that, we won't have time for a book."

The second half of the solution is to give children more choices and more control over things that do not matter so much to you. Lev was allowed to choose which book he wanted. However, the trade-off does not have to be so immediate as in that example. If children are habitual dawdlers, they are calling for more choices and control *in general*, not just at the time they are dawdling. Even at this age, a child's self-esteem demands a sense of power over some part of his or her life.

Deciding what power you can give to the child requires a thoughtful examination of your priorities. What rules do you really need to insist upon, and what preferences can you yield in favor of more freedom of choice for the child? You might be a little bored by some of the child's choices, time after time, but it is a small price to pay for cooperation.

Battles over meals. Many parents ask what to do about finicky eaters. That is a question for your pediatrician, who knows the individual child's nutritional needs. My only advice is that food types (vegetables, fruit, protein, dairy products, etc.) are more important than insisting that the child must eat any specific food. There is nothing wrong with allowing children to decide that they do not like a particular vegetable—so long as they eat other vegetables—or that they do not like a particular dairy product, so long as they get the protein and the calcium from other products. No child was ever spoiled by being allowed to refuse to eat beets.

Once again, I am emphasizing the child's need for choices. Research has shown that most children will choose a balanced diet when presented with an array of foods. They may get too little calcium one day and too few carbohydrates another day, but over the course of a few days their appetites will guide them correctly.

Don't be afraid to put children in control of the amount they eat, as well as allowing them to choose specific foods. Even if you think they are under- or overeating, don't take action without consulting your pediatrician. If an overweight child is put on a diet, he may feel compelled to resist and defeat the diet just to regain a sense of control. He would rather be fat through his own voluntary eating than thin under others' control. Part of therapy with an obese child (though not the whole treatment) may involve providing larger meals than he wants, so that he can be in control of the amount he eats. Conversely, if your child refuses to eat as much as you and your pediatrician think he should eat, try giving him even smaller portions than he wants, so that he will be hungry and ask for more.

The electronic baby-sitter

TV was already an entrenched part of our society when you and I (or your parents and I) were children. The era of many more channels, home video, and video games has not really changed the issues parents have to deal with.

In early childhood, there are just two major issues. One has to do with the problem of overstimulation. The other has to do with TV as a baby-sitter—in other words, as a cheap substitute for parent-child interaction.

Audio/video overload. Dr. Brazelton makes special mention of TV in relation to his point about toddlers building up more intense levels of concentration than they can stand.

> The energy which it takes to control the input from such an attractive source is demonstrated by a child who sits mesmerized in front of a set, unable to be reached unless a parent shouts in his ear, or physically draws him away. The cost to him is easily seen as he disintegrates at the end of a program-screaming, whimpering, and "raw" after a period of such intense involvement.*

* T. Berry Brazelton, Toddlers and Their Parents, p. 161.

There are several things parents can do to make this situation easier for young children. One is to keep the volume fairly low—audible five to ten feet away from the TV but not all over the house, and not as loud as the child's own normal voice.

Another alternative is to have the TV on only at certain times of day, for certain programs. The choice of programs is up to you, depending on the ages of your children and on your tastes as well as theirs. You can be flexible, of course, but I strongly advise against the custom of leaving the TV on even when there is nothing that you consider worth watching. It creates a constant barrage of stimulation. The young child has to either absorb it to the bursting point or tune it out by dulling his senses in general.

A final choice is just to accept the fact that audio/video overstimulation is bound to occur at times. When your child "disintegrates" like the child in Brazelton's example, turn off the TV and invite him into your lap. Try to create a calm, quiet nest for a while. If the child continues to cry, you may have to treat it as a tantrum—especially if he is demanding something you aren't willing to give him at the moment. But not every irrational crying episode is a tantrum; often, the child stops crying after a few minutes of comfort.

The TV as baby-sitter. When "Sesame Street" was conceived in the 1960s, one of its principal goals was to be visually and musically attractive to parents as well as to young children. The Children's Television Workshop producers designed the show to generate extra "cognitive" (mental) interaction between children and their caretakers. Research shows that they succeeded. If it is hard for you to walk past the TV when your three-year-old is watching "Sesame Street" without joining him for a few minutes, it doesn't mean you have immature tastes. The program has mature appeal.

Unfortunately, "Sesame Street" is almost alone in this respect, among programs for the young child. I couldn't stay awake through a whole "Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood," beloved as the show was by tots. Fred Rogers had the talent of sustaining a warm, comforting, slow-paced environment, which bored me to death. (My children were before Barney's time, thank God.)

On the commercial stations, the cartoon shows are designed to deliver a specific audience to their advertisers: children and children alone. The commercials are designed to make the child ask for the sponsor's product. Hence there is no need-in fact, no desire-to get the parents to watch.

All programming for young children can be considered from this point of view. Whose attention does it capture, and how? Is it something that amuses you at the same time it interests your child, so that it brings the two of you together for some preschool enrichment? Does it provide something that might be valuable for your child, even if it doesn't interest you? Or is it merely calculated to keep the child occupied and tuned in to specific messages, creating a demand for cereals and toys? Your answers to those questions will help you make decisions about limiting hours and choosing programs.

I strongly feel that children's competence is enhanced by limiting their time in front of the TV, at every age. Even the best program is less valuable than reading a story with you or playing a game. The truth is, *your* children don't need television at all. They have a parent who likes to read—and who cares.

A support system is a must

Much of the time, parents of preschool children feel like lion tamers. In fact, they are under more stress than a lion tamer, for several reasons. When the lion tamer is working with one lion, the others usually sit patiently on their platforms awaiting their turns, whereas your children are likely to turn on you all at once. Second, lions are *supposed* to be wild animals, so that it is remarkable when they submit to any discipline at all, whereas children are supposed to become reasonable, civilized, intelligent human beings, and when they are not, people blame their parents. Third, the lion tamer is admired and handsomely paid for his work. And when he is tired, he can lock the lions in their cages and walk away.

Even with all those advantages, the lion tamer still gets a staff of five or six helpers to handle the animals and to discuss whatever problems come up each day. You definitely need a support system, too. Researchers find that of all the factors leading to child abuse, one of the surest is a parent trying to manage alone, without enough

other adults to talk with about the ordinary daily stress of parenthood.

Don't wait until you are at the end of your rope. Build a support network for yourself *before* you need it. It should include at least three of the following kinds of support:

1. Your spouse, or an intimate friend who meets your needs for adult companionship as well as helping to solve problems with your children.
2. The children's grandparents.
3. Other relatives who care about your children, especially your sisters, brothers, sisters-in-law, or cousins who have children of their own.
4. A paid sitter.
5. Friends with children the same age as yours, who live near enough to get together with you on a regular basis.
6. A formal, cooperative play group. Supermarket bulletin boards are a good way to get in touch with other interested parents.
7. A neighborhood drop-in center for parents of toddlers. Call any minister or pediatrician in your neighborhood for suggestions, get a list of community services from your city or town hall, or try the Yellow Pages.
8. A parent stress hotline. There are many of these across the United States and Canada. They have the advantage of anonymity. If you are feeling guilty about having struck your child, or neglected him, or merely felt like doing so, a hotline is a way to talk with other, more experienced parents (volunteers) who won't be shocked. They have had the same feelings. To get the number of a hotline near you, try the same sources listed in the preceding paragraph.

EXAMPLE: Matthew, age five, is the only child of a single mother. Still mourning his father, who was killed a year ago by a drunk driver, Matthew tends to throw tantrums when he is tired and something frustrates him. At those times, he is liable to break toys, scream so loud that a neighbor once called the police, and recite every four-letter word he knows.

MISTAKE: His mother feels helpless and distraught when this happens. She has tried everything: spanking him, sending him to his room without dinner, pretending to ignore him (until he started throwing things), and once, at a friend's suggestion, she even poured a glass of cold water on Matthew. That stopped the tantrum, but a few days later there was another one. His mother collapsed on her bed, sobbing. Matthew's screaming stopped, but the next day he did it again.

BETTER: These two people are both suffering a lot, and they need help to deal with their loss: from a counselor, their extended family, and good friends who can spend a lot of time with them.

In chapter 21, we shall discuss when and how to get professional help for various kinds of problems. Not all tantrums are a cause for seeking therapy. But tantrums like Matthew's, which leave you feeling helpless and enraged, are definitely a sign that you need help. The ideas in this book are only the first approach. Drawing upon your support network is the second approach. A family counselor is the third.

Problems not to worry about

Nature is kind to parents of toddlers and preschoolers in one way: Their problems don't last very long. Even if parents do the worst possible job of dealing with some problem—toilet-training, for example—chances are the child will outgrow the difficulty. The process may take months instead of days, but the child will eventually use the toilet properly.

With certain common concerns during this period, it may even be counterproductive to worry about them. Some of these have to do with what might be called "normal obnoxiousness." Others are merely symptoms of moderate anxiety.

Terrible twos. I personally have never found two-year-olds to be terrible. It is an age of steady progress toward self-care and cooperation with family rules, and it is also an age of blossoming creativity. However it is true that two-year-olds say "No" more

often than "Yes," and resistance to suggestions often seems to be their preferred mode of operating.

This may drive you crazy, but other than that, it is not a real problem. Children have to assert their ability to say no before they can choose to say yes. That is what makes us human beings rather than robots. It is similar to the way adolescents need to reject adult society before they can voluntarily enter it. In fact, the pediatrician and writer Fitzhugh Dodson called the third year of life "first adolescence." But I think "terrible twos" is a good name because it helps to remind you that all you have to do is survive until the child is about three.

The "why" stage. Some, but not all, children pick up a nasty habit of incessant questioning. This may happen at two, three, four, or five. I would not treat it as nagging (which you can make a rule against) but as the only way the child knows of sustaining a conversation with you:

Three-year-old: Why are fire engines red?
You: So people can see them.
Three-year-old: Why?
You: So if we're driving our car, we'll see the fire engines coming a long way off and we'll pull over to the side of the road.
Three-year-old: Why?
You: To let them pass.
Three-year-old: Why do we let them pass?
You (sigh): So they can get to the fire.
Three-year-old: Why?
You: You know why.
Three-year-old: Why?
You: Why do you ask?

These conversations usually degenerate when the parent tires of responding. (The story writer Ring Lardner captured it perfectly with his line "'Shut up,' my father explained.") You can stop them at any point, simply by asking the child a question of your own.

Fears. It is normal for young children to have fears—of the dark, for example. There is no point trying to "get them over it" unless

the fear is so intense and irrational that it inconveniences the rest of the family (like a fear of being left with baby-sitters). The best first approach to a young child's fear is to protect him from the thing he is afraid of. Put a night light in his room; keep dogs away from him; don't require him to go into the basement.

If you reassure the child that you can understand why at his age he may be afraid ("Yes, dogs are scary if you don't know them") and that you are confident he will feel more secure at a later age ("When you're bigger, you won't be afraid of dogs anymore"), your acceptance will usually help the child get over the fear sooner. Pushing him to overcome the fear—by insisting that he has to get used to sleeping in the dark, for example—is likely to make the problem worse.

> EXAMPLE: One of my sons was nearly six years old when he became afraid of a circus poster of a lion that hung in a hallway of our home. He refused to go down that hall unless he could hold an adult's hand, and even then he always closed his eyes as he passed the poster. My first response was that this was ridiculous; he should not be indulged in such a silly fear. We would have to convince him that the picture could not hurt him, perhaps give him a series of "desensitization" trials as psychologists do to cure phobias. But a simpler solution suggested itself: We took down the poster. About a year later, with the child's permission, we put it back.

