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Mary Benjamin Auzenne

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AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED

by

Sister Mary Benjamin Auzenne, S.S.F.

A Research Paper

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Sister Joanne Marie Keeshan
(Advisor)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In an environment continuously being shaken by rapid social and psychological changes there is, among many other children, one type of child who is recognized by all, yet known by none. Despite his many faces, he can be easily singled out. He is the child who, from the moment of conception, is eagerly awaited by his mother, yet disappoints her at the time of his arrival. He is the child who wishes that his mother had never had him; perhaps then, he would be spared the agony which will now become part of his destiny. He is also the child whose parents never wanted him from the very beginning. They were not really "ready" for him. His coming was accidental and they must not let him forget it. He is the child who wants and needs love and understanding. In his own small and limited way he searches for these but can find them nowhere. His lack of success in finding that which he so desperately needs gradually fills him with a mixture of fear, anger and anxiety, along with self-depreciation. This child hidden behind these many different faces, is often referred to as the emotionally disturbed child.

Statement of the Problem

The problems of an emotionally disturbed child are many and varied. In this paper, however, the writer attempted to study one segment of his total picture--that of unacceptable aggressive behavior. The type of aggression considered was that which carries with it the connotation of destructiveness.

Definition of Terms Used

Throughout this paper, certain terms are frequently used. To facilitate proper interpretation of material read, the writer chose to define the following terms:

Aggression--a form of response that seeks the reduction of tension and frustration through the medium of behavior that is demanding, overpowering or possessive and is always directed against some person or thing.¹

Rejection--a type of habitual avoidance manifested by an adult toward a child because the adult figure does not want to be bothered with the child. When the adult figure cannot or will not physically separate himself from the child, the rejection may be manifested in forms such as:

- a. Refusing to give warmth and affection to the child
- b. Refusing to accept warmth and affection from the child
- c. Neglecting to fulfill the child's basic needs for growth and development
- d. Deliberately frightening the child
- e. Physically abusing the child
- f. Verbally abusing the child

Punitiveness--the degree of physical pain or discomfort imposed on a child when he acts in an aggressive or asocial manner.

¹Alexander Schneider, Personal Adjustment and Mental Health (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1955), p. 331.

Anxiety--a chronic complex emotional state with apprehension or dread as its most prominent component.²

Transference--the act of transferring attributes that one has perceived in others in his past life, to people in his present.³

²James Drever, A Dictionary of Psychology (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 17.

³Herbert Grossman, Teaching the Emotionally Disturbed: A Casebook (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 16.

Summary

Because one word may have a variety of connotations, the writer used the preceding definitions as means of reducing the possibilities of misinterpretation and also for the purpose of providing the reader with a clearer concept of the material presented in this paper.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The emotionally disturbed child is presently receiving more attention than he has ever before received, yet upon close examination, it might be noted that he still represents that part of the population which is the least understood and the most unhappy. He knows that he is different and is aware of his differences. His unhappiness is increased by his inability to solve his difficulties. Although his attempts to solve his problems are many, his successes range from none to very, very few. More often than not, his attempts only serve to make matters more complicated.

The emotionally disturbed child, like any other child manifests a variety of behavioral patterns, but the one that perhaps gives him the greatest degree of recognition is that of aggressive behavior. This recognition comes about, not because of the fact that he is aggressive, but because of the manner in which he shows this aggression.

Aggression in human beings is deemed an institutional impulse. It is present in the highest form of life as it is in lower forms because there is no basic continuity in the evolution of living organisms. However, human beings in the course of development, have had to learn to control these feelings in order to maintain family life and society. It is not the presence or the absence of

aggressive feelings that is relevant in the psychology of the person; it is the extent and appropriateness of expression in overt behavior and it is the ability to tolerate such feelings in fantasy life without undue anxiety or overwhelming defense operations. In other words, it is the regulation of aggressive feelings that is critical for the mental health of the child, not merely the control or "getting it out of his system."⁴

Schneider further supports Felleman's statement by defining aggression as:

A form of response that seeks the reduction of tension and frustration through the medium of behavior that is demanding, overpowering or possessive.⁵

He further notes that a peculiar feature of aggressive response is that, unlike so many forms of adjustment, it does not contribute to the solution of the problems. To respond aggressively to the demands and restrictions of parents or society is more likely to complicate and compound a problem than it is to afford a solution.⁶

Whenever conflict appears, the important thing to consider is the proper regulation of aggressive feelings.

⁴Carroll Felleman & Abraham Shmusky, The Aggressive Child as quoted in Joseph Rouke, The Difficult Child (New York: Philosophical Library, 1964), p. 135.

⁵Alexander A. Schneider, Personal Adjustment and Mental Health (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1955), p. 331.

⁶Ibid.

