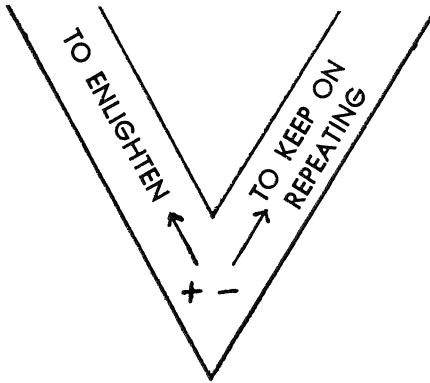


Enlightening Children

MARK ANTON BRUCK, *Los Angeles*

The writer likes to present alternatives in the form of "V"-s. For parents, teachers, and others who try to educate children by constantly repeating to them the principles they want them to accept, the writer usually draws a "V" as follows:



THE TECHNIQUE OF ENLIGHTENING CHILDREN

1. The psychologist collects as much information as possible on the child, from parents, teachers and others who know it, and tries to understand the child's actions and reactions on this basis.

2. In the interview with the child, his behavior and its effect upon his own and other people's lives are discussed. (The previously established hypotheses and the information received from others are imperceptibly checked in these talks.)

3. In very few talks, often the first one, children "see the light," i.e., come by themselves to the conclusion that it will be worth their while to change their behavior.

4. The effect of the conversations is nearly always far greater than that of a mere symptom treatment, the change in the child's mind amounting to a new philosophy of life, a philosophy of cooperative living within the family circle and beyond its limits, and of striving towards worthwhile aims.

5. To attain this, the child's fundamental attitudes: towards itself, towards others, and towards difficulties, are carefully positivized. (Self-confidence replaces self-doubt; the child starts to *face* difficulties instead of *fleeing* them; and co-feeling replaces the counter-feelings against the others.)

6. Simultaneously, work is carried on with the *parents*, in order to enlist their help in the work with the child and help them understand its past and present motivation, as well as their own.

To illustrate this technique, the writer here presents the "case" of an eight-year-old who—although he always had money at his disposal—stole money from his mother and elder sister, old coins from his mother's collection, and minor objects in stores; he bickered much with his sister and forgot too easily about the desires expressed by his mother.

The two interviews with the boy took place in the presence of sixteen students of Child Psychology in a University classroom. The statements of these students (on page 169) will give additional information on the work with the child and show the value of holding such interviews in the presence of an interested audience.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP IN THE CLASSROOM

Jimmy's mother was a student in a Child Psychology class of the writer at a midwestern University. In connection with some of the matters discussed in class, she mentioned that she had difficulties with her eight-year-old son.

The writer offered to help her with these problems, if she was willing to let him do the work in the classroom and if she would first make an extensive report on her difficulties, this report to be discussed in class before the visit of the boy. The report follows:

To write a paper on my son will most probably be to write a paper on both my children. Jimmy is eight; Mary is eleven.

Jimmy is very affectionate; whenever he performs some action meriting approval he automatically raises his arms for a hug. Mary for the most part reports her triumphs casually.

Jimmy is full of his own concerns, and they are so important that they exclude parental direction of his activity. In the morning I may explain why it is necessary that he come directly home alone after school, rather than bring a friend or go visiting. By the afternoon, his desire to practice football with the other boys has caused him to forget my desires entirely.

His school teachers all think he is young for his age, though I have often thought he is only young in his group, one in which he is at the very lowest age limit. His birthday is less than two weeks from the deadline, which places him with children up to nearly a year older than he.

The only appeal I have ever found effective with Jimmy is through his affections. He is extremely sensitive to my disapproval and fights back in many of the well-known ways: stubbornness, obstinacy and disregard of discipline. At one time when he had been particularly naughty for several days and I found myself being more and more strict with him, and more and more disapproving in my manner, he started screaming and walking in his sleep. It was a lesson to me I shall never forget, because the minute I changed my attitude to a more helpful one his spells stopped.

I feel very inefficient in my training of Jimmy. Mary is a child to whom I have always been able to explain causes and effects and she will discuss her friends' actions with me and we may reach reasonable explanations. But Jimmy's feelings at the moment seem to be his only motivation, nothing else is considered.

