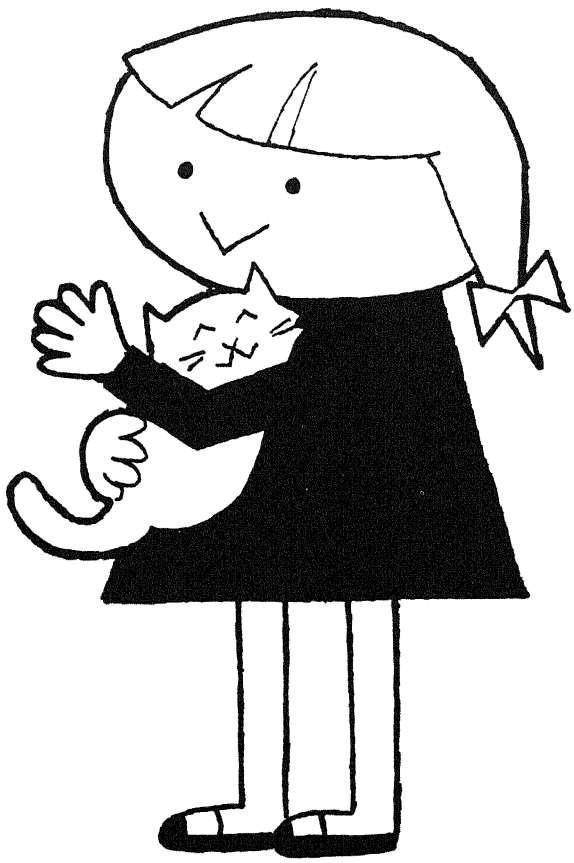
BULLETIN 448

children's emotions



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Children's Emotions

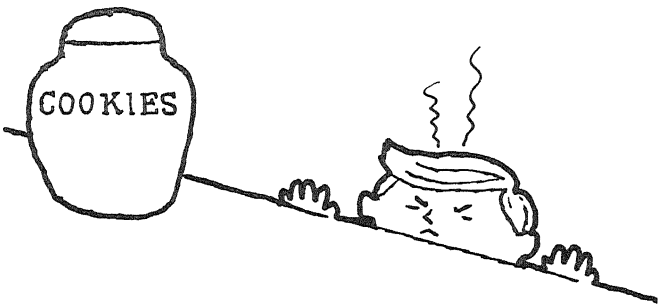
Emotions might be compared to the wind. The effects are easier to see than the cause, the results easier to see than to understand. Wind causes a tree to bend, smoke to drift in one direction, and leaves to blow along the ground. Emotions cause us to jump for joy, frown, smile or laugh, clench our fists and stamp our feet. Our language is full of descriptions of emotion. We are gay, excited, angry, frightened, jealous. Children say "I love you, Mommy," "I'm mad at Jane," "I'm scared," "I hate you."

Psychologists agree that we are born with only a few emotional responses. Most of our emotional behavior comes as a result of learning. As a child grows physically, develops and matures, all the senses become more acute. Imagination and understanding develop. In this way, the range of events that arouse emotions becomes wider and wider.

Let's see how this works for the infant and child. For the baby, unexpected sights, sounds or sensations arouse emotions. These might be a sudden loud noise, a bright light, loss of support, or restriction from kicking or waving arms. As the toddler explores his world, he meets with more things and events. Laughter, temper, fears and tears are brought on by many more events. The older child adds to this the feelings from imagination and ideas, from anticipated or remembered events. He is afraid he *might* fail; he worries over what *might* happen. Imaginary people and events color his world and make him happy or sad.

How and from whom does the child learn these emotions? Some events arouse or cause emotions and a like event later on arouses a similar feeling. Later, words alone arouse the feeling. Most of us recall our emotions on first attempting to speak a piece. If all went well, we were proud and happy. We liked the attention and applause and were ready to take part again. If the opposite happened, we may be reluctant even now to get up before a group.

We take on from others some of their feelings. This is not imitation alone. We feel in some of the same ways as those we love, for example, mother, father, brothers, sisters, friends and playmates. We also find by trial and error that some of our emotions are more satisfying or rewarding to us. Our loving ways bring us warm response from others. Our temper and tears may also help us to get our own way. If so, we try it again to see how it will work.