The child who consistently reacts in a passive manner may, indeed, experience intensive aggressive feelings, and while outwardly withdrawn, he may be torn by internal conflicts because of his fear or inability to express his true emotions. The child who, on the other hand, habitually disrupts any given situation while "getting it out of his system" is caught in the same web as the seemingly passive child, but has chosen a different approach in his attempt to solve his problem.

Some Causes of Aggression

Parental Rejection

There are countless reasons for manifestations of aggression in the emotionally disturbed. One of the most devastating causes, however, is that of parental rejection. The old saying that "Nothing grows unless it is loved" could not be more true than when applied to human beings. Every child needs and wants to be loved, understood and accepted. The denial of these basic needs is, for him, the stifling of his psychological growth, which could ultimately end in a slow and painful death.

The first and most important people in a child's life are his parents. He is most dependent on them, and particularly on his mother, for the establishment of positive relationships.

The child who is reared without affection faces a hard life. While young and weak he cannot count on the protection and help he needs. He is thrown on his own resources when his resources are very limited. He may be left for long periods, hungry, uncomfortable, angry, frightened, friendless and alone.

The child who is not only ignored but actively abused (as some children are, even in infancy) does not have the strength to defend himself. His main weapon is crying. But when he cries in anger, grief, or fear his cries are likely to evoke complaint instead of compassion. Under conditions of severe rejection a child is like a warrior who is wounded even before he has a chance to fight.⁷

Whenever that relationship which is expected to be strong, turns out to be inadequate, the child is bound to suffer. The earlier he senses signs of rejection, the less are his chances to adjust to them and the more complex his problems will be.

There are many ways of rejecting a child. One can reject him by not caring enough, and so, failing to detect signs that he is afraid or is being mistreated at school. One can reject a child by promising to love him only if he is good or if he keeps clean or does superior work. One can reject a child by over-indulging him, giving in to him and giving him almost everything he desires in order to quiet him and be rid of him.⁸

⁷ Arthur Jersild, Child Psychology (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 136.

⁸ Jersild, Child Psychology, p. 135.

In a study by Schaefer⁹, it was noted that mothers who showed a high degree of affection toward their children during the first two or three years of life, had a more healthy and positive relationship with those same children at preadolescence. Mothers who suffered from poor physical health, financial stress and negative emotional states such as gloominess, dullness and unresponsiveness showed a significant degree of negative correlation with later positiveness of mother-child relationship. The study suggested that environmental stresses experienced by the mother reduced the degree of vitality required of her to make positive maternal-child relationships. Her preoccupation with her own problems reduced her capacity to provide the warmth and security so necessary for child growth and development.

Sometimes the parents' failures to which emotional ills might be traced take another form--parents who encourage by their acts, the misdeeds for which they either punish their children or use the children to satisfy their own emotional needs. One often meets a mother (or father) who consistently repeats that her (or his) son is full of mischief "just like I was when I was a child", while at the same time responding to the child's misdeed by inflicting

⁹Earl Schaefer & Nancy Bayley, "Consistency of Maternal Behavior from Infancy to Preadolescence." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 61: 1-6.

on him physical punishment for his behavior. Hostile and aggressive behavior toward a child can only serve to increase his hostility and aggression.

Becker¹⁰ conducted a study which strongly confirmed the hypothesis that the degree of hostility of both parents and the use of physical punishment is related to aggressive behavior in children. His findings showed that if the mother was hostile and punitive, the child tended not to be submissive, but rather dominant. This relationship was stronger for boys than for girls. If the father was hostile, punitive and strict, the child was rated as more of a personality problem on the Peterson's problem checklist. There was suggestive evidence that girls showed personality problems in response to father's physical punishment and strictness only where the mother set a model of submissiveness.

Emotional problems do not arise in a vacuum but must have some breeding grounds. They may come about as a result of the pains and anxieties that a child has suffered, what these have meant to him or sometimes even more important, what he thinks they have meant. The mother who is suffering from physical ills and environmental stresses may, secretly or openly, blame the child for her ailments. On the other

¹⁰ Wesley Becker, "Relations of Factors derived from Parent Interview ratings to Behavior Problems of Five Year Olds." Child Development 33: 509-535.

hand, the mother may have a great love for the child, but because she is inadequate in expressing it at the time that the child is in most need of it, he may interpret it as a sign of rejection.

Because he spends so much of his early life in the environment he knows as his home, a child naturally imitates the emotions of the people around him. He catches from his parents ... their optimism or defeatism, serenity of resentment.¹¹

Jean was a little girl who was probably held too long in a group of normal five-year-olds. Jean was a beautiful child with big, wistful brown eyes and a rare but breath-taking smile. It was hard to believe the suggestion that she might not profit by play with 'normal children' under guidance. Several months' experience with Jean proved that this charming looking child was much too ill to profit from group experience. From the start it appeared that Jean's mother rejected her. The mother reported that the child had been "queer" from the time she was six months old; she complained bitterly of the trouble and expense Jean had caused the family because of constantly requiring medical care and, frequently, hospitalization. Jean's weapon of aggression in a world where she felt unloved and unwanted proved to be a persistent retention of feces for fantastically long periods, culminating in impaction and hospitalization.