Undoubtedly, at that time, this child was working through some more significant feelings, which the fear of the lion merely expressed, and which exploratory therapy might have brought out. But why? That kind of effort would only have been worthwhile if the fear had been a real problem. Accepting the child's way of dealing with his feelings—even if neither he nor his parents ever fully understood what those feelings were—was easier, infinitely cheaper, and probably more effective.

If the thing the child fears cannot simply be removed or avoided—for example, if a two-year-old is afraid to go to sleep in her own room at night—you and the child can develop a magic ritual together that will often satisfy her. Don't lie down with her every night until she is asleep. But she may feel secure if her dolls

have been placed in a certain way, if her bear has been tucked in and kissed good night, and if the door is exactly six inches ajar. Give her some choices. Why does this work? Does the child really believe the bear can protect her if the proper ritual is observed? Probably not. But in cooperating with her in observing the ritual, you give her the message that it is all right for little girls to be afraid, and that you care. And you take bedtime out of the realm of the unknown; if it is the same every night, no unexpected monsters will appear. (My suggestion for toilet-training above is also based on the use of a ritual to give the child security.)

Irrational fears persisting into the elementary-school years, or beginning then, should be treated as more serious. At that age, it becomes more important to ascertain the true cause of the child's anxiety; removing its superficial focus may only leave the anxiety to affect the child in some other way. But younger children outgrow most of their fears if parents simply acknowledge them and allow the children a measure of control over their environments.

Thumb-sucking, nail-biting, bed-wetting. Probably every young child manifests some such imperfection in behavior—and which of us adults is not defective in some way? All such nervous habits will be cause for concern, and possibly therapy, if they persist much into the school years. But again, with preschool children, the most helpful thing you can do is to reassure them that the habit is perfectly all right for now, that you are confident they will get over it, but that there is no hurry. Then ignore the behavior. There is a good chance it will go away; the odds are worse if you hassle the child about it.

Stuttering, lisping, repeat-repeat-repeating words, and other garbled speech. These are very common in preschoolers. Don't worry about them until the school years, and then discuss the problem with the child's teacher. To some extent, it may help if you encourage the child to slow down, and show that you will listen without losing patience. But in general, criticizing young children's speech does not inspire them to improve it.

Lying. A serious problem in older children, lying is not a disciplinary issue before ages six to eight. Until then, don't moralize. Ask yourself instead what the child seems to be trying to avoid by telling untruths. Lying conceals fears, and your job is to understand the fears. Then you can deal with them directly, and the child can deal with you more directly and honestly.

Summary

In the years before children start school, their principal agenda is learning the language and rules of their parents. They don't need many written rules, but they greatly need consistency, clarity, and a secure structure from which they can begin to explore the world, and to which they can return after each exploration.

The show-offable achievements of the preschool years—reciting the alphabet, counting to twenty, and so forth—are less important than the self-esteem parents begin to instill by conveying their delight in those achievements. The early years are for play, not work—play within a secure social environment (basic trust comes from basic rules) and with ample praise for every act of creativity, cooperation, or appropriate expression of feeling.

SUGGESTED BOOKS: The Preschool Years

Ames, Louise, and Chase, Joan. *Don't Push Your Preschooler*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

Beek, Joan. *Best Beginnings: Giving Your Child a Head Start in Life*. New York: Putnam's, 1983.

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Donaldson, Margaret. *Children's Minds*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Fraiberg, Selma. *The Magic Years*. New York: Scribner, 1968. (This is the best book ever written about early childhood.)

Kaye, Kenneth. *The Mental and Social Life of Babies: How Parents Create Persons*. University of Chicago Press, 1982. (Requires some background in psychology.)

Sutton-Smith, Brian, and Sutton-Smith, Shirley. *How to Play With Your Children (and When Not To)*. New York: Hawthorn, 1974.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Elementary Years

Having learned the basic language, the child's main agenda from age six to about twelve is *competence*. Besides reading, writing, and arithmetic, there is a profusion of other skills to be mastered. Physical competence extends to competitive sports, ballet, gymnastics, bicycling, boating, skating, skiing, and video games. Learning to whistle may be a major occupation for months—and learning to play an instrument, for years. There are the hand-eye skills of drawing, sculpting, constructing models. The rules of games have to be mastered, not just for playing correctly but also for trying to beat someone else. There is also the perpetual task of remembering and identifying vast details from stories, movies, songs, television commercials, as well as real life. In all of those domains, children increasingly match their knowledge against adults as well as against other children.

Perhaps most important, the child has to master social skills: how to talk to other children in different situations, how to negotiate a decision about what to play, how to make a suggestion, how to respond to suggestions, how to ask adults for things, and how to say no gracefully.

Younger children are also concerned with mastery, of course. So are adolescents and adults. But there is no period of time when these concerns are so intense and occupy so much energy as during the elementary-school years.

Judging from the conversations of parents with one another during this period, and also from the questions they ask teachers,

pediatricians, and psychologists, children's competence is as big an issue for parents as it is for the children themselves. Two questions come up again and again: how to *motivate* children to try harder rather than giving up when they get frustrated, and how to *direct* their interests in the directions parents consider most worthwhile. A related question is how to help them *feel* competent in the face of so many messages implying they are not competent enough.

These three questions will occupy most of this chapter, with respect to school, extracurricular activities, and relationships with other children. At the end of the chapter I shall add some suggestions for instilling two other vital qualities before adolescence begins: *responsibility* and *honesty*.

Individual differences

All children are unique individuals. Although we try to discuss them in general terms, we cannot reduce all boys to one type, or all girls to one type. Even the simple statement that competence is a big issue for children during the elementary period is bound to have a different meaning to the parents of different children. As I did in the previous chapter on preschool children, I shall begin this chapter by pointing out just a few of the many differences among children. My main purpose is to stimulate you to think about each of your own children as someone for whom the ideas in this book must be adapted, not someone to whom my suggestions can be applied without modification.

Boys versus girls. In the early elementary years (age six to nine or so), differences between boys and girls are less important than at any other time in life. By the end of elementary school, the differences are glaring, and their importance to the boys and girls themselves will never be greater.

The change begins in the fourth or fifth grade, when girls shoot up in height and boys do not. Soon, puberty begins for the girls, increasing the differences still more. Your child's self-esteem will depend not only on his or her own bodily changes (or lack of change) but also on what is happening to the classmates' bodies. A fifth-grader whose menstrual periods have started may feel isolated and abnormal. Four years later, some of her classmates won't have

started puberty yet, and they will be the ones who will feel abnormal. The same holds true for the boy who grows to six feet at age twelve, and the one who is still barely five feet at sixteen.

Even before puberty begins, the elementary-school child anticipates those changes, sees them beginning in other children, and starts to evaluate himself or herself in terms of the questions "What is a boy? What is a girl? What kind of a boy/girl am I?"

In general, throughout this period, girls are more verbal and perform better in school, and boys are more physically active, more interested in construction and moving objects than in social relationships and such role-playing games as "House." Thus our traditional stereotypes are based on truth. But there are so many exceptions and so much overlap between the personalities of girls and boys that the stereotypes are of little use.

Even if many common generalizations about boys and girls are true, what should parents do about them? Try to enhance the differences so that your sons are more "boyish" and your daughters more "ladylike"? Try to minimize them, so your sons don't get short-changed on verbal and interpersonal skills and your daughters don't get short-changed on athletics and assertiveness? Or ignore the stereotypes, letting each child have his or her own strengths in whatever areas they may be? This author declines to answer those questions for you.

In fact, you don't have much choice. Some children seem to be "all boy" or "all girl" from an early age, firmly resisting parents' more liberated suggestions. Other children are less concerned about conforming to the stereotypes and may even deliberately reject them—for instance, the girl who refuses to wear dresses. I think it is unwise to oppose these expressions of individuality. In the case of a girl who *seldom* likes to wear dresses, parental pressure to do so would tend to make her *never* like dresses, whereas respecting her right to choose, and finding a reason to compliment her no matter what she wears, enables her to feel that she can look more or less feminine, depending on the occasion.

Impulsives vs. reflectives. The variation in activity levels which I noted in preschool children continues into this period, and to some extent the same children who were the quieter ones then are still the quieter ones. In addition, another variable observed by child psychologists has to do specifically with mental activity.

Like adults, some children respond quickly when given a problem to solve, and some reflect more carefully before responding. Both types may get the answer right or wrong. These impulsive versus reflective styles have been found to be fairly reliable characteristics of individual children across a variety of situations. In moderation, they are simply personality differences, about which there is nothing parents can or should do. At the extremes, however, an impulsive child and a reflective child have very different needs. The former needs to be encouraged to scan all the available information, to consider alternative responses before choosing one. By contrast, the extremely reflective child cannot commit himself to make a choice, perhaps due to anxiety over the possibility of being wrong. This child may need reassurance about the fact that all of us have to make guesses in situations where we cannot be certain of being correct.

How do you know when these personality styles are problems that the child needs help with, rather than simply individual differences to be accepted? I would say that they are only problems if the child's teacher or school psychologist diagnoses them as interfering with schoolwork; that is, the child is making mistakes because of impulsiveness or failing to complete work because of reflectiveness. Neither an impulsive nor a reflective style is a problem unless it seriously hampers a child's scholastic achievement.

Specialists vs. generalists. Another way children differ is in the breadth of their interests and competencies. For some, the drive for competence in the elementary years is focused on two or three areas: a particular sport; a particular game; reading; grades in school; perhaps a musical instrument. These children have little interest in things they cannot do fairly well.

Other children are more scattered in their interests, accumulating a moderate degree of competence at a large number of activities without getting involved in any of them deeply or for long. They are more intrigued by the diversity of challenges the world offers than by the single-minded pursuit of excellence.

Parents cannot choose which strategy their children will employ. Some parents who pursue a great many interests encourage their children to do likewise, but their children may be of the single-minded persuasion. These parents need to be careful not to push for breadth to such an extent that they discourage excellence. On the other hand, parents who are more single-minded and dedicated to excellence run the danger of stifling a "generalist's" other interests.

In order to avoid that kind of conflict, it helps to spend some time thinking about what kind of approach each of your children seems to be taking toward this period of life. Both types of children are normal. Either strategy can be disadvantageous to a child who carries it to extremes—the musical prodigy who never exercises her body, the star athlete who misses out on the joys of literature, or the dilettante who drops every activity before getting any satisfaction from mastering it. But in the less extreme cases, both strategies are healthy ways of developing.

Adult-oriented versus child-oriented. A difference among children in the ability to relate to adults appears quite strikingly by the time they reach age seven or eight. Although school-age children generally spend much more time playing with each other than with adults, some are more at ease with adults and better tuned in to adult conversation than other children are.

This is not an area in which much research has been done, so I can only share my impressions. When children come into my office, or when I meet my friends' children and my children's friends, I notice right away that some relate to me almost as adults—less knowledgeable, perhaps, sometimes less articulate, but interested in me and wanting me to be interested in them. Other children, just as healthy in terms of their psychological development, do not do that. They seem to find adults' conversation boring. Their replies to questions are courteous but peremptory, even evasive.

I assume that the children who feel at ease with adults during this period are those whose parents have treated them as interesting conversational partners, who have spoken to them in a fairly grown-up way, have included them in dinner table discussions even when there were guests for dinner, and have listened respectfully

when the children had something to say. (I have to add that when this is carried too far, and children sense that there is something wrong with being "childish," they can develop serious neuroses.)

The more child-oriented children have not necessarily been ignored, babied, or condescended to, but their parents have probably not realized that there were many subjects on which they could engage their children on a mature level. They may have rarely stepped out of the order-giving role except when they played children's games at the children's level.

