



Volume I, No 4

AN ECLECTIC APPROACH TO BEHAVIOR

INSPIRING SELF-DISCIPLINE

One of the greatest gifts parents can bequeath to their children is to inspire in them self-discipline founded upon self-esteem and a sense of purpose. These attitudes spring from a home environment where children are 1) loved and accepted for who they are rather than for what they can do; 2) given freedom to explore stimulating environments (such as a touchable, "child-proofed" home) and, 3) helped to build self-esteem by being given responsibilities which are in proportion to their level of maturity.

There are many books written on fostering self-discipline and self-esteem. Dorothy Corkille Briggs' *Your Child's Self-Esteem* is the book first recommended in Stelle. Fostering children's self-esteem has been found to be the soundest way to promote healthy behavior. This approach is augmented by a variety of supporting techniques, many of which are featured in the articles of this issue.

POSITIVE PARENTING COURSES

The popularity of courses on positive parenting now indicates a widespread interest in fostering healthier family relationships. Courses such as Dr. Thomas Gordon's P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness

Training—with its book by the same name) and Don Dinkrneyer and Gary McKay's S.T.E.P. (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) are now available in many areas. Some school districts sponsor these courses as a part of their parent education.

These kinds of courses create opportunities for adults to practice the following: 1) listening for the essence of what children are saying, 2) responding in a way which communicates acceptance of the children's feelings and desires, and 3) acting in ways which support both the adults' and children's needs.

BEHAVIOR MODELING

Children strongly desire to become competent in dealing with the world, and they look to those who are older for examples of how to live. They learn their behavior from people in their environments. In the beginning, parents are the primary models; then siblings, friends, schoolmates, and television play a greater role as children broaden their contacts. Since youngsters like to imitate what they see, their behaviors will be little better than the models they have. If they spend most of their time with other children, THEIR BEHAVIOR WILL REFLECT

THE MATURITY LEVEL OF THEIR MODELS—the other children. If, however, they have quantity interaction with adults, they will tend to behave more maturely. Two-year-olds will still be learning to deal with their volatile emotions, but they'll have more positive examples of ways to express them.

Children need to know how to relate to their peers, also. Observations of children's behavior in group situations sheds more light on this.

Many parents have noted that group size affects the quality of children's interactions with one another. The children's energy levels often rise in a scattered, uncentered way if they gather in groups which aren't involved in an organized activity.

Research also indicates that children (and adults) are more prone to commit violent acts after watching violence in movies or on television. This highlights the importance of protecting children from the detrimental influences currently prevalent in the world.

More and more parents have begun to select children's books, movies, and television programs for their positive models. Bedtime stories are chosen for topics which encourage peaceful (fearless) sleep and the television is turned on only for programs which depict healthy, human values.

UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Children's behavior can make more sense when their level of development is taken into consideration. Toddlers who say "no" to everything they hear, suddenly seem healthy when it's realized that this is how they assert their newfound individuality. Understanding the developmental stages brings reason to otherwise seemingly unreasonable acts. *Oneness and Separateness: From Infant to Individual* by Dr. Louise J. Kaplan, details the normal stages children pass through in establishing their individuality. Such reading is especially important for parents of children under three.

Dr. Maria Montessori also wrote a great deal about the developmental stages of young children, In *The Secret of Childhood*, she defined stages which she referred to as "sensitive periods." A sensitive period is a time when a child is particularly open to acquiring a specific trait. Once a trait is acquired, the sensitivity to that area disappears. Children pass through many sensitive periods with little notice from most adults, unless one of the children's needs is not met, Then the "unreasonable" tantrum which ensues may baffle the whole household.

This commonly happens when children pass through the sensitive period for acquiring order. At this time, children are very absorbed in seeing that things are in their proper place, and even placing a hat on a table rather than its rack may be cause for rails of frustration. Parents who are aware of these patterns in growth are much better prepared to discern the causes of the behaviors and infinitely better prepared to deal with them.

COMMUNITY PARENT GROUPS

There's nothing more supportive than being with other parents who have similar interests. You may talk about the ways you've resolved challenges in child-rearing, ask for ideas which add to your parenting repertoire, or exchange books which add insights to your understanding of young children. If your community hasn't already organized one, you could form a support group for the parents in your neighborhood.

Topics for discussion might include 1) Loving What We're Doing, 2) The Importance of Body Language to Children, 3) Nutrition and Health, 4) The Joy of Learning and 5) Communicating Feelings.

You may also set up a system for sharing books, learning tools or teaching skills. Some parents like to exchange children for a few hours a week, letting the parent who loves science handle the science experiments and the one who loves dance handle movement experiences.

