

## Family Counselling in a Nursery School <sup>1</sup>

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Since it is the Social Worker's duty to fill in the case records for each child, the parent discloses to the Social Worker much information about the child's home and family relationships. Through such an interview many family problems may be mentioned professionally by the parent for the first time, and thus the interview may easily be transformed into a family counselling situation. Because of this and other reasons to be mentioned later, the Social Worker has spent most of her time, other than the more recording of the information, in family counselling. This has been done with a neglect of home visits, for several reasons: (1) Since family counselling has been found to be desired by many parents, it could best and most professionally be carried out in the interview sessions rather than over a teacup in the parent's home, where professional and social roles could not be adequately combined. (2) Since teachers always make routine home visits, any information on the home condition could be, and was, gained from the teacher. If it be argued that home visits fall under the duties of the Social Worker rather than the Teacher, it is best stated here that the value of the Teacher's visits is found to be immeasurable in helping her to establish better contact with the child, and that it also helps to establish better contact with the parent, whom otherwise the Teacher might not often see. Moreover, the parent, by making contact with the Social Worker in the interview, and with the Teacher through the home visit, becomes more integrated into the life of the Center, which is, after all, one of the aims of the Center. By obtaining the information on home conditions from the Teacher, the Social Worker finds herself entering into team work with the Teacher, and this is also one of the wider aims of the Center. This brings us to the next point.

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of the Social Worker's report of the Twelfth Annual Report of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, a Government Nursery School in Melbourne.

It has been one of the major aims of the present Social Worker to work in cooperation with the rest of the staff on the children's problems. Though in the family counselling, parent-child relationships were considered, there seemed little doubt that the best possibility of satisfactory social adjustment (which is, after all, exactly what a parent-child adjustment is) can be achieved when the child's relationship with the wider group is considered, as well as that with his family. If the kindergarten and the home can work together in teaching the child the socialization patterns that will most benefit him now and in later life, a very worth while service may be made to that child. Thus, when discussing with the parent the parent-child relationships, effort was made on the part of the Social Worker to inform the Teacher of the techniques suggested to the parent, and also to enlist Teacher's advice. Often Social Worker and Teacher could supplement each other with necessary information, so that the Social Worker had a clearer picture of the child's behavior at the Center, and the Teacher of his behavior at home. The Director and Nurse were also consulted on matters in their respective spheres.

Certain findings that have been indicated in the family counselling work will be next presented:

1. A large number of the Center families are living with other people, usually relatives. Many parent-child and other family relationships seem to suffer from this, mostly as a result of interference from one or more of these relatives. Families who have been able to move into their own homes, or whose relatives left their homes, often reported a feeling of relief and improvement of the family relationships. However, it cannot be said that all cases of shared housing have difficulty, since several families under such conditions report no friction, but rather a happy relationship among all the family members (the relatives being included as family members).

2. Many parents have expressed the reaction that, since all their children live in the same home and in the same (objective) environment, why should the children differ so markedly from one another, and why, when one child's behavior difficulty eases, does the other child develop behavior problems? Many could, however, understand when it was explained to them that, though the children lived in the same home and with the same adults, the important factor that the parent had overlooked was that the children also inter-act with one another, thus creating quite a different environment for one another;

that often children behave in certain ways just because the other does *not* behave in that way, and that this is only another example of the sibling interaction.

3. There is some evidence that unsatisfactory parent-child relationships exist in homes where also unhappy marital relationships occur, though there is no evidence of one necessarily being the cause of the other. Often the underlying difficulty is a more general one, of the parent not being able to maintain satisfactory intimate human relationships. However, since the home is a dynamic whole, tensions created in one sphere may arise in another, so that unsatisfactory marital relationships, by creating tension, may indirectly affect parent-child relationships if the parent has little insight into either. Through a discussion of what constitutes a satisfactory social relationship, and through the application of a more general theory of co-operative living, problems relating both to mate and child were often overcome within a few weeks. This discussion should not, however, be misinterpreted to mean that a poor relationship with either one's mate or with one's child need be accompanied by difficulty in the other relationship, since in some cases one has occurred without the other.

4. Even though the majority of the parents have only reached the merit stage of formal education,<sup>2</sup> and are not psychologically sophisticated, they can understand and apply successfully certain psychological theories. The Social Worker has found the theories of Adler to be successful in the explanation of family relationships, as well as the more general aspects of co-operative living. Parents who desired an improvement in their children's behavior found some of Adler's techniques to answer many of their problems.

5. In closing this discussion of the family counselling work, it need here be stated what has already been implied, that family counselling has filled many parents' needs. Many problems that were presented were not of a major nature but only every day difficulties that arise in all normal social intercourse. . . . Not only are the children present at the Center so aided, but help may also be given to problems of school age siblings, thus giving service to the wider community.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the equivalent of graduation from Grammar School in the United States.