In small children, emotions seem to be aroused by what they have at stake in the situation. Among these are:

—*Anything that furthers or threatens his motives and plans, even when these are not consciously thought out.*

—*Anything that promotes or blocks activities he has initiated.*

—*Anything that helps or hinders his hopes and aspirations.*

From early childhood, children are under pressure to change, control, and conceal the expression of emotion. "Don't cry," "Don't be afraid," "There's nothing to get mad about."

The child learns to disguise, hide, or show his feelings in other ways. Later he learns to disapprove of himself for these feelings.

Control must be gained over the emotions and the expression of emotions. Just as in other learning, this takes place over a period of time and will progress from childish to more mature ways. The goal is not to suppress or deny emotions. Rather it is to have emotions serve us in our human relationships. Emotions are the basis for the richness, color, and depth in our lives.

In helping children gradually learn acceptable expression of emotion, we need to help them face their feelings rather than suppress or run away from them. This involves acknowledgment of the feelings. It is not always easy to accept children's anger or fear, or hate, especially if it is directed toward us!

The next step is to help the child grow toward control of undesirable expression of his feelings and find acceptable outlets. "You may not hit Baby Sister. Here is your pounding board" (or ball to throw, or rope to jump). The substitutes may not be too successful at first, but little by little they will become more so.

Individual children show differences in the extent to which they seemingly feel or show emotion. Families differ in their ideas about how much and in what ways they express their feelings. Quite early we begin to label certain emotional behavior as more

suitable for boys or more ladylike for girls. Periods of storm and stress, of success or failure and of development and change in growing up affect the intensity and the extent of children's feelings and the ways in which these are shown.

Love and Affection

There is much emphasis today on the child's need for love from parents and those close to the child. Questions and comments we hear from parents are: "Can you love a child too much?" "There is such a difference in my children; the oldest doesn't seem very affectionate." "The children were so loving when they were little but they seem to have outgrown it." "The older children love the baby, but they don't seem to love each other very much."

Such questions and observations show that developing emotions of love do have a pattern, that these can be guided, and that there are individual differences in the expression of affection. There seems to be much more written today about emotions such as anger, fear, and jealousy.

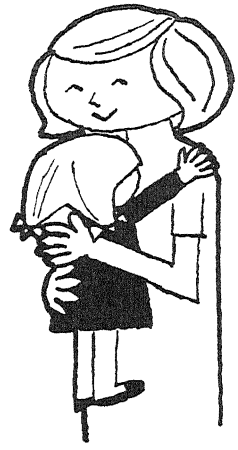
From the considerable store of knowledge about children, we find that love and affections do have a developmental sequence as do other developing areas of each personality. Briefly, these are:

—*In infancy*—developing a feeling for affection. The way others feel toward the baby is reflected in the way he comes to feel toward himself and eventually toward other people. Mother's and Father's loving care conveys the feeling to the baby that he is satisfactory and his world is a safe and sure place.

Dr. Spock tells us "not to be afraid to love and enjoy the baby." This is needed just as much as vitamins and calories."

—*In early childhood*—(1) developing the ability to give affection. Hugs and kisses for Mother and Father, as well as smiles and delight now appear. Even the bunch of dandelions clutched in a small fist and presented "for you" are part of these beginnings of giving love. Now others are included in a widening circle of loved ones. (2) Learning to share love. This is an adjustment that all children have to learn. The little child would like to have the love of Mother and Father all for himself. To share the parent's love with brothers and sisters, to share a teacher's affection with the other boys and girls and to know there is love and affection enough for each one, takes time. "You love me best?" may be asked more than once. A good answer a parent might give is, "I love you, and Sister, and Brother, each one of you."

—*Late childhood*—learning to give as much love as one receives. This giving includes pets as well as people, other children as well as adults, teachers as well as members of the family. Age mates demand that friends give as much as they receive. This takes deep feelings of security such as can be formed only in infancy from receiving sufficient love The child who does not have these feelings



still clings to those from whom he needs love, seeking to get rather than to give.