Jean was so appealing that she was accepted in the nursery school on probation. During her weeks of attendance at school, Jean never

¹¹Helen Moak, The Troubled Child (New York: Henry Holt and Company), p. 26.

addressed another child nor responded by using any of the very well planned play equipment provided for her group. She wandered around aimlessly, turning on the gas cocks on the kitchen range and the water taps wherever she could reach them. While her illuminating smile was rarely seen, she wanted very much to come to school and cried pitifully when it was time to go home. She had one serious impaction during the school period and seemed more and more withdrawn from reality as time went on. Jean had to be dropped from school and returned to her mother's care; the advice of the school psychiatrist was not regarded, and Jean was placed in a school for mentally retarded children.¹²

The key word in the above case is that of rejection. In spite of all other illnesses, Jean's chances for adjustment could have been favorable had she been supported by maternal love and acceptance.

Maternal acceptance is a necessary prerequisite for the affective socialization of the child. Lack of acceptance frustrates the child's need for love and increases his resistance to adapting the rules of society in which he lives. Consequently, one of the most frequent outcomes of maternal rejection is a pattern of aggression and asocial behavior.¹³

¹²Isle Forest, Child Development (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 239-240.

¹³P. H. Mussen, Child Development and Personality (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), p. 393.

Symonds¹⁴ compared the personality characteristics and social adjustments of 31 rejected and 31 accepted children. Rejected children were those whose mothers and fathers failed to provide adequate protection and affection. The two groups were carefully matched in sex, age, school grade, socioeconomic background and intellectual level. Although the subjects ranged from 5 to 23 years in age, the average was 12.5 and the majority were of grammar school age. Experienced raters who knew the subjects and their families filled out check lists dealing with the child's behavior, personality traits and neurotic attitudes, as well as with parents' adjustments.

The children in the accepted group showed more socially acceptable behavior and appeared more cooperative, friendly, honest emotionally stable, and cheerful. Children in the rejected group, on the other hand, were more often rated as emotionally unstable, restless, over-active and given to attention-getting behavior. In general, they were more resentful of authority, including their parents, and more rebellious against society's rules and regulations. They manifested obvious delinquent trends such as frequent

¹⁴Percival Symonds, The Psychology of Parent-Child Relationships (New York: Appleton-Century, 1939).

Mussen, Ibid., Child Development and Personality

lying, truanting, running away from home stealing and quarreling.

Children are aware of parental attitudes toward them, and in their behavior, respond to this awareness. It is imperative that a child sees himself as being wanted by his family and that he is accepted as a respectful member of this close social unit. If he fails to get this assurance, the effects upon his developing personality are serious. Regardless as to the cause of parental rejection its results are usually dangerous enough to warrant the attention of all those interested in good mental health and social adjustment.

With all that has been said about parental rejection, it might be well to note that it is not only through punitiveness, neglect or outbursts of temper that parents inflict pain on a child. The most devastating affliction occurs when they turn away from the child's gift of himself which he offers to them as an expression of his love.

The child who grows up without a satisfactory early mothering experience does not identify with any adult except in aggression. He develops no libidinal tie, no empathy with the other person. Nothing prevents him from expressing aggression in any form because he doesn't love anybody and is not afraid to lose anyone's love.¹⁵

¹⁵Edith Buxbaum, Troubled Children in a Troubled World (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1970), p. 56.

Peer Rejection

The most important people in a child's early years are his parents. As has already been cited, parental acceptance is a necessary pre-requisite for the effective socialization of the child. In the pre-adolescent years children, and more emphatically, boys, seem to shift their primary human interests from parents to peer groups. In pre-adolescence, the ideas of peers are of greater significance than that of the parents. The group usually tends to be exclusive. While some members are readily accepted into the group, others are rejected. Whether in the eyes of parental figures the group be judged as acceptable or unacceptable for the child, if the child is rejected by that group, some degree of psychological damage will most likely follow. In some instances it may be difficult to determine whether the damage would be of a greater or lesser degree had the child actually been accepted. For example, a 10 year old boy may want to join a group of 12 year old "toughies" whose after-dark hobbies are stealing hub caps and tires from parked cars "just for the fun of it". He may be rejected by the group because he is too little, too slow, too good, or too dumb to keep up with them. The mere fact that the boy seeks admission to such a group is an indication that he has some admiration for one or other within the group and/or for that which the members of the group are doing. Their rejection of him will be a source of

pain to him, but if his parental relationships are positive and stable he has a favorable chance of eventually realizing that he really does not belong to that group and may soon find the type of group with whom he can form more positive relationships. If, on the other hand, the child is experiencing poor relationships at home and is a victim of parental rejection, his desire for being accepted and becoming a socializing agent in any group is that much more forceful. When he is denied acceptance by the group, he may feel that he has to do something much greater and more daring to prove to the group his worthiness to be accepted.