Although both groups of children are normal, the child who feels at ease in the world of grown-ups as well as among other children has a strong advantage. Teachers are adults; so are coaches, librarians, ministers, and everyone else from whom children acquire their most important competencies. The acquisition of knowledge is cumulative and self-perpetuating; skills acquired early in life lay the foundation for all later learning. The child who is less able to relate to adults, at any period in development, is deprived of valuable input. This awkwardness will make it harder to acquire all kinds of other skills. It will cheat the child of positive, confidence-building feedback from parents, teachers, and others.

The ability to relate to other children, whose interests and whose social conventions are entirely different from those of adults, is also important. In fact, if a child had to choose one orientation, it would be better to be child-oriented during this period and to let the orientation to adults wait. Fortunately, they do not have to choose one style. They can be bilingual, so to speak—fluent in the dialect of adults as well as in that of their agemates.

Parents of adult-oriented children need to remember that despite the ease of communication on an adult level, the children are still children and the parents are still parents. Don't be misled into letting your rules slip away just because your child is so articulate.

With the child-oriented child, I think the danger is that the parents may become less sensitive to the child's growth. You may need to make an extra effort to narrow the communication gap, to praise the child, to set aside time for one-to-one activities, and to include the child in some of your conversations with adults.

Motivation and direction in school

Your number-one tactic for inspiring your children to do their best in school is to praise their every achievement. No doubt you have been doing that from their infancy onward; but don't stop. When the first-grader brings home that first worksheet with the teacher's "Good" or ?at the top, show your pleasure. Praising is motivating, and it is not the teacher's job alone.

Continue taking an interest in every day's schoolwork right through to the end of high school. Don't take it for granted. Be enthusiastic about good work.

When the grades are not impressive, the first question to ask is, Who says he is doing poorly? For some children, a B in math or a C in spelling may be good grades; they should be praised as highly as another child's A. Poor performance in school is a relative matter. Before worrying about what to do about a child's "underachievement," be guided by the teacher's judgment as to what level of achievement ought to be expected of this child in this subject.

The teacher's job includes observing each child in school, interpreting test reports, analyzing the individual child's problems in understanding the material in each subject, grouping children at various ability levels, and making recommendations to parents about extra help their children might need. One question you should ask at every conference is, "Should we expect our child to be doing better work in this subject?" If the answer is yes, then ask the teacher's opinion as to what type of underachievement you have to deal with. There are at least five kinds of underachievement. The parents' job is different in each case. Depending on the type of underachievement you are dealing with, you may need to provide:

- Remedial help with basic learning skills.
- Tutoring or extra help with homework and with concepts not understood in class.
- Stricter rules about school-related behavior.
- Special incentives for improving grades.
- Psychotherapy for the child or whole family.

Different combinations of these approaches are used for each of the following kinds of underachievement.

Underachievement type 1: Significant decline. Here, achievement slips significantly below what it used to be in a particular subject, though the child still seems to be making an effort. You and the teacher should ask each other whether anything significant happened at around the same time the decline in performance began. Did the subject matter change in a way that required different skills? If so, perhaps the child needs remedial help in those skills. Was he placed in a different group? Perhaps the change was inappropriate; the teacher and/or principal might be ready to reevaluate it. Or was it something at home—a birth or death in the family, a divorce, a parent losing a job? All of those events are known to affect school performance, but not irreversibly. The child needs more opportunity to talk about his sadness and worries—with you, first, and perhaps also with a counselor.

Underachievement type 2: Discrepancy between aptitude and achievement. If the child's achievement has never been up to the level of his tested aptitude in a subject, it suggests one of two things. Either the child simply doesn't care about performing well in that subject, or certain skills necessary for achievement are not tested by the aptitude test. I would start with the first hypothesis, increasing the child's motivation by a combination of rewards and costs, as explained below. If the child is unable to bring his grades up, then you can explore the second hypothesis. When you know he is making a serious effort, the kinds of errors he makes will make it clearer to you and to the teacher just which skills he needs help with.

Underachievement type 3: Special learning disability. When certain aptitude scores are significantly lower than others, a school psychologist may identify the child as having a remediable learning disability. The test scores indicate that particular kinds of remedial work should be given to overcome or circumvent a learning disability. Thus the child need not be resigned to continuing underachievement.

The phrase "learning disability" is often loosely applied to any child with consistently low achievement in a subject. That is incorrect. A more meaningful definition of a learning disabled child is *one who can be helped by teaching the subject in a different way or by giving extra attention to fundamental learning skills before attempting to teach the subject in the traditional way.* (See the bibliography at the end of this chapter.)

Underachievement type 4: Low aptitude. Here, there is no indication of any particular learning disability. Some educators would not call this "underachievement" but would simply say the child is not bright enough to work at grade level in that subject. Nothing will enable him to master the material as rapidly as other children his age. That still does not mean he and his parents have to resign themselves to low achievement. It may mean spending twice as much time on a subject as a brighter child requires to master the same material.

Unfortunately, the way most schools are organized makes that impossible. When the majority of children have mastered a unit the group moves on. Children who need a little more time to grasp the concepts are then at a double loss, for they also lack the foundations on which the next unit is built. For example , they have to struggle with dividing by two-digit numbers before they have mastered one-digit division. Naturally they fall further and further behind.

Educational methods designed to eliminate this kind of handicap are called mastery learning. If your child's school does not use a mastery-learning approach, you can provide it to your child through tutoring. Discuss this with the child's teacher or principal. (If you have some background in education, I recommend Professor Benjamin Bloom's book on this topic, *Human Characteristics and School Learning*.)

Underachievement type 5: "Goofing off." In this case, poor grades are directly due to uncooperative classroom behavior, failure to turn in homework, or absence from class. The aptitude is there, but the teacher reports that the child is simply not doing the work. This could be due to some of the same troubles in school or at home that I listed in connection with unexplained drops in achievement. However, the first step should be to make rules about homework,

attendance, and cooperation with the teacher. If this is all that the child needs, then you will see an improvement in achievement, which will improve the child's attitude, which will further improve achievement, and so on. If not, then you can explore such other possibilities as depression, anxiety, or difficulties with other children.

Motivation by rewards and costs. Regardless of which type of underachievement you are dealing with, in addition to remedial work, tutoring, or stricter rules about school work, it is a good idea to offer extra incentives for improving.

> EXAMPLE: Twelve-year-old Karen's grades have taken a nose dive since last year, and her teacher says she simply is not doing her work. Her parents make stricter rules about homework: Television and telephone are both off limits from dinnertime until one of the parents has checked Karen's homework. This is presented as a Probation, to continue until her grades improve.
>
> At the same time, Karen is offered a reward for returning to her former level of achievement. Her parents offer to take her and her best friend somewhere special; she chooses an all-day trip to an amusement park. Her mother writes out a contract specifying exactly what grades Karen has to achieve by what deadline and exactly what reward is promised if she does.

The idea of this sort of incentive is to make the child want the intervention to succeed. Usually the child would like to do better in school as much as his parents want him to, but the remedial measures are seen as onerous. That creates resistance. The extra incentive can remove the onus, allowing the child to say to himself, "I'm not working just to please my parents; I'm working to get the tickets to the amusement park."

With or without the positive incentive, you can also increase the *cost* to the child of continuing to do poorly. Often the threat of extra tutoring, remedial classes, or stricter homework rules is sufficient motivation for the child to take grades more seriously.

EXAMPLE: Luis has a record of nothing but A's and B's on his report cards until sixth grade, when he begins to hang out with friends every day after school. In the evenings, he watches television. Two C's appear on his first report card. After discussion with Luis and his teacher, his parents decide to tell Luis he has one marking period in which to bring his grades back up. For the next two months, Luis is still in charge of budgeting his own time. If there are any C's on his next report card, Luis will have to go to an after school tutor in those subjects, and his parents will put into effect a homework priority rule as in the previous example.

This example shows that you don't necessarily have to intervene immediately to produce a change. in children's work habits. Why put a restriction into effect if you can get the same result with the threat alone? "Show us that you *can* improve your grades under our existing rules, or we will have to tighten the rule." Of course, you have to be prepared to follow through.

Switching teachers or schools. Although some parents are too quick to blame their child's teachers when his school achievement is disappointing, there are just as many who are too passive and who accept teachers, principals, and school psychologists as the ultimate authority.

Parents should begin with the attitude that those professionals *probably* know their business. At the same time, we have to be aware that not all teachers are wonderful; in fact, few teachers are wonderful for every type of child. Not all principals supervise their staffs adequately, and *no* psychologists or psychological tests are infallible.

You are the consumer. If you are not getting what you are paying for with your tuition or your tax dollars, be assertive. After exhausting other remedies, ultimately you might have to insist that the child be transferred to another class or even to another school.

Many parents are reluctant to be assertive for fear that teachers' resentment may have negative repercussions for the child. But being assertive does not mean being hostile; you won't generate resentment when you present yourself as a concerned parent. You respect the teacher's job, but you are also trying to do your own part

to help your child. Almost without exception, teachers appreciate parents who consult with them several times each year and who respond vigorously when their children are underachieving. The parents about whom teachers complain are the ones who don't show any interest in how their children's schoolwork is going. Of course, parents who assume that problems can only be the teacher's fault are not going to be received positively.

In the early grades, if a child is reported to be having trouble in the classroom—misbehavior, inattentiveness, conflicts with the teacher—it is perfectly reasonable for the parent to ask to observe the child in class. If you are called in for a conference, ask to sit in the classroom for a couple of hours, either that day or a few days later. Even if the teacher is not receptive to this request, be persistent. Explain to the principal that you want to understand better why your child seems to be giving this teacher more trouble than most of the other children do, and why your child is having trouble this year as compared with previous years.

Undeniably, your presence in the classroom may have a moderating effect on your child, and on the teacher's behavior toward him. You won't see their interaction at its worst. But more important is the opportunity to assess how the teacher relates to all the other children. If she is authoritarian—curt, irritable, or insensitive to any of the children that day—you can bet that she will be that way toward your child another day. And, at the opposite extreme, if she seems incapable of managing her class, allowing not just a relaxed atmosphere but a chaotic one, then you can conclude that she is not the teacher your child needs. (A teacher who creates a structured, well-ordered environment can provide extra structure and limits for those children who seem to need them; but one whose whole class is out of control may single out the one who is most visibly suffering from her incompetence and label that child as the biggest source of her problems.)

On the other hand, if the teacher appears to be competent on the day you observe her, you have to assume she is generally so. Someone who is in control of the class, intelligent, and perceptive about the children's needs when you are observing, is not likely to be any less competent on other days.

If you don't like what you see in the classroom and your attempts to work cooperatively with the teacher have failed, discuss

the problem frankly with the principal. Don't be afraid to become a nuisance, if necessary. Even if it is too late in the school year to make a change, your complaints (assuming they are not the only ones received) will help reduce the teacher's chances of being rehired and will make it much more likely that your child is placed with the most competent teacher available next year. "The squeaky wheel gets oiled."

If "nothing works." One of the most frustrating situations for parents is to have a child who just doesn't care about grades. He shows as little interest in the tutor as he shows in school. He rejects all special incentive offers—new bicycle, video cartridge, sports equipment.