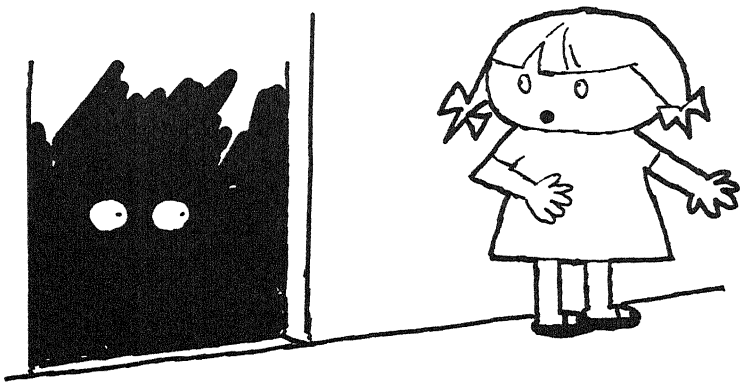
The newborn baby first associates with Mother the loving care that keeps him physically comfortable. Even this early physical care is being shared by Father more in today's young families. As the child grows and develops, there comes a time when most children seemingly choose one person other than Mother on whom to center their attention. This is often Father, but may be a grandparent or other relative who is living with the family for a time. This is flattering to the person chosen, but may be a little hard on Mother, who seems rejected for the time. All this is part of growing and learning. It is a time when the child cannot handle two ideas, loyalties or choices at one time.

At about four years of age occurs a period when the parent of the opposite sex becomes important. Little boys decide they are going to marry Mother, and girls decide they will marry Daddy, and have them all to themselves. From about ages five to seven, the boy accepts the fact that he cannot have Mother all to himself, the girl that she must share Dad with others. The boy then begins to model himself after Dad, the person Mother loves and admires. The girl begins to learn to be like Mother, the woman who is the center of Dad's world. As this happens the brothers

and sisters have in common their love of the same set of parents. The family is bound together through the give and take of a common love.

Dr. Fraiberg in her book "The Magic Years," has some thought-provoking comments to make on this subject. She says, "Every child has the right to claim the love of his parents. But if the child is to grow in his capacity to love and emerge as an adult capable of mature love, parents must be able to claim the love of their children and to make claims upon this love. The parent who loves his child dearly but asks for nothing in return might qualify as a saint, but he will not qualify as a parent. For a child who claims love without meeting any of the obligations of love will be a self-centered child. Because they believe in their right to be loved in spite of everything, they do not alter themselves to make themselves worthy of love. . . . Love is given, but it is also earned."

"Unconditional love" means that you love the child for himself as he is. It does not mean that you, therefore, love all the things he does and place no limit or restrictions on the behavior of the loved one.



Children's Fears

Rover, the gentle, friendly dog next door, comes bounding up to two-and-a-half year old Jimmy. Jimmy screams and runs to Mother. "Don't let him bite me. Make him go away."

How would you like a strange animal, as high as your shoulder, to come bounding around the corner and thrust its head full of long white teeth into your face? The chances are that Jimmy will

get used to Rover and learn to play with him. Suppose that Rover was not friendly and did bite or scratch Jimmy. He may always be a little afraid of dogs. As he grows older he will try to hide it, but he may never really outgrow it.

A sudden, unexpected, or strange experience is one of the ways children acquire fear. The vacuum cleaner suddenly turned on, the abrupt appearance of a stranger, or the dark that erases familiar landmarks might be such experiences. Children take on the fears of others. Many grown-ups are frightened of thunder and lightning because they grew up in a home where someone was afraid of these things. Some fears are the aftermath of unpleasant experiences such as trips to the doctor or dentist, or a painful accident, or being lost, or being mistreated by older children.

Small children tend to be afraid of objects and things such as animals, high places and falling, strange noises and sudden movements. As children grow older, they seem to be less afraid of factual things but show more fear of the dark, of being alone, of the loss of loved ones, of possible pain and accidents, and of the imaginary and fanciful.

School-aged children continue to show evidence of fears of dire imaginary dangers. As they come in contact with the larger social world of school, hear more stories and grown-up discussion, and watch more adult TV programs, they add the fears of possible disasters to actual and real dangers. Will they be liked by the other children and the teacher? Will their grades be good enough? Will they be able to live up to their parents' expectations for them? Will they amount to anything?