It must be noted here, that the peer's rejection of a child within the group is not necessarily the only obvious negative aspect to be considered. When the group is one that has only negative influences to offer, its very acceptance does hardly any more to the new member than add to his already existing frustrations.

It may provide a model, but the wrong kind of model; it may provide reward, but the wrong kind of reward; it may provide an identity, but the wrong kind of identity; It may provide support, but support in the wrong kind of activity.¹⁶

At this age, the child's only concern is to become an accepted member within a group. He wants to be recognized

¹⁶W. E. Martin & Celia Stendler, Child Behavior and Development (Chicago: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1959), p. 392.

as somebody and therefore, considers no chance too great or too risky to help him attain this goal.

Fortunately, it is only as children grow older that exclusiveness becomes a very significant characteristic of their group life. During the years of childhood the individual shows little discrimination in his choice of associates. It is true that a child may be excluded from a group, but the exclusion is usually arbitrary and transient of reasons. Under such conditions, the child who is excluded today may be the most highly accepted tomorrow (and within the same group). Children have not developed, up to this time, stable preferences or prejudices. They do not care how a child is dressed, how clean he is, who his family is, or how much money his father makes. It is in adolescence when peer groups become more highly structured and organized, that acceptance and rejection play an important part in group activity.¹⁷

Because the peer group plays such a vital role in the life of the child, it is the duty of parental and other adult figures to guide the child to the social group whose activities might serve to enhance, rather than retard, individual growth and development.

Fear

Fear, which might be described as an unpleasant emotion in anticipation or awareness of some danger, has many ways of manifesting itself. In some cases it might cause timidity, hesitation or even despair. In others it may cause bold, yet courageous acts. In still others, it may serve as

¹⁷Ibid.,

a springboard for emotional disturbance accompanied by some degree of aggressive behavior. Fear in itself can be a healthy tool for self-preservation; but when it becomes an obsession or is detrimental to the physical or mental health of an individual, it can no longer be termed useful or necessary.

Children have many fears which appear at certain levels of development, remain with them for a period of time, and then eventually disappear. In a few instances, however, some fears never leave certain children. They plague them to such an extent that the children find it almost unbearable to live with themselves and their fears.

One of the most common and most persistent of a child's fears is that of darkness. Just past the age of two a child may show definite signs of a fear of darkness. This fear sometimes lingers on even through the adolescent stage.

Jersild describes some reasons for fear in the following:

There is something dangerous about the dark, both in what it represents in reality and in what it symbolizes. In the dark, we usually are less powerful than when we can see; we might stumble and lose our way. Darkness also signifies that we are out of sight, and that others are out of sight, so it seems psychologically that we are cut off from others. Darkness is an added menace when a child is already frightened, for his imagination can supply what he cannot see, and he can people the darkness with dangers that reside within himself.¹⁸

¹⁸Jersild, Child Psychology, p. 266.

The child who is afraid of darkness may request a light in his room at night. This request should always be met with love and understanding. The parent or guardian who detects fear of darkness in a child should not wait until the child asks for a light (he may be the child who is too fearful or ashamed to make a verbal request), but should anticipate his needs by placing a light, if not in his room, at least where it will be visible to him.

If a child fears darkness he should never be forced to go into dark rooms or areas as a means of "breaking him of the habit". Nor is it of any use to tell him that he is only imagining danger. This imagination to him is a reality which cannot be resolved by mere words of reprimend. To the fearful child there is no such thing as being too old to be afraid of darkness.

Psychology is of the opinion that all children at some time and some children (perhaps) at all times have fears of isolation, desertion and death. One often hears of the child who is sent to his room because of his "naughty deeds". For some children this type of punishment may be somewhat helpful, but for others it may only serve to reinforce unacceptable behavior. The isolation imposed upon an already fearful child may cause him to panic and display acts of aggression which might otherwise, have been avoided. A fearful child does not know how to handle or control his fears; hence, the acts performed by him under such circum-

stances are not necessarily intended to be acts of aggression but rather, means of obtaining a solution to his problem.

Another common fear of children is that of desertion by parents or loved ones. The very young child who has become accustomed to his mother's face may become quite upset when she has to leave him for a short period of time. Even a few minutes may seem like an eternity to him. The degree to which his fears mount will, of course, depend upon his concept of time. There is always the joy of seeing his mother upon her return but underlying this, there is yet some fear and anxiety that she may leave him again.