Jimmy's father says that Jimmy is amazingly persevering in his projects to build or create. Since they work together on a good many things, my husband has the best chance to observe that.

I remember two dreams that he has reported in the last few weeks, though he doesn't dream very much, and can't remember the dreams past the first day. In one dream he was fighting Mary and a group of her friends, in his words he was "at war." He was the only one on his side while there was a group on the other side. When asked why he didn't go over to the other side since he was the only one, he said, "If I had done that there wouldn't have been any fight." In another dream a fox started to chase him but after a few minutes, Jimmy turned around, chased the fox into a sewer and blocked up the sewer with rocks so the fox couldn't get out.

There is much bickering between the two children. Mary, with greater age, has the advantage, since she can tease him more subtly, bait him, while often his only recourse is hitting. Then, too, he will get into her possessions since he knows that annoys her. I am trying to help him in these relations by telling him in advance what to say to Mary when an argument starts

or when she starts teasing him, and he is pleased beyond belief when he can stop her with words. I have explained that only babies hit, that once they learn to talk, people argue with words.

The only problem we have with Jimmy is the petty pilfering which occasionally occurs with some attractive object at the stores, a tiny padlock or a key ring perhaps; mostly it is small change around the home. Usually only my small change, though sometimes his sister's too. His father never leaves a purse around so there is no opportunity to discover if he would take from that. Also, I keep an open box of change in my room from which the children are to get lunch and bus money as needed, and he takes from this. More dismaying, I have a collection of old and foreign coins which he knows is never used for spending money but which he will search out and take from, even though it has been hidden. Interestingly enough, in this collection is a silver dollar he won once as a costume prize at a Western rodeo and this he has never touched, though it is considered his, and no real objection could be raised if he preferred to spend rather than save it.

This problem has me baffled. He almost always has some money at his disposal; large gifts that may be given him as presents on his birthday or at Christmas are left with me as a kind of drawing account. He has no need for more than the pennies and a nickel or two he carries to rattle in his pocket, since he is too young to frequent the stores with his friends. When asked why he takes the money, his invariable answer is, "I don't know."

Yesterday Jimmy made me particularly angry when after telling him, "Go and get your sister's old green sweater," he answered, "I can't, she is wearing it." He knew perfectly well that I was referring to a sweater his sister had outgrown and which was then given to him. He knew I didn't mean her new green sweater which she actually was wearing at the moment.

ANALYSIS OF JIMMY'S PROBLEMS

(in the classroom, two days before the visit of the boy)

Psychologist:

I think the mother has made a fine report in which the personality of the child appears rather clearly.

We see a soft-hearted little boy who likes to be loved by his mother and expects this whenever he thinks he merits approval. (Paragraph 2) The mother has built a method of managing the child on this desire for affection, but, from the psychological point of view, we cannot accept this

as a creative method in education. The mother pays with affection for what she looks upon as correct behavior and withdraws her affection if she is not satisfied with the boy's behavior.

This is but another variation of the age-old "candy vs. whip" method of education, and does not make the behavior of the child depend on what is objectively considered right or wrong in his society. That this method of playing on the child's affections can be dangerous is well revealed in the child's strong reactions of fighting back during the day and in the symptoms of worry, the screaming and walking in his sleep, which appear during the night.

We have heard three complaints of the mother about the child: (a) He forgets his mother's wishes. The mother says that this is due to his being "too full of his own concerns." We might put it another way and say that the child is too little desirous of cooperating. If he had a strong desire to cooperate, he would remember.

There is too much bickering between the two children. We know that it is difficult to be a younger brother. The younger child will usually strive to get ahead of the elder one, especially if the elder is a girl. Our little man naturally uses his fists when provoked because he hasn't the same vocabulary at his disposal as the sister, three years older. Here the mother commits the mistake of teaching the child how to fight better with words, and she seems to feel that by effecting such a change she actually has done something positive for the child. The really positive thing, however, would be to help the children lose the desire to bicker. Perhaps the elder sister teases the younger one, feeling the mother prefers him. In order for this sort of feeling to arise, there need not actually be a preference. The frequency of hugging between mother and younger child would be sufficient to cause the sister's belief.