When failures are balanced by or surpassed by successes, such fears are lessened and self confidence develops.

Fear is a feeling, something that happens inside of us, even though the cause may be something we see or hear. For this reason, it is often difficult or impossible for children to tell why they are afraid. They may say, "Make it go away." "I'm afraid." "Don't let it get me." The small children will cry, creep or walk away or hide behind a person or the furniture. Social pressure may cause the child to hide his feelings.

Children will go to great lengths to avoid the hated "Fraidy Cat." Often those who are the noisiest in making fun of another's fears are working hard to keep their own from being discovered.

Helping children to overcome or at least lessen their fears is not easy. It is important to know some of the things that do *not* help. First of these is making fun or shaming the child for his

fears. He doesn't want to be afraid nor does he know why he is. Shaming him adds guilt and anxiety to his fears. The fear is enough! Scolding the child and comparing him unfavorably with another does not help. Forcing the child to meet the feared thing creates a shock as damaging as the fear.

What can we do to help? The more a child can do for himself and the more he knows and understands the world around him, the better equipped he is to deal with it. Some fears do lessen of themselves as the child becomes familiar with their cause and sees others of his own size and ability unafraid. A hoptoad may frighten a small child by suddenly jumping from a spot beneath his feet. Little by little he sees many toads, sees other boys and girls playing with them, and learns a toad is nothing to be "scared of."

The young child who is terrified by a sudden happening needs protection and reassurance. The protection comes from the adults close to him, the reassurance in the soothing words that Mommy or Daddy are here and will take care of him.

At a later time, get the child to talk about his fears, and let him know that other people are or have been afraid of things, too. Don't let him feel that he is the only one in the world who is afraid, and that everyone else is big and strong and brave.

Letting the child become acquainted with a similar or smaller thing and then leading up to the happening that frightened him will often help. The child who is afraid of dogs may have a puppy. He will become used to all dogs as his own grows larger.

Our part as adults is to be gentle, understanding, and an ever present support as we help our children try to face and understand their own fears.

Sometimes it is a good plan to try this on our own adult fears!

Anger

Several neighborhood boys, all about seven, were having a battle of words. The dialogue sounded something like this:

"Don't you put a foot on our driveway or I'll smear you."

"You dumbhead anyway, why do you have to tear everything down?"

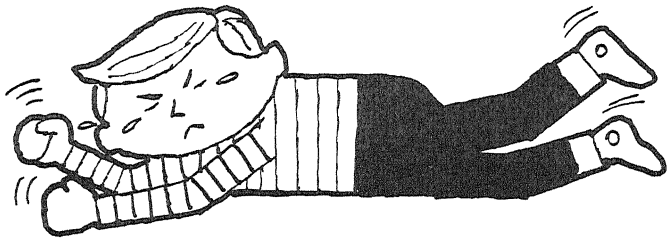
"Don't you ever come over in my yard ever again."

"I'll tell my mother on you," from 5-year-old Little Sister.

"All you can say is blah-blah-blah-yah."

Nobody left and went home; no one hit anyone; nothing was

thrown. After five or six minutes of this, a familiar puppy trotted into view and the group trooped off to pet it, then returned to run their trucks and cars.



What does this episode illustrate? Was it good or bad? Should it have been stopped? As it happens, it was a most specific example of a stage in the control and expression of anger, from infant's primitive lashing out to the mature adult's righteous anger against injustice and inhumanity.

Anger in infants seems to be touched off by minor discomforts, including hunger, interference with physical activity, and to some extent, removal of attention. The baby kicks, screams, pounds his head, holds his breath. These are about the only ways he has to tell the world about his feelings. The baby can hold his breath until he turns blue or momentarily seems to lose consciousness. If your doctor has checked and you know this is a perfectly healthy child, and it is clear that this is temper, remember that when the baby's lungs need more air, he has to breathe. This is automatic, beyond his control.

At eighteen months to two years the youngster is on his feet, exploring, trying out, learning about things and people. But the people want him to do things he doesn't really want to do, or don't want him to do all the fascinating things he wants to do. The world is full of objects that won't cooperate. Chairs, tricycles, and toys fall over when they should stand still or stand still when they should move. The sudden and often unexpected surges of anger bring on direct action. The child throws things, kicks, stamps, hits, bites, attacks with intent to hurt in return.