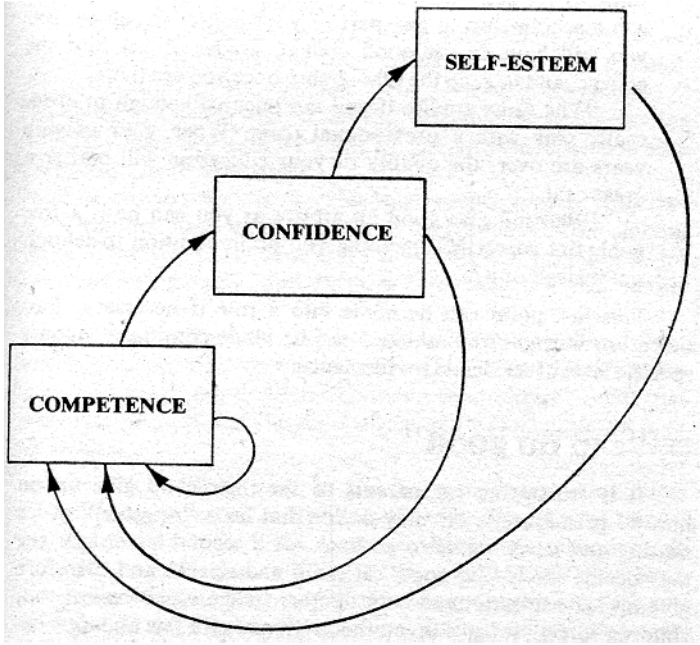
In this situation, it may be best to stop pushing. The concern you have been showing is making the child more resistant. The incentive method usually works as a supplement to a child's intrinsic motivation. It does not work if motivation is completely absent, and certainly not if the child is trying to prove how little he cares for a subject.

Instead of pushing, concentrate on supporting the child's pursuit of whatever school subjects or extracurricular activities he does show interest in. You can actually have more effect on academic achievement in the long run by praising a nonacademic achievement, like mastery of a video game, than by criticism of the child's academic shortcomings.

Extracurricular motivation versus academic motivation. In chapter 11, I stressed the importance of praising children for the activities in which they show an interest, rather than criticizing them for all the activities they pick up and drop. Since that is particularly important in the elementary school years, when competence is such an issue for the child, I want to say more here about the rationale for that strategy.

Competence works like a chain reaction. Every bit of increased competence leads to more competence. This happens both directly (one skill is used to acquire another) and indirectly; self-confidence makes it easier to learn, and self-esteem motivates the child to want to increase his or her competence further.

Out of all the new bits of skill, confidence, and self-esteem that result, some are bound to be useful in school. So the distinction between academic motivation and extracurricular motivation is really an artificial one. Excellence in school will have later benefits for extracurricular activities. Excellence in sports, music, or model building will have later benefits in school or in the pursuit of a vocation.



On the other hand, children sometimes delude themselves with the idea that they are going to be so successful as athletes, singing stars, or space warriors that schoolwork simply won't matter. Without deflating their preadolescent fantasies too much, you need to put them in touch with reality. (This is easier to do now than it will be when they reach adolescence.)

EXAMPLE: "You have to realize that only a small percentage of talented high-school athletes win athletic scholai ships to college. Maybe your soccer abilities will help you win a scholarship to pay part of your college expenses. But you

still have to get good enough grades to get into the college, and to keep the scholarship once you are there.

"The same applies if you are talented enough to eventually play with a professional team. When your playing years are over, the quality of your education will matter a great deal.

"Becoming as good an athlete as you can be is a fine goal. But soccer is something you do in addition to school, not instead of it."

This last point can be made into a rule if necessary. Participation in organized athletics can be made contingent upon a specific level of academic performance.

"I'm no good"

It is frustrating for parents to see their child give up on himself prematurely. He may decide that he is "no good" at ice skating and never wants to go back for a second lesson. Or she may decide she is "no good" at math and science and therefore give up her aspirations to be a doctor. In the social realm, too, children sometimes give up on themselves after a few unhappy experiences with peers.

First of all, you have to assess whether the child's self-evaluation is realistic. It may be a realistic decision not to invest any more effort in an activity where one is hopelessly inept. A child who can't carry a tune, for example, is acting realistically in giving up piano lessons in favor of sports; and a musically talented child with two left feet is equally realistic in making the opposite decision.

What do you do, however, if the child has not given himself a chance, if he just accepts the idea that he is a social outcast, a D student, a failure at sports, or a poor musician, rather than taking any initiative to solve the problem? You suggest inviting a friend over; the response is "I don't have any friends; nobody likes me." You suggest a summer program with a focus on sports; the child does not want to be signed up, because "I'm no good at sports." You suggest extra work in math; the child insists, "More time won't help; I'm just no good at it."

Some people become quite skilled at proclaiming their incompetence while rejecting all efforts to help them. Clinical psychology has a term for such people: "Help-rejecting complainers." The more proficient one is at the help-rejecting-complaining game, the more one loses the game of life. So parents need to stop it before it gets to be a habit.

The way to stop it is to refuse to go on performing your half of the routine. Stop making all those suggestions for the child to reject. After you have made three suggestions in response to his complaints or moping, and all three have been rejected, simply stop.

At the same time, remember that the child's negative feelings need to be accepted. You might be tempted to say, "Sure you can do it, you are good, don't resign yourself to failure"—but that reinforces the idea that the child who doesn't succeed in this area is a failure.

EXAMPLE: Tom, in fourth grade, hates recess. "I'm the slowest runner in the class," he moans. "I can't catch, and I can't throw." His mother invites him to come jogging with her. His father offers to play catch with him. Both parents suggest that when his friend comes over after school, the two of them could play ball instead of building with Tom's construction set.

Finally the parents catch on that Tom is going to reject all suggestions. "Well, Tom," one of them says, "we don't have anything else to suggest. Those are some things you could do if you wanted to be a better runner, catcher, or thrower. That's how the other boys got to be good at those things. But not everybody has to be an athlete. The jocks miss out on some of the things you do, like your construction set. If you want to put your energy into that instead of ballplaying, it's up to you."

Then they stop. No more nagging, and no more going along with Tom's self-deprecations.

One warning about this advice: "Help-rejecting complainer" children are not always playing games. They may be clinically depressed, and this may be their only way of signaling it to their parents. Nonetheless, the way to respond is still to stop making suggestions. If the child is actually suffering from depression, there will be other symptoms, such as too much or too little appetite,

sleeping problems, declining grades. And those things will probably get worse when you stop playing along with the help-rejecting complaints. Then you know that the child needs to be seen by a child psychologist.

Television and movies[*]

By age twelve, the average American child has spent about seven thousand hours in school (including recess and lunch), compared to ten thousand hours watching television. He or she has been exposed to somewhere between five thousand and ten thousand classroom lessons, and more than two hundred thousand television commercials. It seems to me, therefore, that parents ought to give at least as much thought to what comes out of the TV as to what goes on at school. Television may not have become an issue in your family. If it does become an issue, make a rule. I have already discussed rules such as "No TV until homework is done" or "If dishes are not done by bedtime, you lose TV privileges the next night." Now I want to stimulate your thinking about the content of TV, and also of movies—the problem of censoring what school children watch.

As usual, I am not going to try to impose my values on you (though I can't conceal them). What I have to offer are methods for putting your own values into practice.

Trying to control what your children watch can backfire, like trying to control what they eat. When people feel deprived, they overindulge. The best way to help children become selective about what they watch is to give them choices among several acceptable alternatives.

I also doubt whether you can achieve much control over content by limiting a child's viewing to certain hours. That is fine as a matter of priorities—deferring to homework, chores, and so on—but not effective as a means of controlling content. Your children have access to garbage on TV at any time of day. They also have access to truly informative programs and creative

[*] *Readers should of course apply the points of this section to the Internet, which was not available to children when I wrote the book. –K.K.*

entertainment. Your guidelines will have to deal with content, not with time slots.

Not all the violence and sexual titillation is confined to cop shows and TV movies. The evening news can be even more disturbing. A few years ago, kindergarteners in the Chicago area (and perhaps nationwide) had nightmares about the "Tapsule Man"—the killer who laced Tylenol capsules with cyanide. Tapsule Man is fun to joke about on the playground but not fun to think about alone in the bedroom when the lights are out.

Talk shows, too, like to "probe" topics of sex, violence, violent sex, and sexy violence. Nor are those the only program topics parents should be concerned about. A documentary on terminal cancer, drug addiction, or accidents at nuclear plants might be inappropriate for young children to watch without parental supervision.

Parental guidance. Since all those topics belong to the reality of our world, not just to TV, you cannot hope to keep them from your children's view for very long. But you can greatly influence how your children are affected by them. Crime, sex, violence, cancer, drug addiction, nuclear disasters, and political corruption are all occasions for answering children's questions at a level appropriate to their age.

> EXAMPLE: My six-year-old looked up from his toys as I was watching the evening news one night and asked, "What's oral sex?" It was important for me to answer him, so I said, "The man was arrested because he made the boys kiss him when they didn't want to." To an eight-year-old, I might have added, "Oral means mouth, and oral sex just means kissing in a very sexy way." To a ten-year-old: "He forced them to kiss his penis, after pretending to be their friend." To a twelve-year-old, I would say: "It would have been the man's own business if he did it with a homosexual friend, but forcing teenagers to have sex with him—whether they were boys or girls—was a terrible crime."

A married mother on a soap opera leaves her children with a baby-sitter, picks up a strange man in a bar, and goes to bed with him in a motel. Is that a damaging thing for your children to see?

It depends what you say about it. The networks stop short of showing "explicit sex," and they stop short of nudity. But your children know what nude men and women look like. What they may not know, until they see it on TV, is that some mommies and daddies go to bed with strangers.

On a police show, when a son stabs his father as the father is attempting to prevent him from taking drugs, the network censors will spare the gory details of the stabbing. But your children can imagine the father's guts spilling out on the carpet; that is not the problem. In fact, when they see blood and guts in movies, they are horrified in a thrilling sort of way, but not damaged emotionally or developmentally. What is potentially damaging is not the "explicit violence" itself but the presentation of violence as a solution to interpersonal problems.

I agree with psychologists who have suggested that TV shows should depict violence *more* realistically. In real life, victims don't always get shot in the stomach, heart, or arm, like TV victims. Real people sometimes get their heads blown off. If children saw that more vividly, it might make gunplay seem less like fun.

Research shows that watching violence and aggression on TV does not, in and of itself, make children more violent or aggressive. Nor does it necessarily disturb them. If parents comment on the violence, labeling it as part of a lifestyle they specifically reject, and *if they practice what they preach,* their children are unaffected by the televised violence.

Since you never really know what television subjects will capture your child's attention over the course of the day, being prepared to *discuss* the subject matter is more effective than trying to prohibit it. (Get in the habit of asking them about programs they watched when you were not there.) The mass media are not a school, teaching a curriculum that the community has agreed children should learn. They are a reflection of life as it is experienced in our society. They supplement children's education constructively only when parents use the broadcast material as occasions to highlight their own perspectives on life.

Parental censorship. For TV series that are principally aimed at adults, you can establish guidelines to decide whether they are appropriate for your children. If you decide to prohibit a certain

show, be honest about your reasons. "That's an adult show and we don't approve of children watching it until they're at least __ years old. We don't care what your friends tell you their parents allow. We don't allow it." Don't make a phony excuse, such as saying a prime-time series is violent if what you dislike is its portrayal of extramarital affairs. Always preserve your credibility.

With movies, your guidelines can be even more specific, because you can find out exactly what is in a movie before you allow your children to see it.

If you decide not to allow them to see a particular film, tell them why not. It may be the language used, the vividness of violence, or the explicit sex. Or you can explain that the film commends principles you abhor. For example, you consider it pro-war propaganda, or pacifist propaganda. Children need to learn what their parents' values are and how they may differ from others'.

Don't depend on the PG (Parental Guidance) and R (Restricted) ratings; they mean next to nothing. Many excellent films for children as young as ten or eleven are rated R only because of strong language, which they have heard before. Many films rated PG, despite being targeted for families, are obscene in their negative attitudes toward marriage, parent-child relations, the law, women, and minorities.

The other two ratings, G (General Audiences) and X, are more reliable. In these days of pay TV and adult video cassettes, some children have access to X-rated films due to their parents' carelessness. Other parents intentionally expose their children to such material in the misguided hope of educating them. I disagree; pornography is bad for children. We adults, with realistic knowledge of sexuality, can make whatever use we want of explicit fantasy material. We can evaluate it as erotic, trashy, fun, or immoral; and we need not agree with each other. But children have no way to evaluate it, and no one with whom they can comfortably share the impressions it makes on them. It is not the way to learn about sex.