The child pilfers; he takes attractive objects at stores, small change from mother or sister or from the petty cash box, and he even takes foreign coins which he cannot use, but never the silver dollar which is being saved for him. We might say that our little friend is too soft with himself; if he likes something, he will get it for himself. It is quite possible that his answer "I don't know," when asked why he takes money, is true, yet we may conjecture from his behavior that he is over-indulging himself probably on the basis of the over-indulgence he has experienced in his relations with his parents.

There is a fourth complaint, of course, the one relating to the green sweater. It is understandable to us that the child reacted as he did. The mother made a psychological mistake by referring to the sweater which the boy was to fetch as "your sister's," instead of calling it "your green sweater." The boy was now the proud owner of the handed-down green sweater, and his pride was hurt when his sweater was characterized as if

still owned by his counter-person, the sister. Many of us would probably have reacted in the same way in the same situation.

We shall take up all of these problems when the child comes tomorrow, but let us now see what positive things we can tell him about himself. We shall speak to him of the positive things first, because it will be easier for him to listen to his negative behavior after we have mentioned his positive traits.

We will start commenting on his amazing perseverance, which is, next to the affectionate interest for the mother and for her feelings, the only positive thing that has been reported to us.

The first dream of the child, we might add, shows him definitely in opposition to his sister, and he has evidently learned to enjoy this opposition. His statement that if he had gone to the other side in the "war" there would not have been any fight shows this clearly.

In the second dream, we find Jimmy's reaction in accordance with what he does when fighting with his sister. He does not let himself be ill-treated long but turns back against his enemy. As we see, the personality of the child which we know from his day-time behavior manifests itself clearly also in his dreams.

The mother was in the class during the explanation and, in the recess following, the psychologist apologized for having been so outspoken about her mistakes. She answered that she was there to learn, and that she would bring the child to the next class.

THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY

(in the college classroom, with sixteen students as an audience)

When the psychologist entered the classroom, Jimmy was sitting next to his mother, in the first row. After shaking hands with the boy and welcoming him as a visitor, the psychologist said to the class:

"As you know, only one member of each family can be present here at the same time. Shall we ask the mother of Jimmy to give her seat to him for the day?"

The mother, who had previously been informed of this requirement, quietly got up and left the room. Jimmy followed his mother's steps with a regretful look. However, while visibly impressed by the proceedings, he showed perfect concentration during the forty minutes of conversation.

Psychologist: I think your mother told you that we are going to tell you a story here. We are actually going to tell you a story and we are

going to speak about a little boy who is about eight years old. This boy has an older brother, about twelve. Let us see what kind of boy this younger brother is. Let's do this on the blackboard. (He divides the blackboard as shown $| + | - |$). Which side is better?

Jimmy: The left side.

Psychologist: Why would you say this is the better side? Three and two equal . . . ?

Jimmy: Five.

Psychologist: Three minus two equals . . . ?

Jimmy: One.

Psychologist: Which is the better side, the plus or the minus side?

Jimmy: The left one.

Psychologist: (Draws kids on either side of the signs) On which side will the kids be friends? Left or right?

Jimmy: On the left side.

Psychologist: (Pointing to the positive side) This is the side where the kids are friends. What are the kids on the minus side?

Jimmy: Enemies.

Psychologist: This boy we have been speaking of, when he is working with his father and they are making some kind of object, keeps on until he finishes it. Which side shall we put this on? We call such a person "persevering."

Jimmy: . . .

Psychologist: I think we must put this on the positive side. The same boy also does other things, for instance he will always fight with his brother. On which side shall we put the fighting, Jimmy? Shall we put it on the side of friendship?

Jimmy: No.

Psychologist: All right, we put it on the other side. So . . . our boy fights; now how does he fight? The big brother has gone to school four years more than the younger boy and because of this he knows more words. When the two boys fight, the elder brother has more words to fight with against the younger one. The younger one gets angry. It is as if they were sitting on a thing that moves like this (Psychologist shows the movements of a see-saw with his pencil). What goes like this, Jimmy?

Jimmy: A teeter-totter.

Psychologist: If two people are fighting, where is the fellow who fights better?

Jimmy: On the top.