Direct expressions of anger bring disapproval and punishment. Wise parents accompany these with help in finding a good substitute for kicking and hitting. "You may kick a football but not the cat; you may pound clay or a pounding board, but not Susie." Language is a more usable tool now and language starts to replace direct attack.

The "temper tantrum" in varying degrees of intensity occurs most frequently at about this age. This violent release of pent up feelings may catch a child by surprise, as well as his parents. Anger-causing forces have piled up and built up until they must explode. Lack of skill in managing self and the world, the meeting head-on with necessary limits, possibly too many bosses, being tired and hungry and feeling no one seems to understand, all contribute to this build up. The storm must spend itself before anyone really can help.

Do not abandon this small "ship in distress." Stay nearby but do not try reason or appeasement. When tantrums are frequent and severe, check over the pressures. There must be limits. Are these too many and too rigid? Can the law and order be made simpler and clearer? Can help be given when skill and language fail? Have the tantrums produced bribes and rewards?

The three and four year olds call names, brag (to belittle), begin to use the cutting remarks, and tattle to bring punishment on another. Somewhat older children combine to show anger toward another child by excluding him from the group. These episodes are usually short lived and vary from day to day.

In the early school years, there is a shift to attempts to hurt the feelings rather than the person. Since pressure from adults to control anger continues, periods of sulking or pouting become more evident.

The child of eight or nine or ten is growing in ability and self confidence. This is a period when quarrels increase. There is constant contact of children with each other in what is commonly called the "gang-age." The give and take required, the establishment and maintenance of ones own position calls forth considerable loudness, boasting, gruffness, and sauciness. Beckinridge and

Vincent in their book "Child Development" call this a period when children "woof, boast and bluster."

One side result is that when this seems to work on playmates, children give it a try on the adults in their lives. This definitely meets with little success in most families, as it comes out as sauciness. If they "get away with it" with the adults, this may become an established habit.

Outbursts of anger, then, are often results of limited skills and ability, of being small and helpless, of pressures to conform and to achieve. These are necessarily present in the process of growing up. Help and guidance means helping children gain skills and self confidence, to know and accept the rules and demands of living with people, and to find accepable ways to work off angry feelings. Our aim is not to end or suppress feelings of anger, but to guide these into progressively more mature channels of expression as children themselves grow up.

Jealousy

Some time ago Mother had two colored slides taken of her little daughter, not quite three, and the newly arrived baby brother.

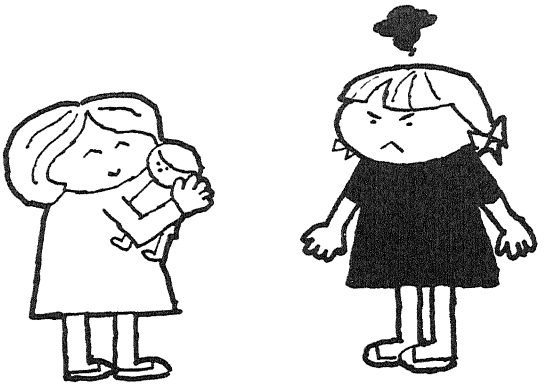
These two pictures tell a story all their own. In the first, Sister is standing by little Brother's crib, a beautiful smile of love and interest on her face. The second picture is of Grandmother holding Baby Brother. Sister is standing beside them, looking the other way with a real thundercloud expression on her face.

These two unposed scenes show vividly how jealousy involves persons who are important to us in some way. We want to be loved, thought well of, to have standing with such persons in our lives. We are jealous of anyone whom we fear is receiving love or favor or recognition that we would like to have for ourselves.

Much more has been written about jealous behavior in children than about the feeling itself. A mixture of emotions of fear, anger, self interest, guilt, and hostility is involved. The little child feels lost, frightened, and resentful without understanding in the least how or why this has come about.

Jealousy is an emotion which, when expressed, often meets with disapproval. This causes suppression of the direct show of feelings which then are diverted to behavior that is more difficult to recognize. Jealousy hurts and when hidden and suppressed, it can truly become the "green-eyed" monster.