I am not suggesting that movies themselves should be more censored. It is our job as parents to make those decisions on an individual basis. Unless a picture is rated G, see it yourself first, or read a detailed review, or talk with another parent who has seen it.

Nor am I suggesting that you can put blinders on your children. Before they reach adolescence, they are going to see and hear virtually everything. But being exposed to adult reality need not mean having their noses rubbed in it. You have considerable control over how much your children are confronted by sex, violence, and other disturbing themes in the media, and at what ages. When censorship fails, you can use the occasion to discuss the provocative or disturbing subject matter with your children, instead of merely complaining about it.

Live in a good neighborhood

In *How to Make Your Child a Winner*, Dr. Victor Cline includes "Live in a good neighborhood" as one of his ten crucial keys for parents. It seemed to me an obvious point, until I reflected on how few other authors mention it and how many parents let loyalty to relatives, financial pressures, or just plain inertia keep them from moving when they should. Moving might mean being further from the grandparents or selling one's house when its market value is less than one had hoped. It might mean moving into a more modest house or apartment. Yet it can be a valuable investment in your children's future.

The immediate neighborhood your children live in is more important during the elementary years than at any other time. What goes on within a few blocks of your house will influence their values, aspirations, competence, and self-esteem more than the wider cross section of society that they learn about through the media. Cruelty, stupidity, or despair on TV can be understood as belonging to another part of the world, clearly apart from their own lives. Cruelty, stupidity, or despair in a child's own neighborhood cannot be ignored. They can be overcome, to be sure, but it is a struggle.

By "neighborhood" I do not mean the school district. Attending good schools is only part of the issue. Where will they play after school, on weekends, and in the summer? Will you have to shepherd them everywhere, or will they be able to go places on their bikes and on foot? What kinds of children will they be bringing home, and what kinds of homes will they be visiting? Will their playmates be responsible children, from homes with rules? Or neglected children coping with irresponsible parents?

Of course, you can't expect to move into an ideal neighborhood and have it remain ideal for you. A community is what you make it. Your job as a parent includes active involvement in one or more of the organizations that make your community a good place for children to grow up: Scouts, PTA, park districts, sports leagues, and so forth. It is not enough to be a precinct captain or a hospital volunteer. As worthwhile as those activities are, they don't directly affect your child's daily life. By participating as an active *parent* in the community, you show your children how much you care about them, and you give them a more visible model of active citizenship.

Friends

Through your children's neighborhood, school, activities, and through your own choices of family friends, you indirectly determine who your children's friends are going to be. You may also have a considerable direct effect by placing certain activities or places "off limits" or by banning a particular child from your home. These measures, however, are only for discouraging children from forming friendships with kids whose behavior you disapprove of. That is not usually a problem during the elementary years. The more common problems are how to encourage relationships with other children and how to help children who have trouble finding friends.

How many friends "should" a child have? There are several different patterns of friendship, and any of them can change with age. Every child needs at least one good friend. There is nothing wrong with having only one, unless the child himself wishes for more friends. And there is nothing wrong with having many different friends without one bosom buddy—unless, again, the child is dissatisfied with that situation. There is cause for concern if a child is a loner: no after-school friends; no one to invite over on a Saturday, or to call on the phone about a homework assignment, or to sleep over with. Cousins can fill the bill to some extent, but brothers and sisters are not enough. Learning to make friends, to be

a friend, to behave appropriately with peers is one of the major areas of competence to be achieved during these years.

The child who has no friends may be suffering from extreme shyness. Shyness can be very painful for a child. In most cases it is just a genetic trait, to be accepted like one's eye or hair color, but often children think "They won't like me, because I'm too shy." That is obviously self-defeating; sufficient reason to consider therapy for your child. I would not expect the problem to go away of its own accord.

In other cases, the lack of friends is due to rejection by other children. This is not always an indication that therapy is needed. A child who is socially isolated for being different from his classmates in some way—because of religion or race, for instance—probably needs an out-of-school group of more similar playmates rather than therapy. On the other hand, some children are isolated because of behavioral problems. The other children may find them too babyish, too aggressive, or sexually disturbing in some way. When you find out why your child is unpopular, you are a long way toward helping him or her.

MISTAKE: "Of course they don't like you. What do you expect, the way you keep grabbing them and pulling them down off the jungle gym?"

BETTER: "I was watching you play with those kids, and I noticed that they really didn't like being grabbed and pulled. I think they might be friendlier next time if you just climbed with them, without grabbing them."

"What's wrong with you that you don't have any friends?" is only likely to heighten the very feelings of inadequacy that may be contributing to the problem in the first place. Instead, try to do just the opposite: Make the child feel more self-assured. If you talk about the problem in Tom's presence, describe it this way: "Tom unfortunately hasn't found any kids in his class to be friends with outside of school."

Usually a child's biggest problem is taking the initiative. There are plenty of other children waiting for your child to make the first move. Perhaps he or she is afraid to, does not know that it is all right to, or is inept at approaching other children. You can

explore these possibilities frankly with your child and help him in one of the following ways.

Get the child out of the house. You can't ensure that relationships with peers will be the result, but it is obviously much more likely than if the child hides himself indoors.

If computer games help your child attract friends to come over and play, fine; but if all they do is entertain him while he stays home alone, you need a rule restricting their use. The same goes for model trains or any other hobby. There is nothing wrong with forcing your child out into the harsh world, provided you don't do it in a harsh way.

This might mean as little as an hour a day for a first-grader, up to several hours for a seventh-grader. Don't insist on any particular activity ("You must be on a hockey team"). Instead, suggest several alternative activities and let the child choose one. You can insist that the child find something to do out of the house.

Help him or her invite children over. Your firstborn may not realize, until you suggest it, that children can telephone other children or talk to them in school about coming over to play. (Later children have an advantage in observing their older brothers' or sisters' friendships.) A specific activity helps to give the invitation structure—just as it does between adults. It takes a fairly self-assured child to call up and say, "Would you like to come over and play?" Most children feel more comfortable saying, "Would you like to play Dungeons and Dragons?" or "How about bringing your coin collection over and trading some of your duplicates with me?"

The more reticent your child is, the more you might need to create special attractions. You might rent a video-cassette movie—either a favorite classic or a new release. Or you can take your whole family to a museum, beach, or amusement park, and encourage the child to bring along a friend. Include some time before or after the excursion to let the children play at your house.

A birthday party seems to me a poor way to accomplish this goal. It is too much work for you and no help for the child in making friends. It puts him in the awkward situation, if he is trying

to make new friends, of obligating them to bring a gift. And it only comes once a year.

Get together with your own friends who live nearby and have kids the same age. This approach requires no initiative at all on your child's part, except to be friendly when the other family comes over—for example, for a Sunday brunch. If the children enjoy one another's company, it will be obvious to you as well as to the other parents, and subsequently the kids alone can get together.

If "nothing works." Finally, if your child rejects all your suggestions, ask yourself whether you might have been trying too hard to solve his problem for him. If he still complains about not having anything to do or anyone to play with, follow the suggestions under "I'm no good," above.

In the case of a child who does not complain but mere resigns herself to a lonely existence, a family-oriented therapist is needed (see chapter 21). Remember to label the problem as "Susan is unhappy," rather than "Susan is unpopular." It is bad enough being lonely, without having to bear in addition the social stigma attached to loneliness.

Moral development

For nearly a century, psychologists have been investigating the growth of moral judgment—children's ideas about right and wrong. In prior centuries, there were three philosophies about children and morality. There were those who believed that children were born in "native depravity" and had to be rectified, as the Reverend Billy Graham recommended, by fathers holding a Bible in one hand and a belt in the other. The opposing group believed, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that children came directly from God, to be inevitably corrupted by civilization. (Rousseau gave all his children to foundling homes rather than taking part in "corrupting" them.) Finally, there were those who saw children as blank slates, morally as well as intellectually, to be written upon by their parents.

The research has not supported any of those views. It indicates instead that normal children's moral judgment advances along with their intelligence, through similar stages from concrete to abstract.

It develops as a result of all their experiences—in school, in play, with other children, and with their parents. It is certainly not a result merely of the discipline they have received. In fact, there is only an indirect connection between parental discipline and the development of morality. Let me explain what I mean by that.

If a system of rules and consequences were responsible for moral training, children would develop only the most primitive attitudes toward morality: judgments based on rewards and punishments. ("What is right is what others reward; what is wrong is what others punish.") With that attitude, anything one gets away with is all right. It is an attitude that pervades our society; but if we want a better world for our children and their children, we had better give them a higher morality than that. Higher principles are based on cooperation for the mutual benefit of all, and on ideas of right and wrong irrespective of reward or punishment.

Fortunately, most children develop those higher levels, at least in their thinking about moral questions, and sometimes in their actions as well. For example, whereas young children are more likely to cheat in games or tests if they believe they can get away with it, older children and teenagers cheat *less often* under an honor system than when they think a higher authority is monitoring them. Such research evidence supports the main principle of this book: Rules and consequences are most important in early childhood so that self-esteem, competence, and social responsibility can take over to motivate and protect the older child.

The rule system described in Part I has little direct bearing on moral education. It provides a structure for the family with respect to a relatively small number of areas in which children are not free. The moral questions arise in all the other areas of life, where children are free to decide how to act. A system of rules makes it clear to children what those areas are. It allows you to explain your preferences without generating too much internal resistance to your views. It allows you to convey your values without depriving your child of the opportunity to choose those values voluntarily. It frees you to be an educator rather than a dictator. And it frees your children to make responsible decisions and experience the effects of their actions upon themselves and upon others.

In other words, the extremely concrete, consequence-oriented approach you are adopting for basic rules will not represent your

moral attitude. Making beds, washing dishes, and doing homework are not moral issues. Some of the rules may reflect your values (don't borrow things without asking; don't lie), but the way you enforce those rules is not a model for dealing with all situations in life. Your children will not be confused about this, for they have plenty of opportunities to learn from you, both by word and action, how decent people conduct their lives.

The greatest of all child psychologists, Jean Piaget, made this point more than fifty years ago when he said, "Given sufficient liberty of action, the child will spontaneously emerge from his egocentrism and tend with his whole being towards cooperation." Piaget also wrote:

> Thus adult authority, although perhaps it constitutes a necessary moment in the moral evolution of the child, is not in itself sufficient to create a sense of justice. This can develop only through the progress made by cooperation and mutual respect--cooperation between children to begin with, and then between child and adult as the child approaches adolescence and comes, secretly at least, to consider himself as the adult's equal.*

Responsibility for things

Which of the following things do you hold your children responsible for? "Responsible" means financially accountable for loss or damages due to negligence. In some cases, it might also mean routine care: washing, cleaning, mending, storing properly.

- His or her own clothes (if she loses a sweater, she buys herself a new one or does without).
- School supplies (you buy the first set of colored pencils, for example, but when the child can't find them, the second set comes out of his or her allowance).
- Sports equipment (you would refuse to replace a pair of skates if they were left somewhere).
- Bicycle.

* Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child.* New York: The Free Press, 1965, pp. 190 and 319. Although it is a scholarly book, this is one of the few of Piaget's works that is readable and enjoyable by the general reader.

- Pets.
- Your stereo, television, and household appliances.
- Windows, doors, furniture, etc. (beyond normal wear and tear).

Obviously, the list changes as each child grows. A five-year-old would probably not be responsible for any of the items listed above. You are the one who tries to remember, when you pick him up from kindergarten, whether he had his mittens with him that morning. A fifteen-year-old would probably be held responsible for all these things.