Psychologist: I shall draw a teeter-totter. On the teeter-totter the boy who has more words is on the top because he can fight better. What do you think the little one does if he does not find so many words to fight back with? How does he fight?

Jimmy: He tries to get on top.

Psychologist: How? With words? What does he do to his brother? Does he use mouth or hands?

Jimmy: Hands.

Psychologist: The little brother uses hands because he does not have so many words. Who wins at the end? Little brother tries to put the other brother down by hands. On what side is fighting? (*Pointing to the divided line*).

Jimmy: Right.

Psychologist: Yes, on the side of the enemies. Being together and being apart . . . which side is better?

Jimmy: On the side of together. (*Psychologist points to plus side*).

Psychologist: Good, if you know that. Suppose the younger brother . . . what shall we call him?

Jimmy: . . .

Psychologist: Well, let us call him Bob. On what side is Bob when he is very nice to his mother?

Jimmy: On the side of together.

Psychologist: On the side of being together, this is helping mother. He is asked to come home from school alone because she wants to go out with him. The boy wants to play football and forgets and brings boys home to play. Then mother cannot go where she wanted to. What is this?

Jimmy: Being apart.

Psychologist: If he remembers, on which side is he, then?

Jimmy: On the side of together.

Psychologist: I will tell you something else. You know there is an older sister in the house. The boy not only has a brother but also a sister. The sister had a sweater which was black. The mother said to the sister, "You give your black sweater to Bob; it is too small for you, and Bob can use it." To whom does the sweater now belong?

Jimmy: To Bob.

Psychologist: Then the mother says to Bob, "Go and get your sister's black sweater." In the meantime she bought sister a new black sweater. Bob says to his mother "But she is wearing her black sweater." Did Bob know his mother meant his sister's old sweater or did the boy think he should go and take the new sweater off the girl? Do you think Bob knew which sweater his mother was talking about?

Jimmy: The old one.

Psychologist: Yes, I think so too. However, Bob said to his mother, "I can't take her sweater, she has it on." Is this being together or being apart?

Jimmy: . . .

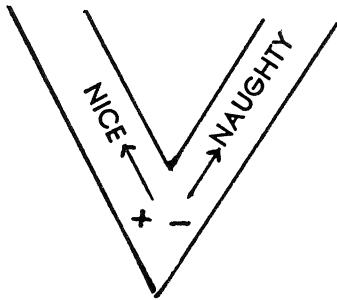
Psychologist: Who will put a name on this way of acting of Bob?

Student: Put it on the side of being apart.

Psychologist: Bob is being clever. Why does Bob do these things? I think Bob wants to show himself as being clever. Should this be on the side of together or apart?

Jimmy: Together.

Psychologist: Everyone can be clever in two ways. Nicely clever or naughtily clever. We can make a V out of this. (*He puts the V on the blackboard*).



Psychologist: Here again, which side is nicer? Nice or naughty?

Jimmy: Nice.

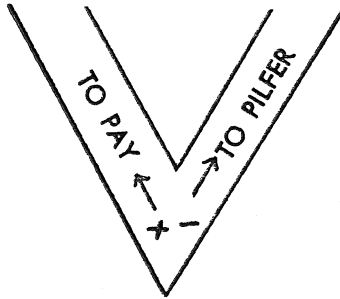
Psychologist: This Bob is doing something else which we have to talk about. The mother of Bob has a box. In the box are many nickels and dimes. She keeps these at home so when the children go to school she can give them money for lunch. Bob has found out that he can go to the box and pilfer. He can take out coins from this box when nobody sees him. On which side is this? (*Pointing to the divided line*)

Jimmy: On the minus side.

Psychologist: On the side of being apart. A shopkeeper has worked many years until he got enough to buy himself the shop. He now works for his children. He wants to send his children to school. Whatever the shopkeeper has in his shop he has bought for money or has to pay for it. You have to work for money, if you want it. Bob goes into the shop and sees something very cute. Everyone likes cute things. In this world you have to do what when you want things from a shop?

Jimmy: You have to pay for them.

Psychologist: So this is another V which we can make. (*He draws on the blackboard*)



There is a beautiful locket in the store for only 5 cents. Bob thinks, "He will not see me . . . let's stick it into my pocket." He does not pay.