One common form of jealous behavior in young children, with the arrival of a new baby, is to act like the baby. They may ask to be fed, bathed, and dressed. They may try to climb into the baby buggy and will drink from the baby's bottle. Another child may make a great show of affection for the baby but may begin a series of misbehavior. Others may cling to parents, or begin to boast or tattle or lie. The problem this poses is to sort out which is jealousy



and which is the usual mischievousness of growing children. Part of the misbehavior comes from the child's need for proof that parents do still love him when he is good, when he is naughty, and when he is very, very naughty.

What can be done to help handle jealousy? Preparing a child for a new arrival can help somewhat. Parents may have done as good a job of this as possible and still be taken aback to find the first child is jealous after all. The reality of the new baby cannot be completely explained in words beforehand. The sight of Mother and Dad spending the time and giving the loving care the new baby needs is more real than the words indicated. The two or three year old probably didn't understand all those words anyway. The new baby has needs, too, but sleeps about three-fourths of the time. This leaves time in the early weeks for the extra interest, affection, and attention the older child needs as he readjusts to his own changed small world.

Much less attention has been given to jealousy among older children in the family. We need to remember that down underneath for a considerable period of time each child would like to be favored by his parents and feel that he comes first with them. Past the pre-school age, both the older and the younger children can be involved with these feelings in relation to each other and their

parents. Praise and blame, privileges and punishments, successes and failures are often unconsciously weighed from this standpoint.

It takes time for each child to feel worthy and secure. The following suggestions are among those offered for parents' consideration:

—The more agreeably parents get along with each other and the children, the less jealousy there tends to be.

—Brothers and sisters grow slowly in their ability to be genuinely happy about each other's achievements. They need to be happy about their own, also.

—The more each child finds satisfaction in his own life, the more he can be comfortable about others.

—Excesses of praise or blame, or taking sides with one child, may add "fuel to the fire." Holding one child up as an example for the others falls in the same category.

—Help children handle (not eliminate or suppress) their jealousy by listening without apparent shock when they try to tell you how they feel. Restrain the acts of aggression (You may not hit the baby).

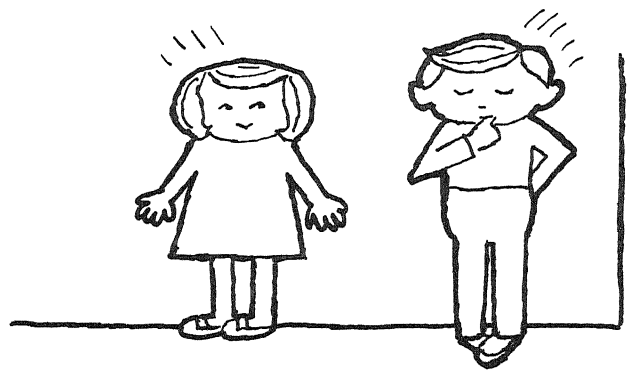
—Jealous children have a secret fear that no one likes them or ever will. Help the child to have friends of his own, activities and hobbies that enable him to "feel good about himself." Let him be sure that you like him as well as love him.

Remember, there is almost bound to be some jealousy. If this can be kept from being too severe, it probably helps children learn that they must accept others, take their turn with success and failure, become tolerant, independent and sharing.

Shyness

The quiet, self reliant child is not the subject here but rather the child who is shy because he lacks self reliance in social situations. Also, we are not concerned here with the shyness which almost every child shows when five or six months old nor that commonly seen around the two year mark.

Many children, faced with a situation they cannot handle, will react by hesitating, withdrawing, shutting their mouths clam tight, even running away from it. The situation may be the simplest kind, like a stranger asking their name or other children inviting them to come and play.



Such children are excessively shy and this shyness, normally quite obvious to grownups, is unfortunately often misunderstood. The child is tapped as "backward" or "stubborn." Some regard the shy child as a "good child," the kind that "can be seen and not heard."

What poses a problem for parents is the shyness sometimes found in the pre-school and school-age child which makes it difficult for him to take part in social activities.

The shy child needs a better opinion of himself. Somehow he missed out on one or both of two "musts" that should have gone into strengthening his personality.