So the elementary years are a period of gradually handing over responsibilities, making them clear, and following through with the consequences. You need to tell each child exactly what he or she will be held accountable for—write it in your rules if it is becoming a problem—and then you need to be consistent in enforcing those consequences.

Teaching children to be responsible is a matter of supporting competence and attaching a price to negligence. You would be doing neither if you took the easy way out and bought your child a new set of colored pencils, admonishing him, "Now don't lose these!" He is just as likely to lose the new ones, because it costs him nothing to do so, whereas *not* losing things costs him some effort.

If, when the child loses his pencils, you send him to the store to buy a replacement set with his allowance, you are letting him experience the cost of his negligence and enabling him to rectify the loss himself. This is for the child's benefit, not only for yours.

When the cost of repairing or replacing something is more than the child ran possibly afford, yet the item cannot be done without—a winter coat, for example—decide how much of the cost the child can bear and give him a "matching grant" for the rest. You can do this even if the loss was entirely the child's fault; if he pays a reasonable share of the cost, he will get the message. (If he is guilty of vandalism or other willful damages, as opposed to mere carelessness, it may be wiser to make the child bear the full cost.)

Matching grants. When charitable foundations want to support a cause while ensuring that it has broad support from others as well,

they give a "matching grant." They promise to donate a million dollars to a museum, for example, if the museum's own fund drive can raise another million. The same principle works beautifully with children.

EXAMPLE: Harry wants a pair of skis. His parents offer to contribute two-thirds of the purchase price if Harry earns the other third doing chores for neighbors.

The advantage of this type of incentive is that children can work toward earning money for things they really want but would have no hope of being able to afford within a reasonable space of time. A ten-year-old is not going to be able to earn three hundred dollars by raking leaves in the autumn, but with industry he might earn a hundred dollars. So Harry's parents decide on a 2:1 matching grant. In another case, the grant might be 1:1, 1:2 (the parents adding a dollar to every two their child earned), or 10:1. It depends on how important the goal is to the child, what his or her earning capacity is, and how much you are willing to contribute.

Lying and stealing

When your three-year-old tells you there is a whale in the living room, that is pretending, not lying. When the nine-year-old tells you she did not eat any prohibited cookies, but the Crumb trail leads across the floor up the front of her shirt to her face and hands, that is lying.

Don't punish your child for her first deliberate lie if you had no prior rule about lying. But make sure she knows that it is a major crisis in your relationship. Show the same amount of distress as you would to the news that your best friend-was in critical condition at the hospital. In fact, the mutual trust between you and your children is your best ally as a parent; it is in critical condition when the child lies to you.

I do not think it is worthwhile to give children the third degree about *why* they lied. Two other things are more important:

1. Make a tough consequence for lying in the future.

2. Sit down face to face with the child and explain why you are so disappointed.

EXAMPLE: "Son, there are two ways people deal with each other: by trusting or by not trusting.* Up to now, you and I have always had a relationship based on honesty and trust. When you told me something, I could count on it being true. If you told me about some trouble at school, I knew that I could call the teacher and not hear something completely different.

"I think you've been able to trust me, too, because I've been truthful with you.

"The reason I'm feeling so concerned is that I know what life is like when we don't trust people. When people can't trust each other, they have to demand proof of everything. If we can't believe you when you say you're up to date on your homework, we'll have to make you bring home signed sheets from your teachers. If we can't trust you to bring back all the change when you go to the store, we'll have to check the cash-register receipt every time. That's a lousy way to live. It's the way we have to deal with strangers. Out in the world, people who don't know us don't trust us. When we come home to our family, it's nice not having to be that way.

"I have cherished the kind of relationship we've had up to now, and I hope it can continue. But I see plenty of other parents and children who can't trust each other. Once someone goes down that path, it takes a long time before he is trusted again, even by his parents. The choice is up to you.

If a child violates a rule and then lies in order to avoid the consequence, the consequence should be significantly greater. A simple method is to double any consequence that a child has lied to avoid. I would not escalate it for the future, just make it double for that one occasion.

The first instance of petty theft should be dealt with similarly– with a heartfelt talk and a tough consequence for the future. Don't

* If you have adopted the terms used in this book, you can point out that these two kinds of relationship correspond to Liberty and Probation, respectively.

get bogged down in semantics. Taking something that doesn't belong to you, without permission, is *stealing*. Saying something that you know isn't true, or concealing the truth, is *lying*.

Your goal is to nip lying or stealing in the bud, immediately. It is normal for children to try them once, just to find out whether anyone cares. So I would not get upset over the moral aspect, nor would I agonize over the likelihood of it leading to a criminal career. Treat it as a test, and be sure to pass the test with honors.

Of course, this will not work unless you yourself have established a model of honesty and trustworthiness in the relationship. If not, you have no chance of convincing the child to be honest with you.

Chronic lying or stealing. Normally, if you respond as I have suggested to the child's first experiments in lying and stealing, your child will sensibly choose the relationship you offer, based on honesty and trust. If he does not, and if the lying or stealing continues, *don't try to deal with it by escalating the consequences*. The second incident of lying or stealing is sufficient reason to put the child on Probation (see chapter 9).

Once you have made clear what an enormous difference there is between a relationship based on trust and one based on distrust, the latter is so obviously undesirable that no child would choose it without strong emotional reasons. He himself probably doesn't understand those reasons. If you respond severely, you are likely to exacerbate the problem. This is one of the behavior problems that definitely call for family therapy (see chapter 21).

Summary

Both children and parents are concerned, during the years from about age six to twelve, with *competence*. Rules are of secondary importance in helping to channel the child's energies into productive activities. Their main function is to free the child from parents' nagging and criticism, and to free the parents to provide encouragement and praise.

As your children come under the influence of a broader segment of the world, you can convey your own attitudes about the reality they are discovering; and you can convey positive feelings about their ability to cope with that reality.

One of the many things children learn during the elementary years is that the world beyond the family can be a treacherous place. By practicing honesty and trust in your own relationships, you can make your family a secure haven and a solid launching pad for adolescence.

SUGGESTED BOOKS: The Elementary Years.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Surviving Your Adolescent's Adolescence

"What is happening to my child?"

It happened to every one of us. Between age eleven or twelve and age eighteen or nineteen, we all went through adolescence. Since then, we have watched each new wave of adolescents break upon our shores. Yet it does come as a shock when we see it happening to our own children. The abrupt changes in personality, the moodiness, the secrecy, the volatile tempers, and the slavelike adherence to peer fashions frustrate and confuse us. Most confusing of all is the way the child alternates between disdainful alienation from us at one moment and childish dependency the next.

The way to be most helpful to the adolescent child and still retain one's own sanity is to be as clear as possible about your rules and consequences. It is true at all ages, but especially during adolescence, that *it is less important for you to understand the child than for the child to understand you*. However, it is also true that parents who have a basic understanding of what adolescence is all about can not only survive this period but actually enjoy it.

From the onset of puberty, at around age twelve, to the time when high-school graduates are launched out into the world (either the "real" world or the relative freedom of college) is only about six years. During that short span there are more changes in the child's

body than will occur in the rest of his or her entire life. At the same time, equally striking mental changes are taking place—in knowledge about the world, as well as in the process of thinking. And on top of those physical and mental transformations, there are radical changes in social relationships. From a complete dependent, the child becomes relatively independent of the parents and acquires responsibilities to others outside the family.

We shall take up those three kinds of radical change one at a time. Keep in mind, though, that the child does not have the luxury of dealing with them separately. All of those assaults occur simultaneously, as if some alien force had barged into the secure, familiar environment of the child's home, shot him full of hormones, stuffed him into an adult body, set off an explosion inside his brain, and kicked him out into the street. Into a blizzard. Without a coat.

The conflict between excitement and apprehension about being thrust out into the world lies beneath most of the adolescent's thoughts and actions. Therefore the child continues to need help in building competence and confidence. Family rules are necessary but not sufficient, because your ability to supervise the child is coming to an end. How can you ensure that your teenagers acquire the skills and information to handle life in the outside world? How can you ensure that they acquire sufficient feelings of self-worth and self-confidence so that they will take care of themselves?

Bodily changes in adolescence

Any offspring residing in their parents' home at their parents' expense are *children*. No matter how old they are, the word *child* applies until they move out on their own. The trouble is, the adolescent child quickly acquires an adult body. He may be bigger than you are. She may have a shapelier figure than yours.

Do not be fooled. This is only a disguise. Teenagers are still children, despite all the anatomical and physiological changes.

However, it is not a disguise they can put on and take off at will. It descends upon them whether they like it or not, and even though it is exciting to be taking on all the physical characteristics of adults, it is also disturbing and frightening. Parents need to be

aware of the fact that these major bodily changes have major emotional effects.

Self-image. Even before puberty, children begin to be self-conscious about their bodies. This is accentuated when puberty begins. The appearance of every new feature has significance for the child: height, weight, muscles, bra size, body hair, voice change, and, of course, pimples. What are the implications for parents?

In the first place, try to recognize every sign of maturation. Compliment the child on his or her appearance whenever you can do so sincerely. Don't call attention to the awkward symptoms of transition—the squeaky voice, the clumsiness, the acne. If the child seems upset by those aspects of puberty, you can listen sympathetically and assure him that they happen to everyone.

Second, since the child wants so desperately to present a good appearance, especially to peers, you might be tempted to exploit his or her self-consciousness as a convenient consequence for disobeying rules. For example, you might prohibit your daughter from using your face cream or devise some punishment that would publicly embarrass your son. *Don't do it.* The child's self-esteem is your most valuable ally. Do everything you can to build it up, unconditionally.

Another thing that should be unconditional is your availability to the child as a counselor about the physical changes he or she is experiencing, as well as about matters of beauty, physical appearance, and grooming. For the most intimate matters, it should be the parent of the same sex. On the other hand, for things having to do with their appearance, teenagers are often especially interested in the advice of the other parent, who is a representative of the opposite sex.

Menstrual tension and cramps. This can be a problem for about forty years, not just in adolescence. But self-consciousness, the novelty of the experience, and the fact that periods might be quite irregular at first, make it a special problem for girls in their early teens. Fathers as well as mothers need to be sympathetic at those times, as you would with any physical ailment.

When trying to discover why your daughter seems particularly cranky today, you might consider the hypothesis that she is about to

have a period and needs a hug or needs to be left alone more than she needs a sharp response from you. However, to accept menstruation as an excuse for disobeying your rules would be to reinforce the idea of "the curse," which women of my generation worked hard to overcome.

> EXAMPLE: Paula's weekly responsibility is cutting the grass. If it is not done by noon on Saturday, her allowance is cut by five dollars. One week she comes to her mother on Saturday evening, just as she is about to go out, and explains that she did not feel well that morning because her period started. She promises to do her job the next day.
>
> MISTAKE: Paula's mother gives her the full allowance and tells her husband to mow the lawn himself this week.
>
> BETTER: "If you had come to me early in the day and asked for an extension, I would have explained to Dad and it would have been fine. This way it looks as though you forgot and are just using your period as an excuse. I am going to give you a forty-eight-hour extension, because this is the first time the situation has come up. But from now on, if you are sick or have any good reason why you can't meet the deadline, you have to get the extension before the deadline or take the consequences."

If menstrual cramps or other symptoms are frequently so severe that she has to stay home from school, the girl's doctor should be consulted.

Sexual awakening. The whole of chapter 16 is devoted to adolescent sexual activity, but two things need to be said here about changes in the child's body. The first is about family members respecting one another's privacy. Nudity has a definite sexual significance to adolescents that it did not have when they were younger. Some children bathe and dress themselves privately from an early age and never see their parents in the nude. Other parents are less inhibited. This is fine, but it can be a mistake to continue that after puberty. Do not hesitate to make rules about closing the bathroom door, not coming downstairs in one's underwear, and so forth. And you should follow the same rules yourselves.