The mother has a box with money in it. Bob opens the box and puts a couple of pieces of money into his pocket. This is getting something for nothing. We have just heard that we must work when we want something. Must earn it or pay for it. When you work, you get money for your work.

The mother also has a box of old coins. She collects them because she likes them, and likes to have them together, these coins of all countries. Occasionally Bob takes from that box too. In the middle of the box is a silver dollar, It has been given to Bob as a present. This coin belongs to Bob, but Bob never takes it. He always takes those that belong to his mother. He takes only mother's coins, never his own. Here again he is taking something for nothing. This taking . . . belongs on the side of being apart. It does not belong on the side of being together. It happens that Bob likes very much to be together with his mother. He likes to hug her and likes her to hug him. People only hug each other when they feel like being together. When they feel like being apart, they don't hug each other. People, when they like each other, turn their faces toward each other. When angry, they turn their backs upon each other. Bob's mother often does not know what to do because Bob often goes to the side of being apart. When he takes money, fights, doesn't remember what his mother asked him to do, when he is naughtily clever, then the mother turns her back on the boy. What should Bob do to always be together with his mother?

Jimmy: Be on the left side.

Psychologist: (*Writing on the left side of the board*) Persevering, helping, being clever nicely . . . what is another thing we also have to put here?

Jimmy: Not taking what is not his.

Psychologist: Can I put this here?

Jimmy: Yes.

Psychologist: Come back next Monday and tell us how the week was. On what side are you most of the time?

Jimmy: . . .

Psychologist: Well, forget about what side you are on now. Tell us about the side you will be on.

Jimmy: On the side of "together."

CONVERSATION BETWEEN JIMMY AND HIS MOTHER AFTER
THE FIRST INTERVIEW, ON THE WAY HOME

Mother: What did you talk about?

Jimmy: He asked me a lot of questions.

Mother: What kind?

Jimmy: You know, you told him.

Mother: What do you mean?

Jimmy: He talked about me. He called me Bob and the rest of the kids didn't know. He invited me to come back a week from today.

Mother: Are you going?

Jimmy: Oh, I don't know.

Having reported the above to the class two days after the interview, the mother was asked to send a written report to the psychologist on the occasion of the boy's next visit to the class, unnoticed by the boy, and in time for the psychologist to start the class with a reference to this report. He called the attention of the class to the fact that Jimmy, when talking to his mother, very proud of his right to decide, left the question open whether or not he would accept the invitation, while only a few minutes earlier he definitely stated to the class that he would be back. He expressed his conviction that Jimmy would change and that he would come back for the significance due to him as a changed person. The mother is asked to stay in the class on that occasion.

THE SECOND INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY

(seven days after the first)

When the psychologist entered the classroom, Jimmy was sitting with his mother in the first row. After a friendly waving of the hand to him, the psychologist silently read the following report of the mother, which he found on his desk:

Jimmy hasn't taken money I know of. He *earned* his first money (not from family) this week, and is very proud of the fact.

I don't believe he has been see-sawing with Mary so much, though with all the Christmas excitement and tension it is hard to tell. He now accuses Mary of see-sawing when she argues with him:

After this reading, the psychologist said:

I have just received a letter from Mexico, from Bob's mother, telling me all kinds of good things about him. She is writing that the box is untouched, and that he has earned his first money outside of the family this week, being very proud of this fact. He is entitled to be proud. To earn money at his age is getting significance in an adult way very early. People who don't want to work are on the negative side, people who do are on the positive side.

The mother also writes me that Bob is not see-sawing so much with his brother any longer. He has explained the see-saw to his brother. Now, when the brother starts see-sawing, Bob says to him: "You are getting on the see-saw."

Bob has taught his brother about the see-saw just as a lady student of mine in another class here, about six times as old as Bob, has recently taught her husband about the see-saw. Now, when either of them notices that they are on the see-saw, they very quickly get off, because they know it is nonsensical to see-saw.

Bob has certainly made great progress in a short time and I shall tell his mother to congratulate him on our part.