The first is the all-important one and the lack of this seems to be at the root of too many troubles in child training.

Your child must always feel that you want him and love him.

He needs to know that he "belongs" to you, that he can count on you for understanding, come what may. While he was a helpless baby, he needed your complete protection and loving care. Now, as he is growing up, he still needs affectionate help and direction as he begins to take over activities, decisions, and responsibilities for himself. The security that comes from knowing that you, his parents, are standing by with approval, understanding, and interest is the broad firm base from which your child steps confidently forth to meet new people and new situations.

Humoring a child one minute and scolding him the next doesn't provide a firm base of security. Restrain and control him on the important issues until he learns to control himself. You can do this in such a way that he has no doubt that you love him and that he himself is all right even though he's got to stop what he's doing.

The shy child may lack the feeling that he is able to do many of the things he wants to do, and to be many of the things he wants to be.

The shy child needs to feel more capable, adequate, and important. There are many ways in which parents can, almost from the child's birth, weaken his faith in his abilities to be and do like others.

Eight obvious situations for parents to avoid are:

1. Limiting his experiences such as not allowing early opportunity to sit up, crawl, stand; failing to make suitable play provisions or failing to let him help feed, wash, and dress himself before he is able to do these completely or faultlessly.

2. Tying him to your apron strings; keeping such a close check on him that he can't learn things for himself.

3. Making all decisions for him.

4. Too much "Don't touch," "Stop that noise," "Can't you do anything at all?"

5. Expecting too much from the child in the way of manners, habits or cleanliness.

6. Making thoughtless remarks or laughing at his childish, awkward attempts to learn. Also neglecting to praise and make suitable comments when he achieves something.

7. Too much emphasis on the child's cultural and artistic activities to the neglect of helping him learn handicraft skills, so that he feels unequal among his friends and playmates.

8. Humiliating or embarrassing him with a remark because he upset a glass at a party, for example, so that later he feels uneasy in social situations.

You can help the shy child overcome his unwillingness to meet situations, but scolding or persuasion will not help.

Your approach may include a number of positive steps. You can set the stage for future occasions that are likely to bring out his shyness (such as meeting people) by making the situation pleasant and appealing. Plan a gradual introduction, gently encouraging and easing him into it, always remembering to praise him and to share his happiness when he's been successful. Familiar "props" are often a comfort. Holding a favorite article or wearing a favorite piece of clothing helps reassure him and makes it easier for him to direct his thoughts away from his own feelings. Having someone he knows and trusts, such as his playmates, close by, also builds up his confidence.

Avoid the "spotlight effect." Do away with too much comment or pointed remarks when you're introducing the child to new people or new situations. You will need, also, to accept his possible slowness, giving him time to make gains at his own pace as he breaks away from his dependent habits and develops greater poise and control.

There's a limit to his abilities and you can aid him by directing his attention from the things he can't do to what he can do, and make him feel that these are important.

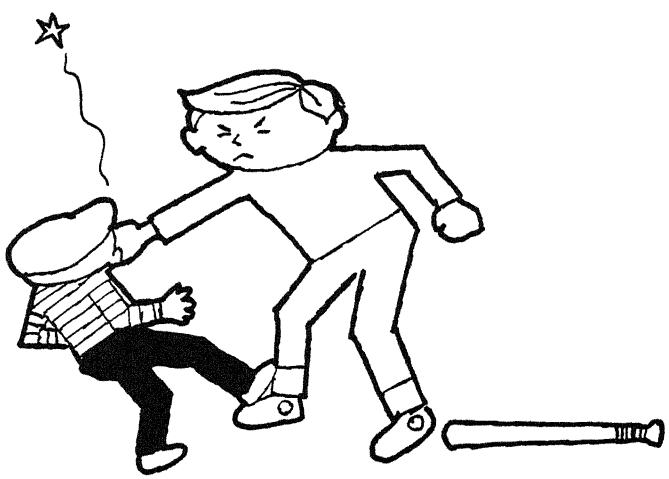
Often, it's quite effective if you let the child help out in some little way, be it with welcoming guests, or some detail, however minor, of a new undertaking (handicrafts, fixing shelves, etc.) or situation.