The second word of advice is that you need to start from the beginning—before puberty if possible—encouraging the children to come to you with any questions at all about the changes their bodies are about to undergo. A girl should feel comfortable about talking to her mother, stepmother, aunt, or an *adult* female friend; a boy should feel the same about his father, stepfather, or another adult. If you are a single parent with a child of the opposite sex, instead of insisting that you must become the child's confidant, you can say, "I'm willing to try to answer your questions, but if it's something you think I might not understand because I'm a man [or woman], don't hesitate to call Dr. Jones or ask the school nurse. You're old enough to learn the facts, and you can't always rely on the information you get from other kids."

The adolescent mind

Less obvious, but every bit as consequential as the physical changes of adolescence, are the changes in the way the mind works. How do adolescents react to the logic of parents' rules? How can parents provide a firm structure, without provoking revolution?

. In the elementary school years, children can think logically about concrete objects that they see or visualize, but they still fall short of abstract thinking or "formal" logic. An example that I gave in an earlier chapter was:

> Jenny is bigger than Kenny.
> Kenny is bigger than Lenny.
> *Is Jenny bigger than Lenny?*

Elementary children usually answer this correctly with no trouble. But they cannot necessarily think through the same syllogism with abstract symbols and nonsense words:

> J is more "dreft" than K.
> K is more "dreft" than L.
> *Is J more "dreft "than L?*

Most high-school students can answer this correctly. One of the reasons that we have junior high schools for twelve- and

thirteen-year-olds is that this is the age when children go through the transition to formal logical thinking. The child begins to be capable of logical deductions and, for the first time, capable of thinking about hypothetical propositions such as this one: "If they changed the rules of baseball so that players could be taken out of the game and put back in, as in football, then we would see fewer fielding errors and higher batting averages."

What is the effect on adolescents' behavior once their thinking becomes capable of this higher level? They find themselves able to think about all sorts of hypothetical propositions, including ideal worlds to which the human imagination can aspire. They suddenly realize that much of what they had taken for granted as inevitable is only one of many possible permutations and combinations that nature could have contrived. The result is that they are ready to challenge the necessity of every characteristic of the world.

This continually renewed challenge to established ways of viewing the world and established ways of doing things is one of mankind's greatest strengths. When adolescents appear. contemptuous of our values, traditions, institutions, and lifestyles, they are manifesting the essential free-spirited questioning without which mankind would still be living in caves. They are expressing Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" and George Bernard Shaw's "I see things that never were, and ask, why not?" At the same time, they can be a pain in the neck.

It is the adolescent's job to question everything. It is your job to keep him in touch with reality, but *you only have to confront him with reality in the few areas that you have rules about*. You do not need to get into arguments about politics, music, clothes, hairstyles, sports, or anything else, unless you and the child enjoy such discussion. If the matter is so important that you want to insist upon your view, then make a rule and enforce it with consequences. Otherwise, you can discuss it on a purely intellectual plane if you want to, but it does not have to become an emotional issue.

> EXAMPLE: Randy, seventeen, has started to smoke, and his parents are mortified. Neither of them smokes, and they consider it an abuse of Randy's health, as well as a socially offensive, filthy habit. They should say, "We consider it an abuse of your health, as well as a socially offensive, filthy

habit. You have to decide the question for yourself at this point in your life. However, you are not allowed to smoke in our house." This makes it very clear which part is the preference and which part is the rule. Then, when Randy replies that it is not socially offensive, his parents should not argue the point. They can simply say, "Well, it's a matter of opinion. We could be wrong about what other people think, but we find it offensive and we do not allow it in our house."

Some parents feel they have to come down very strongly in defense of the values and institutions that their adolescents are questioning. The result is constant confrontation, provocation, and bitterness between the generations. Adolescents are likely to feel their parents are attacking not only those ideas but their right to have any ideas of their own. (You will have to get used to the fact that they think their ideas are novel even when they are slavishly copying their friends and idols.)

Adolescent idealism can be a great strength. It motivates them to care about themselves, their own safety, their own future. Don't pop their bubble by disputing all their unrealistic goals. Let them be "into" something—anything from sports to computers to chess to car repairing. You achieve more of your own goals as a parent by encouraging your kids to put their utmost into doing their own thing than you could ever achieve by making rules and restrictions.

When parents criticize the teenage culture, it feels to teenagers like an attack on themselves as persons. It sounds to them like "Don't grow up." And sometimes they are right; parents are sometimes upset by the very fact that their children are growing up. Often this is what leads children to overreact, to rebel to a greater extreme than they had ever intended.

Other parents take the opposite approach. Not wanting a confrontation, they try to accommodate their teenagers as much as possible, going along with everything, even adopting some of the adolescent styles of dress and speech. They do not understand why their children fail to accept them as peers. They are astonished that their children keep testing their limits even though their rules are the most liberal in town.

That is not what teenagers want or need. They want us to remain ourselves, consistent with the values and realities of our

community and our generation, even while they are questioning those realities. If their job is to "see things that never were and ask why not," our job is to show them what is and will remain. However, we only have to do this in relation to the rules we insist upon; we can acknowledge that they might be right in theory.

EXAMPLE: Terri inherited some money from her grandfather, which her parents are saving for her college tuition. She wants to use some of the money now, to pay for a demo tape that will launch her singing group on the road to stardom.. She argues that the potential return on this investment is so much greater than the 10% she is earning in the money market that it justifies risking the capital. "And it's my money," she says. "I should be able to decide how to spend it."

MISTAKE: Her father gets into an argument with Terri about the wisdom or stupidity of spending the money in this way. They also argue about what it means to say the money is hers.

BETTER: "You might be right. It could be a very wise investment. But you can't have the money."

"Why not?" the child is sure to protest.

"We are going to spend it on college tuition. Whatever is left after you have graduated from college, you will be able to invest in any way you want." Beyond saying this, Dad would be wasting his breath. Listen to the child, acknowledge her feelings, but do not feel obliged to get into a debate.

EXAMPLE: Barry, seventeen, wants to buy his own car. His parents do not consider him ready for that much responsibility yet. They have told him that he will have to wait until he is eighteen. "But it isn't going to cost you anything. I'm going to pay for it from my lifeguard earnings. You act like I'm a reckless driver or something. You think I'm a baby."No, we don't," his parents should reply. "You would probably take excellent care of your car. You seem to be a safe driver." They do not need to defend all their fears; they do not need to go into their reasons more than once. "We might be wrong, but we have set eighteen as the minimum age for anyone in this family to own a car."

EXAMPLE: Sam is another seventeen-year-old who wants his own car, and his parents have decided to let him buy one. His uncle is willing to give him a ten-year-old station wagon in good condition, for one hundred dollars. The insurance would cost several hundred more, but Sam argues that his parents should contribute at least the amount they would have paid to add him to their existing insurance policy. They feel that if he wants a car, which they consider an extravagance, then he should pay every penny himself. They explain that they are willing to allow him to buy a car but not willing to subsidize the purchase.

"To each according to his needs," Sam cries, each according to his abilities." He has proclaimed himself a socialist.

"Sam, if you want your own car, you'll have to pay all the expenses yourself," his parents say. "It is your decision."

EXAMPLE: Susan, fifteen, can get a part-time job at a fast-food restaurant if her mother will write a letter saying that Susan is sixteen years old. She explains that most of the kids working there are younger than sixteen and the manager knows it; he just needs the letter as a formality. Susan's mother at first agrees to go along with the scheme but later talks to a friend about it and realizes that she does not think it right to collude in a lie.

"Well, then *you lied to me*," shouts Susan bitterly. "You said you'd do it. I told my friends I was going to be working there. You should set a good example and stick with what you told me the first time."

"I'm sorry that I changed my mind. I'm sorry that I hadn't thought it through before saying anything, I'm sorry that you had to be disappointed. But I will not lie about your age, and you may not take any job that fifteen-year-olds are not allowed to have. "

"Then you'll have to pay me forty-five dollars a week, because that's what I would have earned. There's no other job I can get."

"I'm sorry, Susan, that's all there is to it.'

This way of talking with adolescents requires you to do exactly the opposite of what you feel like doing. You feel like defending yourself. You want to explain that your initial response was not a firm promise and to explain why your later decision is wise and reasonable. You do not feel like apologizing.

Following those inclinations would be a big mistake. Susan can always find a rationale by which, in principle, she has justice on her side. That sort of mental gymnastics is part of the wonder and excitement of adolescence. It is not your job to suppress it. All you have to do is present a consistent reality, and over the period of a few years the child's mind will gradually go through the inevitable transformations toward the more constrained rationality of our adult world.

By the same token, you do not need to be afraid to apologize. It does not necessarily mean you were wrong. It means acknowledging that the child is hurt a little by your specific ruling and also by the more general pain of being relatively powerless in a world that does not appreciate her superior reasoning.

Challenges to authority itself. The younger child challenges parents' rules but does not challenge their right to make rules. Teenagers, however, often direct their arguments not just at the fairness of the rules themselves, but also at their legitimacy: As free citizens, why should they have to be bossed around by their parents?

Instead of arguing about this or defending your responsibilities as parents, you can simply agree that it is hard to let one's freedom be limited by others. Growing up means acquiring freedom. But it is a gradual process and never culminates in total liberation. Point out that we adults are constrained by a great many rules. Point out that we, too, are frequently "bossed around" by employers, by clients or customers, by the government.

Try saying, "We know it is frustrating. You are mature enough now so that you feel ready for more freedom than society is willing to give you. That is why we wrote out our list of rules—so you could rely on the fact that you have only those specific obligations to meet as long as you are living in this home. Other than the rules on this list, you are as free as an adult."

If the child wants to argue about that rationale, I would refuse to get roped into the debate. You do not have to convince him that your authority is morally, politically, or philosophically legitimate. (Deep down, he knows that it is.) You only have to convince him that, legitimate or not, this is the way things are going to be.

Changing relationship with the family

It is true that teenagers normally get deeply involved with other teenagers, spend a lot of time with them, and let their tastes be ruled by whatever is currently popular with their generation,

However, it is not true that teenagers care more about their peers than about their family relationships. Nor do they care more about their friends than about their parents.

There is a common misconception that children become less interested in their parents when they start school, and then even less interested when they reach adolescence. Probably this misconception is based on the amount of *time and attention* they devote to peers versus family. But time and attention are not good indicators of emotional significance.

As involved as teenagers are with their peers, and as passionate as many of their friendships are, those peers are often interchangeable. This week's best friend may not be next week's. Meanwhile, the relationships within the family grow more sophisticated, more sensitive to the strength and vulnerability of each family member.

It is the adolescent child, not the younger child, who suffers more when parents divorce. It is the adolescent whose self-esteem is supersensitive to parental criticism. It is the adolescent who is obsessed with the parents' every imperfection, who stews and sulks over the injustice of having been born into the wrong family. All these observations, though they involve negative rather than positive feelings, indicate how concerned and involved adolescents are with their parents' behavior, thoughts, and feelings.

What is really going on during this period is their development of a more autonomous role in the family. It is not a matter of caring less. In fact, mature relationships between young adults and their parents involve deeper caring than the younger child, who evaluates everything in terms of his own desires, is capable of. Nonetheless,

those more mature relationships require more freedom, more time and space to be a separate person.

That is why the system of family rules described in Part I works so well. You reward maturity and responsibility with freedom; you respond to irresponsibility and immaturity by restricting freedom. The adolescent has the power to set his own pace of development along that path toward autonomy.