When a child has to wait too long for his mother, he becomes angry at the people around him and expresses his anger and frustration by misbehaving. He may or may not ask for his mother-- but whether he asks for her or not, that is really what he wants. When mother finally returns the child usually directs his anger toward her. Underlying his rage is anxiety lest she leave again. When mother has been away for a week or more, the toddler will follow her around like a shadow, cry when she gets out of his sight and make incessant demands on her attention. After a bit, when he feels secure again he will relax and trust her to leave and return.¹⁹

This fear of desertion is the reason why many young children entering school for the first time have so much difficulty in adjusting. They are unable to concentrate on what is happening in school. They fear that mother will leave home while they are away and not return again.

¹⁹Edith Buxbaum, Troubled Children in a Troubled World, p. 26.

In a moment of anger a child may secretly wish the death of a loved one. If death does come to the individual during the early years of the child's life, whether death is because of illness, accident or any other reason, the child's fear are increased for now he thinks that he is the cause of mother's (or the loved one's) death.

When the two year old's mother does not return for whatever reason--illness, death, desertion, all are the same to a child--his faith in her, and that means in all mankind is shattered. The only possible reasons in the child's mind for mother's leaving him are because she is bad or because he is bad. Usually he thinks both are true. If mother was bad, he is angry at everybody who reminds him of her, and he in turn, will be bad too and will punish her in everybody who may take her place. If he is bad (and that is why she left) then maybe he will try to be good, so good, he won't dare move and so he will be alternately very good or very bad according to his fantasies.²⁰

One might summarize the whole spectrum of fear in the words of Katherine D'Evelyn who said:

"Excessive aggressive behavior usually indicates a fearful, angry child who is fighting to get what he feels has been denied him. Only by recognizing the meaning of the behavior and taking steps to help the child overcome his fear and anger can his behavior be improved".²¹

²⁰Ibid.,

²¹Katherine D'Evelyn, Meeting Children's Emotional Needs (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 70.

Anxiety

Another emotional state very closely related to fear and often difficult to distinguish from fear is anxiety.

Anxiety is interlinked with the development of a growing child's ideas and attitudes pertaining to himself. As the child grows older, much of his anxieties, whatever may have been its roots, is tied to the choice and conflicts that arise in the management of his life. He faces a predicament when he has an urge to venture into the unknown, but he also has a need to cling to the familiar; when he seeks independence and yet finds comfort in being dependent; when he has an impulse to resist but also to comply. There is a conflict within himself when he feels anger toward his parents when they thwart him but also feels affection for them; or when he is lured by temptation, yet restrained by his conscience. As he grows older, anxiety is likely to occur when impulses from within or reminders from without threaten to undermine a cherished view of himself.²²

While fear may know a reason for fright, anxiety may be termed a haunting formless fear whereby the individual knows that he is afraid but does not know precisely what it is that he fears. The child who is suffering from excessive anxieties may choose any one or a combination of the following patterns of behavior:

- a. He may move with those belonging to his social sphere (for example his parents, peers, etc.) by being docile

²²Jersild, Child Development, p. 269.

and conforming to their demands. If that is the case he may comply to their every suggestion and be overly eager to please them.

b. His second choice may be that of moving against those with whom he has any contact by being extremely aggressive and seeking control or dominion over them. He is the person who feels it his duty to defend himself since, in his opinion, everyone else is out to get him. What might have been attractive to him quickly becomes repulsive the moment any one else sees attraction in it or vice-versa.

c. The third choice of behavior is that of moving away from people to avoid any meaningful contact. This type of child will be withdrawn and aloof. He may be suffering from some past painful occurrence which now exists either in his conscious or sub-conscious mind. He too, feels a need to defend himself but unlike the aggressive child who makes himself known and recognized by all, his strategy of defense is a sinking into a state of oblivion.

Although the line between fear and anxiety is sometimes rather obscure, it might be concluded that fear becomes anxiety when one succumbs entirely to it so that the feeling of anxiety is entirely out of proportion to the cause of fear.

Negative self-concept

Aggression seems to particularly reflect interference with the need for security, affection, independence and recognition. Hovering also in the background is the need for status, because external frustration endangers status, and thus, stands as a threat to personal integrity and security and to the development of a healthy self-concept.²³

Since it is through the family that basic patterns of development are established, family situations will serve to make or break any child. The child who is the product of an unstable family can hardly be expected to escape emotional disorders. Due to the conflicting attitudes manifested in such a home, he may look upon himself as being different or unwanted and may set himself apart from others. In reaction to his inability to solve his environmental and internal conflicts, he may develop more complex symptoms of disorders.

It is felt that a child constructs a psychological system of self out of the responses made to him by other people. According to Carp²⁴ in the development of a positive self-concept it is of vital importance to have experiences of being loved, of being worthy of respect and affection and of

²³Schneider, pp. 344-345.

²⁴E. A. Carp, "The Conception of the Mentally Deficient Human Being," Journal of Existential Psychology (1960) 1.

being accepted. A negative self concept is usually related to a feeling of being degraded.

