

Here's How To Help Children Who Have Problems

Parents are made—not born. And frequently they may be not too well made at a high cost of frayed adult tempers or bruised children's feelings. Becoming a good and understanding parent involves so much in the intricate and complicated region of human emotion that there is little wonder that many a parent never realizes his fullest potential as the human being most vital in his child's life.

While it is true that we tend to hand on to our children many of the concepts of child-rearing that we ourselves have experienced in our own pasts, nevertheless the child's unique personality, different from all other child's, can baffle and frustrate parents when the old time woodshed techniques fail to produce docile, smiling progeny.

Children Are People

The fact is of course, that children are human beings—right from the beginning—not when they begin to vote or enter college. From the outset they are endowed with tendencies and tempers, dislikes as well as likes; all of which combine, charmingly, of course, as each parent would say, to make him or her uniquely our son, our daughter.

For a child to develop a balanced, healthy self it is important for parents to appreciate objectively the child's world. In this small but important orbit the parent must come to understand certain meanings children attach to living—the meaning, for instance, to the child of needing to be cared for in the first early months of life, the meanings of earliest experiences such as walking, first discovering other children like himself, and very important, the meaning of those first days of school when the child's comfortable, established world seems to slip away from him for long hours each day.

It is not enough for parents to cast back in their own minds to recall how they felt when they were young. Precisely at this point conflicts between parent and child may begin. For when a child seems to reject parental standards, views or values, or when he behaves in what parents deem a naughty fashion, some cold light of objective fact needs to be cast on the child's situation. "Why is my child behaving like this?", the parents ask. And it is the whys that are hard.

No Miracles

At Catholic Family Center we help parents explore these painful but necessary whys. Contrary to popular belief, children with problems are often children with parents, with homes and enough to sustain them physically. It is not only the child from the broken home, who has difficulties, confusion and fears—the adjustments to living in society as reflected in childhood are many, and the mere fact of a child's being in his home in no way creates immunity for him from some of childhood's troubles.

When parents come to Catholic Family Center seeking help for their child either in his

home, school or general adjustment, they are advised by the social worker to expect no miracles, no quick changes of attitude or behavior in their child. Helping a child live through difficult behavior is a slow process, fraught with pain both to the parent as well as to the child.

The social worker carefully explores with the parents their child's early history, their attitudes even before his birth and their feelings about him during his infancy and young childhood. This is necessary because children respond to parental attitudes and are sensitive even to unexpressed, subtle feelings of parents.

Play Therapy

Often, in this early stage, the parental request, "Please help

my child", can be restated to, "Please help us". The social worker tries to help the parent understand both his own attitudes toward his child and to see reasons why the parent takes the stand he does in relation to his child's troubled situation.

Since the child, however, is the pivotal person in the situation, the social worker places the focus as soon as possible on the child's personality in order to determine reasons for his behavior.

This is done through interviews with the child, and often by the use of play therapy. A child, in his play with selected toys is able to reveal some of his troubled attitudes, or in use of toys, he may indicate significant personality trends which

help the social worker understand the child better. If the child attends school, conferences with his teachers and psychological testing also aid in understanding him.

Sometimes parents wish their child to correct what they see as a fault and they are willing to have the child visit Catholic Family Center on a regular basis. If parents are not eager to allow themselves also to be considered factors in the situation, if they cannot see that they may also need to change some of their thinking, then frequently no permanent change in the child's behavior can be seen.

Environment Change

Upon occasion, as the social worker gets to know parents and child more thoroughly, she

may recommend that the parents consider some environmental change for the child which might bring out to better advantage the child's potential.

Such a suggestion might be for a change of school or grade, or, after closest kind of analysis, a change in the child's living situation which would entail placement away from his parents for a period.

For the most part, however, willingness to submit all the facts in the problem for examination determines the degree of change in parental attitude, plus ability to accept the suggestions and reasoning about why the child is acting in a troubled fashion.

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