The "peer pressure" myth. Another common misconception is that teenagers cannot resist peer pressure to go along with whatever is in fashion and parents are powerless to set standards that conflict with those of the peer group.

You can impress upon your children that you hold them responsible for their own choices about how to behave. What their friends do is irrelevant; if necessary, they may have to choose different friends. If your child goes off with friends and gets involved with drugs, it is because he or she chooses those friends and chooses those drugs.

When teenagers invoke peer pressure as an excuse for their behavior, they are simply attempting to evade responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Don't let them evade that responsibility.

Parents, too, often use the "peer pressure" myth as an excuse for failing to set limits, to write clear rules, and to find effective consequences. Sure, the adolescent culture exerts powerful pressure. Sure, your children's friends will encourage them to test you in every conceivable way. You simply have to decide that you are more powerful. And you are—not only because you pay the rent and stock the refrigerator but also because your child desperately wants your approval, your respect, your confidence in his ability to make it in the outside world.

You may be interested to know that therapists who work with troubled adolescents do not consider the peer group as necessarily a negative force. On the contrary, instead of trying to isolate irresponsible youngsters from peer pressure, we often rely on group therapy as part of the treatment. Group therapy helps because the peers are a more convincing voice of reason than the authoritative adult can ever be. They pressure the adolescent to conform to the rules of the group, and ridicule his immature behavior.

This sort of positive influence happens all the time in informal, everyday peer groups as well. There are more *positive* effects of peer pressure than negative ones. You can have some influence in fostering the beneficial effects by establishing good relations with your children's friends, making yourself a good listener to them, and making them aware when you have concerns about your child (anything from skipping homework assignments to using foul language), where the friends' cooperation might be helpful.

Influencing the choice of friends. Is it a good idea to let your children know when you do not like their friends? Or does it only provoke them to keep their friends away from you and be more secretive about whom they are associating with?

Conversely, should you encourage them to associate with kids who fit your image of appropriate teenagers? Or would that only look as though you were meddling in their affairs and result in alienating them further?

I feel that we should indeed let our children know which other teenagers impress us positively, and which ones negatively. This comes under the heading of *preferences*. If you try to make a *rule* about it, it is likely to backfire. Make your rules about behavior, and leave it to the child to choose friends who will not interfere with following your rules. You thus indirectly encourage the child to seek a more responsible group of friends. If you try to legislate *directly* whom they can associate with, it will seem like an illegitimate invasion of their rights and they may feel compelled to thwart your choices even if they would otherwise have agreed with you.

Believe it or not, your children really want to know which of their friends you like and which ones you do not like. Your daughter may bring some of her friends' friends over to the house just to see what your reaction will be. You owe her an honest reac-. tion. As I said above, the adolescent's job is to challenge all our values, and our job is to remain honest and clear about what those values are.

Before you go too far in evaluating your child's friends, a couple of words of warning. Be sure to express yourself in reference to the friends' *behavior*. If your judgments are merely based on race, religion, or social status, your child is likely to lose

respect for you and to reject your opinions on a great many other subjects as well. He knows the other kids better than you do, on an individual basis; your stereotypes may not apply.

Nor can you tell from clothes, grooming, or manners which other teenagers are dangerous for yours to be associating with and which are harmless. Many kids who disguise themselves as hippies, bikers, or punk rockers are really responsible, self-respecting young people. Conversely, many high-school drug dealers and addicts look like "preppies." Again, you are better off commenting on your children's friends' behavior than trying to deduce their personal qualities from their appearance. (You may be a very good judge of character in adults and yet be all wrong in your assessments of adolescents.)

The one area where you *can* enforce rules about friends is where you have rules about specific behavior that is unacceptable in your home—smoking, swearing, teasing your pets, or whatever–with the consequence that the friend who does this will not be allowed to come again. Here, it is the behavior that you are being firm about, not the other child personally. It is a good idea to ban the friend as a guest for a period of time—say, one or more months—rather than permanently. If the banishment is temporary, your own child is less likely to consider it unreasonable; and at the end of that period, either the other child will come back radically improved in behavior or your child will have dropped him as a friend.

Your two best controls: Transportation and communication

The fact that most sixteen-year-olds can get drivers' licenses is surely their most cherished freedom. Therefore the hand that dispenses the car keys wields great power. Instead of thinking of your child's license as a tremendous nuisance, a threat to life and limb, and an insurance-rate catastrophe, think of it as something *you have the power to suspend*.

Besides the fact that the freedom to use the car is so highly valued by teenagers, it has the virtue of being divisible into

convenient units of time. You can withhold the car by the day, week, month, or year.

Actually, there are four different aspects to adolescent transportation, all of which lend themselves easily to natural consequences, logical consequences, or, if necessary, arbitrary consequences:

1. The chauffeur service you have been providing all these years. When you drive your kids someplace or pick them up, you are doing them a favor. You can say, "If you want me to do favors for you, you'll have to start showing more consideration for. . . . "

2. The right to operate a motor vehicle. The sequence in most states is a learner's permit at age fifteen (requiring parents' permission), a driving course sponsored by the school (also requiring parents' permission), a written test and a driving test that can be taken after the sixteenth birthday (but only with parents' permission), and then a license that parents can rescind at any time up to the child's eighteenth birthday.

EXAMPLE: "If it comes to our attention at any time that you have been in a moving automobile of which the driver—you or anyone else—even *appeared* to be drunk, we will personally suspend your driver's license for one year." You suspend a minor's driver's license by tearing it up and writing a letter to the state department of driver's license registration, explaining that your child, a minor, does not have your permission to obtain a new license before a certain date. This will not affect his driving record for insurance purposes (since you do not have to tell the state the reason), nor will it count against him in any way in the future. (Call the general information number of the appropriate bureau in your state for specific details.)

3. The right to borrow your car. This should be a reward for responsible behavior. You can lend your car not just by the day, but by the hour, or in so many odometer miles per week (which can be reduced, for a Probation, in the same way that curfew times can be reduced). You can make it perfectly clear how you expect your car to be treated, which expenses the child is responsible for, and what the consequences will be if these expectations are not met.

4. The right to own a car. In "my day," the sixties, it was not uncommon for high-school seniors to have their own cars. My best friend bought a '51 Chevy for one hundred dollars. His summer earnings enabled him to pay the insurance premiums—another hundred dollars—and he made the rest of us chip in every time he stopped to fill the tank (at twenty cents a gallon!). This is one way in which today's adolescents have less freedom than their parents had; it is the rare teenager today who can afford a car, and fewer parents can afford to buy him one. If you happen to be that fortunate and generous, you should certainly use it as an opportunity to set forth clear conditions.

Last-minute calls. What do you do when your child is due home at midnight and calls at five minutes before midnight to say that no one is willing to leave the party to give him a ride home? Would you mind getting dressed, he asks, and coming to pick him up? Or should he wait until his friends leave (they don't have to be home until 1:00)? Or do you want him to walk home—he can make it in ten minutes if he cuts through the city dump—where those kids were murdered last year—maybe somebody can lend him a flashlight—and a raincoat.

Don't be a sap. Tell him to take a taxi, at his own expense. The kid is responsible for arranging transportation home in advance. If it falls through, he takes the consequence. It does not matter what the reason is; there is always a reason. When an adult is late for work, he has to take the consequence even if it was not his fault the bus was late. "Next time," says the boss, "you had better take an earlier bus just to be on the safe side."

So you need one rule about what time the kid is to get home, with a consequence that overrides all the usual excuses. (If he is late because he stopped to rescue an invalid from a burning building. I would make an exception—if there are witnesses!) But you need another rule about calling you. On those occasions when the child is going to be late, do you want to be called or do you just want to deal with it the next morning? This probably depends on the child's age.

In fact, sometimes when parents have been discussing this with me, they suddenly realize that they don't care when the child comes home on a weekend night so long as he does not wake them. So they discover that they don't really want a curfew time at all. You should talk with your spouse about why you have a curfew on the weekends. Is it just so that the child doesn't wake you when he comes in? If so, maybe you want to make a rule abbut waking you instead of a rule about the time.

You also may need a rule about what the consequences will be if you have to get dressed and go out on a pick-up mission. You have to define what you consider to be a sufficient emergency to warrant such a call. Then you may also need a rule about any alternatives the child is not allowed to use in order to avoid paying the price of making an "emergency" call to you. (In Chicago, for example, the elevated trains are not safe for teenagers at night. Parents need a consequence for their children calling them and asking to be picked up downtown, but a worse consequence for not calling them and taking the El instead.)

If you do make a last-minute pick-up, the time you get the child home should count exactly the same as if the child had come in on his own at that time, for purposes of the curfew rule. He might have called you at 11:30 and was in the car by 11:55, but if you don't get home until 12:20, the kid is twenty minutes late.

The phone. As with the car, a hierarchy of privileges can be constructed around teenagers' other absolute necessity, the telephone. You will soon discover the need for very explicit rules to govern incoming and outgoing calls on your phone. The next thing you will discover is that you can change those rules—that is, reduce the minutes of use per day—as a highly effective consequence.

Taking away telephone privileges is a logical consequence when children fail to get other things done that have a higher priority, such as homework and chores. In addition, it makes a good logical consequence for misbehavior that has to do with communication: disrespectful or obscene language, fighting with siblings. "If the two of you cannot communicate with each other without degenerating into warfare, you will both lose the privilege

of communicating with anyone else, on the telephone, for the rest of the evening."

Less extravagant than giving adolescents their own car, and very convenient for parents who can afford it, is to give them their own telephone (probably a cell phone, today) or to let them get one with their own money. If you pay for it, you have another potent consequence: You can take it away.

> EXAMPLE: The Davises have a second telephone for their three children. Monica is allowed to be on the phone only during the first quarter of any hour, Brian during the second quarter hour, Kevin during the third. Any friend who calls during the wrong time slot is called back later. Thus there is no arguing, and the schedule guarantees that no child can spend more than fifteen minutes in any one call or more than 25 percent of the evening on the phone. If the system is abused, the phone will be unplugged for an appropriate period of time.

Summary

The physiological changes of puberty disturb a child's self-image. This is partly because of the suddenness of the change; the massive shock to the body takes getting used to. It is also because of the transformation in the child's sexual feelings, from simple feelings of physical pleasure to complex feelings about individuals of the opposite sex.

The whole period of adolescence is a function of our culture. Every little change in the body is evaluated in relation to the culture's "ideal," which itself has changed every decade or so. One generation's John Travolta and Brooke Shields are the next generation's Brad Pitt and Britney Spears. Of course, certain evaluations are fairly constant: How tall am I? How pretty? How perfect a figure? How clear is my skin? How deep is my voice?

During this same period, the mind goes through changes that are every bit as radical as the body's. Able to reason for the first time about hypothetical propositions, the adolescent naturally has to test those propositions against the reality that parents and teachers impose.

For that reason, you can expect adolescents to manipulate your rules to their own advantage. The attempted manipulation is usually all right; it means that they accept parental authority and are trying to assert their growth and independence within your constraints. Whenever the rules do not work in the way they were intended, parents can change them.

The final area in which adolescence involves fundamental changes is in the child's relationship to the family. There is a double bind in the messages we modern-day parents send to our teenagers. We tell them, "We aren't going to keep a roof over your head and feed you forever. You are going to have to go out there and make it in the world, responsible for yourself. But remember, you're still a member of this family, dependent on us and subject to our rules." That sounds like "Grow up, but don't grow up"—a double bind. Double binds can make anyone a little crazy. Any adolescent who isn't a bit crazy must not be getting the message.

However, the full message is "You're still a child as long as you continue to live in our house. We make rules for our children. As you grow up, as long as you prove to be responsible, our restrictions will be fewer and fewer, and we will treat you as an adult. If your behavior is immature, we may have to start treating you more like a child again."

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