As soon as the psychologist said "all kinds of good things about him," Jimmy turned a beaming face upon his mother. From then on, the beams of happiness seemed to grow increasingly up to the end of the psychologist's little talk, when the mother rose and asked to be allowed to leave, since she had to take Jimmy to school. (This had been agreed upon.) It was a very proud Jimmy that walked to the door with her, after having shaken hands with the psychologist and several students who held out their hands to him.

After the departure of Jimmy and his mother, the psychologist read the mother's report to the students and pointed out to them how she evidently could not yet believe in a definite change, this being clear from her postscriptums "I know of" and "though with all the Christmas excitement. . . ."

REPORT OF JIMMY'S MOTHER
(*forty days after the first interview*)

This final report on Jimmy has no further misdemeanors to describe. He has taken no more money from anyone and has taken nothing from the stores. He has been paid again for his choir singing, so still has money of his own which he values highly.

He never talks about visiting the class, nor does he mention what he heard there, though I have remarked on what was said several times.

I am more pleased than I can say at the results of Jimmy's visits to class. He has been a great deal more self-possessed and responsible since then, and is far more assured in the normal give and take of family life.

SIX MONTHS AFTER THE FIRST INTERVIEW

Jimmy's parents have invited the psychologist and his wife to their home. In the absence of the children, the parents stated that, since the psychologist's conversations with Jimmy, the entire home had a smoother, more pleasant atmosphere. The children had stopped see-sawing and Jimmy had become a knight without blame.

Jimmy seemed somewhat fearful that the old sins might be discussed again, but the boy soon noticed that the past would not be mentioned.

He then spent the afternoon with the grownups as a pleasant young companion in whom the so usual efforts of children to attract the adults' attention were conspicuously absent.

A REPORT OF SIXTEEN EYE- AND EAR-WITNESSES

The students who had assisted at the interview with Jimmy have been asked to write a report on their observations under the title "Seeing It Done *vs.* Hearing About It." The following is a condensation of their statements:

1. *Young Married Woman*: Seeing is believing. In many things it is true that what the ear may find hard to believe, the eye accepts as proven. Certainly this is so in the case of Jimmy. I must confess that I had been

a bit skeptical about the method of changing a child's life direction that was explained in class. Here there were no tests used, no hocus pocus, but merely an insight into the child's environment, and then a talk, not too lengthy, with the child himself.

This, as a theory, sounded fine, and was indeed more to my liking than ink blots and other tests, but did it really work in all cases, or was it subject to abject failure as often as success?

I looked forward to the coming of Jimmy to class. There, before my eyes, it was proven to me: that a child could and will understand and change after an understanding talk in which he is shown the error of his ways. I could tell that it was very likely to be a success, because I could see that Jimmy uncomfortably realized his error.

2. *Young Married Man*: From hearing you speak of different cases in class, I concluded that you were probably exaggerating just a little in the description of how easy it was at times for the psychologist to show a person the way in which he should direct himself to the positive side of life, and thus to significance. It honestly amazed me to see how you gained the confidence of Jimmy so easily and were able to show him the pleasure in the positive side of life in such a short time.

3. *College Senior, young woman*: Seeing Jimmy's case handled in class proved very interesting to me and was most helpful. I must admit that I was slightly skeptical about a couple of the methods previously talked about in class, and their working out so nicely. For instance, I felt almost sure Jimmy would believe the whole class knew about his behavior, and this would give him a rather hostile attitude towards us all. This was not the case, however, and Jimmy was very cooperative. A couple of times I seemed to notice a little tenseness in Jimmy, but this situation was eased very readily by having someone of the class take part in the discussion. Whereas before I thought a private consultation would be the only way of obtaining any results, I can now see how a consultation with others present has its advantages. Jimmy was proud that everyone now was interested in "Bob" and this gave him a greater incentive to "jump over" to the positive side.

4. *Young man*: I watched him closely and observed every little movement. Knowing previously his misbehavior it was interesting to note how he reacted when certain things were brought up that reminded him of his naughtiness. It was even more interesting when the psychologist made him reason through his own misbehavior and arrive at his own conclusions that the matter should be corrected.

5. *Young woman*: The face of the consultee is dramatic evidence of his understanding. Seeing and hearing the consultee and watching the psychologist in action, it is difficult to doubt.