

HOME INSTITUTE

CHILD WANTS MOTHER TO ACT HER AGE

Elders Are Looked to for Wisdom

CHILDREN need mothers and fathers who act their age instead of trying to step back into a younger generation. They need councilors and guardians. Children don't turn to ten-year-old Johnny Jones for sympathy in time of trouble. They go home to their parents.

If those parents have tried to be so youthful and scatter-brained that they have convinced their own children they haven't the slightest idea what to do with a serious situation, the small boys and girls will be lost.

The attitude of "I don't know what to do any more than you do, but together we'll find a way," is not constructive within a filial relationship.

After all, a woman of 40 is not 15, by any method of subtraction. She has had forty years to garner knowledge. She has advanced to a certain position of maturity through her growth. She belongs at the place on the road to which she has journeyed. To run back post-haste, to a cross-road where she stood 25 years ago, is so silly that her children smile about it.

Youthfulness of Spirit Laudable

The essence of spiritual youth is ageless. That fine understanding, sympathy, and tolerance should flourish in hearts as they mature. They should bring parents and children closer together than any simulation of the role of an older sister or brother can do.

"I think freedom comes too early to children," Faith Baldwin, noted novelist, insists. "After all, they

have all their lives in which to grow up. Children are not so adult that they need their own latch keys at seven."

We agree wholeheartedly. It is this tendency for children to usurp adult privileges, and parents to discard their prerogatives which is placing American home life in such a perilous position. A child of 10 has had no back-ground of experience against which to make comparisons. He needs to be guided. An adult has had a fair amount of knowledge instilled into him, usually, one way or another. If he has a road map he should use it instead of pleading that it is fun to get lost together!

Years Are Child's Only Yardstick

Children like parents who are fathers and mothers. They like the feeling of security that a protectorate gives them. After all, they know their parents' birthdays, and they feel a little foolish when they see adults disregarding the wisdom of the years. Parents certainly should never be jailers. On the other hand, they won't get any place by standing in the front yard giving the college yell all the time.

Life is so arranged that every age has its compensations. A life that is well-planned will take the highest beauty from each year of its span. It will reveal to the children that there is loveliness all along the way. When it skips backwards to the aid of jumping rope or a bouncing ball it makes those children wonder what the farther world is like that their parents want to escape it.

Nor does it make those children for one minute really accept their parents as members of their own group. Youngsters measure by years. It is the only yardstick they have. No matter how young their fathers and mothers act they can't pass the backward entrance examinations.

POLLY-SIT-BY-THE- FIRE

Girls Need Companionship of Young Friends

When a boy won't go out and mix with the gang, his parents begin to worry and fuss. But when a girl turns pussy-cat and becomes a regular Polly-Sit-by-the-Fire, no one ever bothers about it.

It isn't a good thing for growing girls to turn recluses. They are far better off for having congenial friends with the same interests. A mixture is good, because it is affirmed by those who have gone into the matter deeply that attitudes of both sexes are improved in future relationships if first approached in the group that skates, or sled-rides or picnics together, or even snowballs, purloins hats or splashes mud. The roughage of the group is good for the soul, as well as its courtesy and sportsmanship and loyalties.

But barring the boys, because it is not every girl who takes kindly to the mixed crowd, she needs company. It isn't good for her to turn in on herself and settle down to her parents' routine alone.

Age and Size Create Barriers

Once in a while I get letters from mothers who realize this and ask for advice. As there are so many possible reasons for the "detached" child, I think it best to list some of them. Then other mothers may be able to decide where the trouble lies, if they too have one who prefers her own company.

Sometimes it happens that Bessie—let us call her—is younger than her schoolmates. Younger, too, than her close neighbors. If so, she will not be welcomed by the rest. If she has been kept back by removal or illness, her place in school may be a torture to her. She will make no effort at friendliness

herself, feeling sensitive as she does about the discrepancy.

Sometimes size counts too. If she has grown faster than the rest, she may think they do not want her. Or if she has a more-mature nature, even though of equal age, she may be inclined to spurn the friendship of "those babies" as she calls them.

Perhaps the family has ambitions to live in a newer and better neighborhood. The local children may unbend and welcome her, but this has to be a fifty-fifty business, and Bessie will have to go half way. If she feels a misfit in her new surroundings, she won't make the effort. Then all is lost.

Lacks Bond at School

The same is true of the school. The one she attends may not lay much stress on democracy. If Bessie feels that she is unequal to holding her own in this rare atmosphere, again she will fail to make social contacts. She will be "in" the school but not "of" it. While it is natural for parents to want to improve their children's chances for the future, to put the onus on them alone is just a bit cruel sometimes.

Third, perhaps Elizabeth is one of life's natural "escapers," and prefers to live vicariously through books, sleep, movies and such. If this is the case, has any attempt been made to get her interested in something that will undermine her inertia; and show her that real experience is far more enjoyable than dreams? Perhaps she has acquired the liking because her parents veto everything normal on the grounds that "ladies should stay at home and be good little girls." So often this results in friendlessness. Every girl should have some friends.



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