Meeting the problem of the shy child means giving considerable thought to ways you can help him build a better opinion of himself on foundations of security and self confidence. Children who feel secure in their parents' love are free to use their energies to find out the what, why and how of the world about them and so satisfy most of their personal wants and needs.

Aggressiveness—The Bully

The child called a "bully" exhibits a form of aggression toward other children usually smaller or weaker than himself. Why does he do it? What can be done about it?

The word "bully" calls to mind the picture of a blustering, swaggering child who tends to attack, hurt or dominate others. In its exaggerated form, extreme and continual aggressiveness of



this sort is a special problem which may require guidance counseling. We are concerned here with the behavior that shows up from time to time in children's relationships with each other to which we can give some thoughtful attention and helpful direction.

The question has two sides, depending on whether the parent is concerned with curbing the potential bully among his own children or whether parents and children are trying to cope with the neighborhood bully.

Why does a child bully other children? At times most children feel that they are not large enough or clever or strong enough to win the attention and approval they so much want. There is always someone who is more *something* than they are. Some resentments and anger occur in children as they meet rules and regulations. It is not easy to handle feelings of being put upon or unfairly treated and children often interpret discipline in this way.

Limited opportunity to use up energy causes boredom which in turn can break out in teasing and tormenting. Younger children do not themselves understand teasing very well. They are resentful and feel somewhat helpless in the face of this sort of humor, and pass these feelings on by picking on someone else. The bully may be the "middle man." Someone else, child or adult, is teasing, bullying or dominating him in such a way that he wants to strike back. You can't strike back very well at someone larger and stronger, so you pick someone smaller and weaker.

Aggressiveness may be encouraged by the admiration of the group for the "fighter" or one who "can take care of himself." This is usually more true of boys than of girls, though the comic strip "Myrtle" is cast in the fighter role.

The bully often has a following of weaker and more timid children whose admiration he strives to hold.

All this means that underneath, the bully is unsure of himself, unhappy and resentful, lacking in skills and abilities that win him a place with his fellows. This child views his world in terms of fears—fears of being hurt or attacked or ridiculed or belittled. These may actually have happened or may be imagined fears. In either case, they are real fears to him. His response is to attack first, but to pick a victim who cannot strike back.

When this behavior wins approval from a group of "hangers on" or from adults who unduly admire aggressiveness, it becomes more pronounced. We need to be aware of the fact that many children live in situations where much approval goes to the very aggressive child. "He can lick every kid in the block," is high praise. Delinquent gangs are led by the most aggressive member.

When you are concerned about these traits cropping up in your own child as he plays with brothers, sisters or playmates, consider these possibilities:

Help the child develop the skills that others his age possess.

Find some special claim to distinction of his own.

Guard against making him feel more awkward, clumsy or inept than he really is.

Help children to find numerous outlets for their interests and energy.

Help children develop a sense of fair play and justice. They arrive at it very slowly on their own.

Give your approval more generously when your children deserve it and you will have to do less scolding because they do not.

Make the rules and regulations clear, firm and fair.

Do not give him a pattern of a bully to imitate.

Are your children the victims of a neighborhood bully?

This is a tougher problem to handle than guidance of your own children. You have a right to stop attacks on your children when they occur in your yard or home. Unfortunately this may result in the bully lying in wait for your child when he leaves home for school or to play with others. If there are older brothers or sisters, their protection may be needed. An older friend also may take this role.

Sometimes you can give the bully a chance to learn skills or take part in a responsible way. How well this works depends on what is making the bully unhappy in the first place. If he is insecure and uncertain, it will help. If he is bitterly resentful and angry at something or someone, it will have little effect.

Approaching the parents of such a child usually gets you nowhere. Including him in a special occasion strictly on the basis of good behavior may help. You might include him in the trip to the swimming pool only on condition that he plays nicely and behaves. Be firm if he does not, and don't include him the next time.

There is a bit of the bully in many children. When they get away with a little of it, they will try some more. One authority has said that parents who have come to believe that aggression needs to be expressed (without restraint) have produced some extremely disagreeable children. Do not be surprised at the traits that show up. Do a thoughtful job of guidance and teaching directed toward having happy, healthy children. Try to teach them happier ways than you may have learned. A happy child is a friendly child.