

RE-EDUCATING PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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The rise in the incidence of juvenile delinquency and adult crime, the frightening dislocations of family life, have brought our people face to face with the realization that a way must be found to combat an evil which is threatening the stability of the American home - of perhaps our entire cultural structure. The conviction is growing in the minds of more and more educators and community leaders that the ultimate solution of the problem lies in the re-education of parents and teachers - that a re-orientation in their point of view is imperative if our children are to be adequately prepared to live in tomorrow's world.

There seems to be little doubt but that we have reached the point in our educational program in which teachers and parents alike need to be made aware that we are witnessing a change in our cultural pattern and that this change demands a modification in parent-child and teacher-child relationships.

The problem of what to do about juvenile revolt in the home and school is occupying the attention of community leaders everywhere. It seems as though authority all over the world were under the microscope. It would be surprising if parental and educational authority escaped this scrutiny.

The following quotation from an old work on the moral training of children points up the difference between the authoritarian attitudes of parents many decades ago and those that obtain today:

"Children are their parents' goods and possession...they owe them their all - even their own selves. As the Lord our God hath made and created children through their parents, so hath He also made them subject under the power and authorities of their parents to obey and serve them!

"The child is to frame his gestures to a reverent and dutiful behavior towards others; he is to rise up to elders and betters when they pass between, and to bend the knee in token of humility and subjection and above all to keep silence while their betters are in place until spoken to."

Those of us who have seen the play, *Life With Father*, have chuckled at the behavior of the pompous, self-important head of the family. We smiled at his antics because we realized how inapplicable are the disciplinary methods which obtained in the 90's to home life today. There are, however, thousands of parents and teachers who try to employ similar, outmoded techniques with children and wonder why they do not work.

The principal reason for the questioning of authority and for the changes in adult-child relationships is that we are witnessing a change in our cultural pattern. The patriarchal system is steadily losing ground and the spirit of freedom has entered the home and the school. Either the spirit of cooperation and teamwork has supplanted the authoritarianism of the father, or, as in the case in many homes, there is conflict, rebellion, and confusion.

With the coming of the Machine Age in the 19th Century there emerged changes in the inter-personal relationships inside and outside of the home. With the introduction of machinery and the erection of factories people left their homes for labor centers and along with many social and economic changes there came a spirit of emancipation - a freeing and a loosening of social and family ties.

A somewhat similar turn came on the heels of the Second World War and even during that conflict. Women and children took the place of men on the farm and in the factory. Family unity and solidarity were in many instances non-existent. Children had to make their own decisions and as a result they either became more self-reliant, or, as happened in many instances, they became unmanageable and rebellious to all direction and authority.

But it would be a mistake to blame present chaotic conditions in the home on parents, on the schools, or on the war. Everything we don't like we blame on the war. As a matter of fact the seeds of disunity, of revolt, of lack of cooperation, were present in the home before the war. The world conflict merely precipitated matters. It hastened the breakdown of the patriarchal system and the emergence of greater democracy in intra-familial relationships, a gospel which Alfred Adler had preached about fifty years ago.

There is a great disposition, nowadays, to blame parents. Whenever we are confronted with a problem which we cannot solve, our tendency is to manufacture an alibi, to rationalize, to find a scapegoat, to justify our acts. It is much more comfortable to do these things than to face the responsibility or consequences of our educational blunders. It is convenient, for example, to blame heredity. Ten-year old Billy is mischievous, cruel, or lazy because he "inherits" these traits from his father's brother or his mother's uncle.

Right now in this country a hue and cry has been raised to punish parents for the misdeeds of their children. The celebrated Rivera case in New York has been disposed of by the learned judge in the case by sentencing the mother of a delinquent adolescent boy to jail for a year. That settles the matter, does it not? The judge, as the representative of society, has done his duty. It probably never occurred to him that jailing the mother will not cure the emotional disorder of the son, or that both the mother and her son were badly in need of psychotherapy. Society, by and large, has done very little which is constructive for emotionally unstable parents or children until they run afoul of the law. We have jailed anti-social people for ages. We have disciplined and punished non-conformists for decades, but we have much yet to accomplish which may be regarded as socially useful.