Jenkins²⁵ made a study of the relationship of different kinds of behavior problems manifested by young children to that of parent-child relationships. His findings indicated that if a child was anxious, the mother had a tendency to show signs of "babying" him and being overprotective. The father who, in many cases was apt to show signs of mental health problems was the one to delegate authority. Both mother and father of the unsocialized aggressive child were punitive as well as highly inconsistent in their relationship with the child. Mothers of the unsocialized aggressive children also tended to show very critical and depreciative attitudes toward them. The socialized aggressive children were usually from large families with obvious signs of parental neglect. The father from these families were often found to be alcoholics. The study concluded that these children saw themselves as they were so often seen and judged in the eyes of their parents-- an added burden, rather than a joy to the family unit.

Babying or over-protecting a child helps to negate his self-concept. The parent (in most cases the mother) who babies a child long after he has passed the 'baby' stage or

²⁵R. Jenkins, "The Variations of Children's Behavioral Problems and Family Dynamics," American Journal of Psychiatry 10: 134-139.

shows signs of overprotection does so, first of all, because she herself has hidden signs of insecurity. Her reward is the satisfaction received from the child's total dependence on her. She sees the child as frail and totally incapable of fending for himself. She transmits these unnecessary feelings of insecurity to the child, and he in turn, sees himself as he is regarded in the eyes of the parent. Very often he may imagine himself to be even worse off than what the parent thinks him to be.

The child who has to live with a mentally ill or alcoholic parent is deeply confused by the inconsistencies of relationships with him. He finds it difficult to distinguish between the "right" and the "wrong", for what may bring on the parent's wrath at a given time--that same act, and even under the same circumstances may go completely unnoticed on another occasion. This confuses the child. In spite of his efforts, he sees himself as being unable to live up to the expectations of his parents and even worse than that, he may blame himself for the total conflict and unhappiness that exist within his home.

Because a child sees himself through the eyes of the adult world, his performance is in accordance with his vision of himself while his self-vision is simply a reflection of that of his parents and/or other adult figures in his life.

Studies made by Mote²⁶ and Barogona²⁷ show that the child whose mother is contented, has positive self-esteem, and shows satisfaction with his behavior and learning, will himself, have a manifestation of these same qualities, while the child whose mother is cold, anxious, punitive and depreciating adds to the child's mental health, a negative contribution and, at the same time, sets his stage for patterns of aggressive behavior.

Failure

Whenever an individual's goal-directed activities are blocked, interfered with or circumvented he experiences a certain degree of frustration. If he has enough stamina to withstand it before the next frustration attack, and if, in spite of some obstacles, he experiences a sufficient amount of success, not much damage will be done to his mental health. If, on the other hand, frustrations come so rapidly and so heavily that he is unable to cope with them, he begins to see himself as a failure. His failures (along with his self-

²⁶Florence B. Mote, "The Relationship Between Child and Self-Concept in School and Parental Attitudes in Behavior and Child-rearing", Dissertation Abstracts 27: 3319 (1967).

²⁷Rosalie Baragona, "The Relationship Between Certain Personality Characteristics in Nursery School Children", Dissertation Abstracts 25: 3094.

concept as a failure) are magnified whenever criticized or ridiculed by those around him. The parent who constantly nags a child on the grounds of "correcting" him, while failing to recognize the positive aspects of his behavior is by that very fact, telling the child that he is a failure. A correction is sincere or of value to the child only if the person making the correction is able to recognize and acknowledge to the child his acceptable as well as unacceptable behavior. In other words, if a mother wants a child to profit from a correction for misbehaving, she should not merely admonish him when he misbehaves, but should recognize and praise him for behavior which is considered acceptable.

When a child is ridiculed for erring or when his efforts are compared with those of others who may surpass him in performance he begins to lose confidence in himself. A sense of failure may not really manifest itself in a child until after he has reached school age. At that age the type of family relationship he is experiencing will be a determining factor in his school performance. If he is loved and accepted by the family and has been made to experience success in his endeavors, even if his performance is below that which is considered average, he will maintain his happiness and feel that he is successful. If he has poor family relationships, his unsuccessful experiences in school life may place him in a state of perpetual combat. Now he has to cope not only with his family but also with the school.

Constant fear in school of never being able to keep up with the class, or of being unable to achieve recognition, creates emotional problems. Sometimes the pressures on a child who cannot quite hold his own are so great that he is virtually driven into withdrawal from reality. He sees withdrawal as his only protection against the threats of his immediate environment. The child who does not choose withdrawal may become so extremely aggressive that the tasks of teaching and of learning (in a classroom situation) may become almost impossible.