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Basic

Principles

THE RELATION BETWEEN *MOTHERING* AND DEVELOPMENT

The mothering children receive defines the world for them, gives them their identity, and sets the pattern for their relationships with other human beings.

The kind of mothering a generation of children receives is the greatest single determinant of the quality of the culture that generation produces as adults.

MOTHERING BY MOTHERS — AND OTHERS

Optimally the mothering a child receives is from that child's biological mother, begins before birth, and is consistently attuned to that particular child. Sometimes the mothering function is performed by the father or by someone else other than the biological mother. And sometimes this alternative mothering, if consistently, lovingly present during the first several years after birth, is effective in facilitating the child's healthy development.

The fathering function is important—extremely important, in fact. It is, however, a different function.

MOTHERING DETERMINES THE QUALITY OF CULTURE

Perhaps in some history class somewhere you heard the story too—about the Chinese mothers. Historians were puzzled over how China was able to maintain its unique culture intact during the hundreds of years it was being continually conquered by foreign invaders. Why didn't the cultures of the conquerors come to dominate—or at the very least to distinctly alter—Chinese civilization? Finally scholars discerned a reason. The conquering soldiers settled in China and married Chinese women—who were thoroughly trained in mothering and in their role as purveyors of Chinese culture. The children of these unions may have had a mixed genetic heritage, but the cultural heritage they were given by their mothers was purely Chinese.

Those generations of Chinese mothers clearly demonstrated the power mothering has to affect history, but the lesson seems to have gotten lost. Our culture's truism, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," is generally regarded as merely a nice bit of sentiment. So is Saint Augustine's challenge, "Give me other mothers, and I will give you another world." Yet abundant research in psychology and history is beginning to verify the truth of that sentiment.

Psychoanalyst and historian Lloyd deMause, in *The Defense of Childhood*, concluded that the central force for change in history on of the personality of generations of children due to changes in parenting modes. A supporter of this concept, historian Glenn Davis, studied the differing patterns of parenting used in rearing four American presidents and became convinced that those parenting patterns were predictive of major national social thrusts associated with the four men!

Another strong stand for the significance of mothering is found in Selma Fraiberg's book *Ever Child's Birthright: In Defense of Mothering*. In it, a statement with surprisingly practical ramifications is made.

Economist Harold Shapiro, chairman of the Department of Economics at the University of Michigan, is reported as stating that optimal development in a generation of a nation's children is reflected in

future productivity in that nation's labor market! And most of the rest of Fraiberg's book is a carefully supported explanation of how this optimal development in childhood is dependent upon optimal exercise of the mothering function—or proper use, in other words, of that cradle-rocking hand.

If Chinese mothers determine what cultural consciousness pervades their country, if the parenting of presidents shows up later in national social movements, and if the quality of mothering affects a nation's future productivity, then perhaps that old truism needs only slight amendment to become a simple cause-and-effect statement: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world of the next generation." And perhaps Saint Augustine's statement is not sentiment at all but rather a logical description of reality.

MOTHERING SETS THE PATTERN FOR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

Although historians and social scientists have carefully traced how patterns of parenting affect society, their conclusions are eventually rooted in what psychologists have studied even more thoroughly—the impact of mothering on individual development.

The effects of early mothering, and its lack, have been studied at length by Margaret Mahler, John Bowlby, and Rene Spitz, among others. The highly respected work of all three shows how crucial a reliable mothering presence is to every aspect of a child's growth. Their work also indicates what many other studies show as well, that that presence alone is not enough; the way a mother is present to her child affects the child's overall development—sets patterns for all future growth.

For example, in The Roots of Love, Helene Arnstein reports that Drs. Sylvia Brody and Sidney Axelrod conducted a fairly simple-sounding study of how mothers feed their babies. Films were taken of feeding sessions when each baby was six weeks, six months, and twelve months old. Analysis of the films and tests of the babies revealed amazing significance in this very mundane process. Some babies experienced a pattern of happy feeding times, while other infants usually exhibited unhappiness during feedings. At the end of a year, those babies who had had generally pleasurable mealtime experiences showed, "a much greater capacity to wait, to concentrate, to learn, to solve problems, and to anticipate and expect pleasure from people and things than did the babies who had experienced anxieties and tensions during their feedings."

When these same children were studied at the time they entered grade school, their intellectual, emotional, and social development still mirrored the patterns of interaction established between mother and child during that first year of life!

Well, have we found them, then? Are those much sought basic requirements for intelligence and mental health as simple as relaxed mealtimes and a reliable mothering presence?