There is no blame which can legitimately be attached to the failure of parents to understand the emotional processes incidental to the raising of children. There can be no blame, no censure, no moral reproach where parents do not understand the principles involved. But there is responsibility. Before children are born parents should take stock of their own emotional equipment, and should seek professional help, if necessary, in order that their children may not be the victims of parental blundering. They should examine, as objectively as possible, their relationships to each other and seek answers to these questions: Is the atmosphere of the home one of cooperation and affection? Is there the spirit of democracy and teamwork in the home? Or does there prevail the spirit of discord, of friction, of bickering, and of hate? If the answers to the first two questions are negative, then it is time for the parents to take inventory of their personalities. This is an exceedingly difficult thing to do without professional help, since, in an effort to maintain their prestige they will indulge in all kinds of rationalizations to justify and excuse their own behavior. It is sometimes even difficult for parents to be aware or to admit that a problem exists. Education of young parents or potential parents - students in high school - is one of the best answers to the problem. In some cities an attempt is being made to bring to parents elementary courses in the psychology of child behavior. In one public school a knowledge of the mechanisms of behavior based on the teachings of Alfred Adler is being brought to children through simple psycho-dramatic presentations. In one high school pupils are getting a course in Individual Psychology as an extra-curricular activity.

The task of parents and educators is to help the child to work up to his best potentialities without pressure and without recriminations for mistakes which he may make. Mistakes are of no consequence. It is what the child learns from his mistakes that matters. Children should not be made to feel that their parents love them any the less because of mistakes or failures.

Parents and teachers must realize that children are people, and as people they must enjoy the same feelings of belongingness, as their elders. And never must the prestige of the parent be allowed to conflict with that of the child. Parents and teachers should strive for cooperation. The spirit of cooperation can be cultivated in children if adults can submerge their own prestige in helping children to realize theirs.

With many teachers this is a difficult, if not impossible task, because teachers frequently bring into the classroom their own emotional shortcomings. They sometimes feel inadequate and inferior themselves and hence seek to achieve a spurious kind of superiority over their pupils.

In spite of teacher-education pedagogues still remain in their ivory towers and hand down dicta to their pupils from above. If Johnny talks back, if Mary is defiant, if Henry is impudent, they are punished. They give them hours of detention after school, they humiliate them in the presence of their classmates, they coax, cajole - even threaten and punish them physically, but usually to no avail. Such teachers have

learned little from sociologists like Warden Lawes and Sheldon Glueck who have demonstrated the futility of punishment as a cure for anti-social behavior.

Seldom does it occur to some teachers that children will generally cooperate if they can be made to understand their specious goals, if they can be made to feel the belongingness which is their due. They will cooperate if they sense that they are liked, that their efforts are appreciated and applauded.

The day is past when teachers will be selected because they are good "disciplinarians," because they can make pupils walk a chalk line, because they can "maintain order" by threats or punishment. The teachers in tomorrow's schools must be men and women who are emotionally well-balanced themselves, who have an optimistic philosophy of life, who love children, and like to work with them.

They must be men and women, who, more even than a knowledge of subject matter and of teaching of skills, will know how to plumb the depths of children's motivations. They will be people who will approach their task with understanding hearts and open minds.

We shall need teachers of vision— teachers who can see the world through children's eyes. We shall need teachers who have a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties that beset the adolescent in our complex age. We shall need teachers who are willing to submerge their own personalities, their own pride, if necessary, to help their charges. For, just so soon as the teacher feels that his own prestige is in jeopardy in his treatment of unadjusted children, just that quickly does he block the road to the understanding of his pupils.

We shall need, moreover, to educate parents. Much of Individual Psychology concerns itself with the forces that are set free in the family set-up. It was Alfred Adler who laid the foundation for a plan of education based on the concepts of the inferiority feeling, the striving for superiority, goals, and the style of life. If these concepts are constructively and intelligently applied in education they would solve many of the problems that are plaguing the world today.