Many parents become almost overly ambitious for their children's progress in school. They are not satisfied with average or even above-average progress. They want their children to be top students in class even though the children do not have the capacity. Persistence in this attitude develops in a child various forms of deviant behavior. He may rebel against the school and do less than he would have done otherwise or he may withdraw from any efforts to succeed. In addition, these repeated "failures" also form a vicious chain of anxieties and fears.

Summary

Before a child can learn to live, love and appreciate the beauty and joys of social living, before he can truly function in a meaningful way, he must have some love and appreciation of himself as an individual. This love and

appreciation he cannot build on his own. He can do it only with the help and encouragement of adult figures. Because his parents are the first and most important adult figures in his life, they are the ones to set the stage for the type of self-concept which he develops. If he is warmly loved and accepted by his parents he will develop a sense of belonging, security, and self worth. If he comes from rejecting and depreciating parents, he recognizes in himself only that picture which the parents have painted of him: one who is no good-- whose offerings are all on the negative end of the scale.

It must be remembered that events that alter a child's relationship with others or deprive him of security and love are bound to have some adverse effect on the development of his personality.

Because adults play such an important role in the lives of children, it is their responsibility to provide maximum assistance to these children that they (the children) may not be deprived of the necessary essentials for healthy psychological growth and development.

Aggressive Behavior and the Classroom Teacher

Every classroom teacher can expect some degree of aggressive behavior among her students. As was earlier stated, the manner in which aggression is expressed is what enables one to judge it as being acceptable or unacceptable. The teacher's probability of having to cope with aggressive

behavior is much greater when working with the emotionally disturbed than it would be among a so called "normal" group.

The classroom behavior of the emotionally disturbed child is affected by disturbing emotions which arise both in and out of the classroom. If he is to be helped, then one must have some knowledge of the reasons for the child's manifestation of certain behavior problems. Kirk defines behavior problems as "the outcome of frustration resulting from the discrepancy between the child's capacity to behave and the requirements of the environment."²⁸ Whenever the demands of his environment become too great for him to meet, his behavior may appear to be in conflict with that which is ordinarily expected of him. If he cannot meet the requirements expected of him, he will either run away from the situation or meet it with hostility and aggression.

The thoughts and practices used by a child in his outside-of-school life conditions his thoughts and practices while in school. This outside-of-school influence is the vague enemy of classroom control. The teacher, all too often, instructs the in-school Billy, ignoring the fact that his behavior may be the result of something which was thought or experienced twelve hours before such as a television program "enjoyed" at 10 p.m. the previous night. What can she do? Psychologists and scientists say "Find the cause of his behavior". This is excellent advice, but the teacher has to live with Billy's misconduct until she has

²⁸Samuel Kirk, Educating Exceptional Children (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), p. 336.

the time to "find the cause". There are three major causes which envelop countless minor causes. It is on these major causes that the teacher should work. First, if the child is tired she should see that he gets rest either in the classroom or in the nurse's room. Second, if the child is hungry she should see that he gets food without the other children knowing about it. Third, if the child is unhappy she should praise him for some effort no matter how small; or she might talk to him at recess or noon telling him how nice it is to have him in her class; or she might plan a classroom program or stunt in which she needs a secret confederate and invite him to "hold that important job."²⁹

As parents spend more time away from home this has a tendency to weaken their effectiveness in offering emotional security to their children. Because of their inability to spend time with their children they may often feel guilty, and thus, increase anxiety and tension in the home. For this, among numerous other reasons it now becomes the responsibility of the school to make up to the children for the deficiencies in family life.

The school creates a security for the children but of a different nature than that obtained at home. The child gains a sense of belonging to a group as he engages in activities with others of his age. For the child to know that he is a needed member of his group, that the group needs his particular skills or knowledge to carry out their ideas, that he will be missed if he is not there gives each child a feeling of security that grows out of be-

²⁹Blanche McDonald & Leslie Nelson, Successful Classroom Controls (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, Inc., 1959), p. 115.

longing. This sense of belonging is not always easy to accomplish, for it does not arise naturally from being a member of the group. Unlike being loved at home, belonging must be earned by the contributions of the child to the welfare of the others.³⁰

It is at this point that the teacher's competency manifests itself. It is her duty and obligation to provide the child with incentives for motivation to learn. Not only does she need to know through which channels can the child best acquire knowledge in order to reach him through these channels, but she must also provide work which will ensure success so that the child can feel that he truly is a contributing member of the group.

If conditions are not arranged by the teacher for each child to contribute to group enterprise, his potential contributions may be unrecognized and unappreciated by others. In a school that limits the activities of children largely to academic learnings, the bright, verbal child will be admired, while the child with more practical abilities may have difficulty in winning the recognition of his peers.³¹

A good teacher does not wait until a child begs, buys or demands recognition from her. If she is observant in her recognition of each child's efforts, whether great or small,

³⁰Charlotte Buhler, Childhood Problems and the Teacher (New York: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 1952), pp. 60-61.

