

- A child's behavior and life are greatly determined by the kind relationship between father and mother rather than by the education and economic status of its parents.

FAMILY INFLUENCES ON PERSONALITY

We have found in our guidance study group that the relationship between parents bears more largely on children's behavior than such things as the educational or economic status of the parents. In fact, the marital relationship appears to be more important than any other factor. Food-fickleness, over-dependence, attention-demanding, temper tantrums, and urinary incontinence are recruited more consistently from homes where an inharmonious parental relationship exists.

Since the marital adjustment is so important to healthy habits and sound personality in the child, the teacher may ask, "What of it so far as I am concerned?" If she has good sense she knows that it is completely outside the limits of her function to intrude into the

highly inflammable area of husband-wife relationships. But some general knowledge of the sources of strain and bafflement may give her tolerance of both parents and child, and may help to breed tolerance in them.

In our group, we found that while similarities of educational and economic background were the rule in marriage, this was not true of temperament. The reserved, dignified person with a marked sense of privacy tends to marry the outgoing, extraverted person. Apparently a large element of romantic allure lies in a temperament different from one's own, and yet it may be baffling to understand and adjust to.

A mutually satisfying sex relationship brings enough support to make such adjustments seem relatively mi-

nor, but when erotic tensions exist all sorts of minor items are saturated with strains projected from them.

Another factor, closely related to marital adjustment in its influence on children's behavior, is the degree of parental agreement on disciplinary techniques. This is never complete, both because the parents vary in temperament and because all of us are greatly influenced in our ideas about discipline by our approval or disapproval of the techniques used on us as children. Where parents have not accepted these differences and real strain or friction exists over discipline, we find the child showing insecurity or anxiety.

Child behavior is also affected by the child-parent relationship. A mother may be baffled by an emerging personality unlike her own or by conflict in herself, or because of the trying domestic situation to which her child ties her. She may be reliving through her child the tensions of her own childhood. She may be merely too acutely aware of the importance of the mo-

ther-child relationship, hectic, self-conscious, poring over the latest undigested words from child psychology, and mental hygiene propaganda, anxiously seeking advice and authority. Regardless of the cause, if she is anxious and uneasy in her relationship to her youngster, she increases the likelihood of unfortunate response patterns from him. What she needs is a practical program that will help her see herself and the child objectively — to appreciate which of his characteristics are modifiable and which are not. What she does not need is criticism of herself or her child. An intolerant teacher can easily add to the tension of an already tense relationship.

The psychological environment of the child also varies enormously according to his mere position in the family. The first child has a monopoly on affection, and many children are so dislocated by the advent of a new child that they have marked changes of personality and show gross misbehavior in their futile attempts to get back their monopoly.

A younger child, too, has his problems. Older children place him in an inferior role with respect to achievement. If the older child is a boy, the younger may constantly feel inadequate intellectually and physically and carry these attitudes even as an adult. If the older sib is a domineering girl, he may carry deep-seated resentment of women into adulthood. If the older sister is protective and maternal, he may have fewer adjustment problems as a young child but continue most of his life handing on to childish dependent patterns that retard his emotional maturity.

All these relationships modify the other relationships within the home. If permitted by circumstances and good luck, the child becomes a youngster who is fun to know and teach. If poor original equipment, bad health, or straining intra-family relationships exist,

then the child, a victim of circumstances, may become for the teacher a thorn in the side.

Understanding breeds tolerance. Where teachers have knowledge of the whys of a child's behavior, greater sympathy and patience are possible, and a more intelligent contribution to the child's training. But no teacher can know more than a few of her children and their homes. She can't depend on understanding as the basis of sympathy and tolerance. She must learn to accept the fact that children and parents vary greatly in attractiveness, and perhaps when they are particularly trying she can remember to stand by with tolerance while they struggle, with the equipment which heredity and experience have given them, against the pressures of life. — *By Jean Walker Macfarlane, Director of Guidance Study, Univ. of California, in the Childhood Education, Oct. 1938.*