We are learning more each year about how to help children maximize their potential. How the brain works, what the essential stages of growth are, and how the physical and mental relate, these are only a few of the factors in child development that are being studied by scientists and put to use by parents in this generation. The details are intriguing and valuable. But probably the most powerful effect of the research is its recurring theme: that the patterns for how children will actualize their potential are intricately and closely bound up in the kind of mothering they experienced, And the kind of mothering given a generation of children provides the shape of the world those children fashion when they become adults.

J. C.

TO MOTHER IS TO TEACH

by Joanna Carnahan

THE EVERYDAY LIST

Of course, the basic everyday interactions with your child—other than feeding and changing—are lots of touching, holding, cuddling, eye contact, talking, singing, and movement. Within that context, using each of the activities listed below, every day, happily, will increase your young children’s intelligence (yes, truly!), give them tools they need for learning more, and help them be more independent, alert, and self-confident. (I know that sounds like an extravagant sales pitch, but it’s all true!)

If you have to skip doing some of them on a few special days, do, and just resume when you can; but most of them are simple enough to become habits and slipped in between almost any kind of busyness!

Probably you’ll develop your own variations of many or the activities, thus making them just that much better suited to your particular child. For the greatest impact, begin most activities on the list at least by the time your child is six to nine months old.

1. Print on a Palm Each morning write one letter of the alphabet on your child’s palm with a washable felt—tip marker. Pretend it’s a special “t”, for example, that’s looking for “E-friends,” which you help your child find a dozen or more times throughout the day. At nighttime you can wash off what’s left of the t, “so another letter can come to see you tomorrow.” Try a different letter each day and then numbers to 100 or beyond.

2. Name Colors Name 30 to 50 colors for your child every day. You can take a special three or four minutes to run together through the house calling out the color and name of everything you see; and you can train yourself to name the color of every object you refer to throughout the course of a normal day. Remembering to do this requires conscious

effort for a few days at first, but can pretty easily become a habit. Use a wide range of shades; crayon boxes have 64 shades, “for starters!” The result is children with a heightened awareness of color, naming colors as soon as they can talk, and able to distinguish shades they might not otherwise have perceived.

3. Walk, Run, Jump, Hop, Skip As soon as your child is “cruising”—standing and moving around the room by holding onto stationary objects—hold one hand and take two or three walks together each day, seeing how much farther you can happily go each time. When your child walks alone, continue taking walks and add chasing games to encourage running. After the running is fairly easy, add holding hands and hopping together on both feet. Be rabbits and kangaroos, and soon hold only one hand, then none. Next comes hopping on one foot, first holding hands, then alone, and you’re ready for step-hop on one foot, step-hop on the other, slowly, frequently, until it turns into a skip! And all of it turns into balance, coordination, agility, confidence, and more pathways to the brain.

4. Sing and Count Create from three to seven situations each day in which you quickly sing from one to 20, counting fingers and toes or blocks or peas or anything else, and if possible touch each item as you count it. When your child seems bored with 20, go on up to 30 and eventually on past 100. Children at two will be singing anything they’ve heard many, many, many times!

5. Write in Corn Meal Three times each day, guide your baby’s index and middle fingers to write lowercase letters in a roasting pan containing a thin layer of cornmeal. As you write, say the letter name clearly several times, having fun with the process. When you’ve gone through all the letters, go on to capitals and then to words. We all have a stereognostic sense, or “muscle memory.” Writing words at two, sentences at three, and paragraphs at four is literally child’s play for children whose hand-to-brain pathways have long since “memorized” the shape of all the letters!

A HUG A DAY

Author Ashley Montagu in *Touching* presents scientific evidence to prove that touching is a basic, human need—essential to health and survival. He states that if people in this culture could understand the value of fathers as well as mothers satisfying their infants' needs for touch, it would be a considerable step toward improving human relations. All human beings need lots of touching and there are many "behavior problems" which melt away with that age-old comforter, the hug.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE

Observe your own children with these points in mind: How do they behave after they've eaten sugary foods? How does their behavior in a

group of two or three children differ from the behavior in larger groups? What kinds of changes do you note when you respond to behavior problems with a gentle touch or hug? How do your children respond when you let them know that you recognize their feelings? ("You're really angry now.") When they step outside of acceptable limits and reason doesn't work, how can you regain their cooperation?

Most important of all, how can you offer them more opportunities to learn to discipline themselves? Essential to this is allowing them to help you, to accept responsibility for special tasks, and to feel loved for simply being themselves. Then they learn how to call upon discipline from within, and that's a more effective motivator than all the laws of the land.

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