³¹Ibid., p. 61.

then the children will learn from her, the art of recognizing and appreciating each other's efforts. She should anticipate trouble and as much as possible, ward it off. For example, if she knows that Billy and Johnny cannot get along she must provide situations that will allow a safe distance between the two until they can learn to accept each other along with their shortcomings. A teacher can sometimes ward off foreseen trouble by using it as a problem solving lesson for the group.

The teacher should never place herself into such a situation where she has to pit her will against that of the child. She should avoid leading him to the point where he says "I won't do it" or "You can't make me do it". An angry child needs a cooling off period before he can be reasoned with. She should not take his obstinacy as personal affront but rather, as an offense against the group. She should train the group to refrain from being audience to the misbehavior. This training should be part of the everyday lesson rather than waiting until after a problem has arisen.

The teacher should avoid nagging at behavior problems. "When a behavior problem is settled, the teacher should drop it. She should let the child know that he is restored to full membership in the group and that what went before will never be remembered unless he offends again".³²

³²McDonald & Nelson, Op. cit., p. 126.

The teacher should anticipate certain days that could be very crucial to her pupils as well as to herself. Such days are: the first day of the school year; the day before and Halloween day; the day before the Christmas holidays begin; Valentine's day; the day before the Easter vacation begins; the last day of the school year; the day before and the day after any holiday longer than a week-end. On such days she should make sure that she has a variety of work both satisfying and challenging enough for the children, to offset the possibility of any unnecessary aggressive behavior.

The teacher is sensitive to over-all moods such as those occurring at holidays when the school is enveloped in seasonal excitement. Daily routines which are established to give security, go by the board to capture the emotion of the moment. Fun is as much a subject in the curriculum as is arithmetic. Nevertheless, the teacher remains the manager rather than the managed, fostering pupil initiative and resourcefulness, yet limiting energy here and challenging it there.³³

The teacher who is able to transmit to her pupils a sense of calmness and security in the midst of surrounding emotional excitement will look forward to enjoying such festivities with her class, rather than nervously await that moment when she can finally "get rid of them all".

³³William Moorse, "The Educating of Socially Maladjusted and Emotionally Disturbed Childre," Education of Exceptional Children and Youth, ed. by William Cruickshank and G. Orville Johnson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 599-600.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Within the past decade or so professionals from the various disciplines as well as researchers have done a tremendous amount of work toward a better understanding of the emotionally disturbed. These studies have revealed that one of the most common symptoms of emotional disturbance is that of unacceptable aggressive behavior. Researchers agree that a certain amount of aggression is expected and can be a healthy sign of growth and development, but when the aggression carries with it a destructive connotation, then the ailment may be much deeper and more serious than that which meet the eye.

In the preceeding chapters the writer gave a bird's-eye view of the emotionally disturbed child along with reasons for some of his behavior patterns.

Chapter I included the introduction, the statement of the problem and the definition of terms used. The introduction showed the child most likely to be labeled as emotionally disturbed and the struggle encountered in his desperate search for love and understanding. The problem stated was that of unacceptable aggressive behavior in

relation to emotional disturbance. To facilitate correct interpretation of material presented, the writer also included in Chapter I, a list of definition of terms most commonly used.

To develop a clearer understanding of the problem, Chapter II was written. Treated in this chapter were some causes of aggression which included parental and peer rejection, fear, anxiety, negative self-concept, failure and the teacher's manner of coping with aggressive behavior in a classroom situation.

A review of the literature suggests that a child's acts of aggression are his way of saying that he is angry; that he is dissatisfied with the way things are going and that he feels he is neither loved nor understood. His striking out with vehemence is done in hopes that his message will be heard and heeded.

Although much has been done for the emotionally disturbed aggressor in relatively recent times, researches all agree that there is yet much to be learned and to be done in order to help such a child to lead a better adjusted and more satisfying life.

Aggressive behavior does not evolve in a vacuum. As was pointed out in the literature reviewed, there are numerous combinations of factors which contribute to certain patterns of aggressive behavior. The child who is a victim of emotional disorders will more likely and more frequently

show signs of aggression than will the so-called "normal" child. These forms of aggression are not due to any one cause, but to a perpetuation of frustrating occurrences which eventually become, for the child, a vicious cycle. He in turn responds aggressively, not out of meanness, but because he is aware of the enormity of his problems and is attempting to solve them in his own limited way.

The language of the emotionally disturbed child is more often one of action than of words. When there are limitations in his vocabulary, he chooses to make those around him understand through his actions, what he is unable to express verbally.

If he is to be helped at all, the emotionally disturbed child must be guided through a well structured program which includes firmness, patience, understanding and, above all, an abundance of empathy and love. It is well to keep in mind that a child's repeated misbehavior is not (as some would like to believe) a bid for attention, but rather, a cry for help.

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