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50 Years of Feel-Good Parenting - A Recipe for Disaster

by Jacob Azerrad, Ph.D.

If we were to ask why so many children are out of control, we might discover it to be a result of the many current parenting books that have created a generation of parents who are playing therapist to their children. As a result, well intentioned parents are rewarding - with attention - the very behaviors they are trying to change in their children.

Many of the most popular childrearing books are full of such nonsense. They repeatedly urge parents to hold, soothe, comfort and talk to a child who bites, hits, screams, throws or breaks things, ignores or refuses parenting requests or otherwise behaves in obnoxious, infantile ways. Common sense and a truckload of research argue solidly against this practice. Yet, these experts seem to be unaware of the well-established fact that children do what gets noticed, that adult attention usually makes behavior more likely to occur, not less.

Parents are told to comfort the child during and immediately after out-of-control behaviors - advice that rewards the very behaviors that drive parents crazy. When the behaviors become worse, the child is given a diagnosis and then all too often a handful of pills. Today, 2.5 million children are being medicated - needlessly and destructively - and the number is increasing yearly. It is a crime against childhood.

Parents have been led down a primrose path by a number of self-proclaimed childrearing experts. These "experts" have undermined the traditional parental role. They have persuaded millions of parents, especially well-educated, well-intentioned, middle class parents, that misbehavior is a symptom of psychological disorder and that, therefore, parents must think of themselves as therapists. There is ample evidence, not just from my clinical practice but from decades of research, that this approach is not only ineffective in treating behavior problems, **but is the main cause of them.** Indeed, the more "sophisticated" parents are about the supposed mental health problems that underlie bad behavior, the more conscientiously they take their roles as mental health workers, the **worse** their children are likely to behave.

Many of today's psychiatrists and pediatricians subscribe to the belief that very young children, often as young as 2 to 5 years of age, can be diagnosed as childhood bipolar or ADHD. Behaviors associated with these diagnoses are often hitting, kicking, tantrums and biting - previously known as the "terrible two's."

Recently, in Massachusetts, a 4 year old girl, Rebecca Riley, was diagnosed with childhood bipolar and ADHD. She died due to an overdose of psychotropic drugs. Her parents are guilty of some level of ignorance. Mostly, they are guilty of placing their trust in doctors whose only recourse seemed to be the use of medication. There is a saying that, "to the person who only has a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

Kids need parents, not pills. The need for children to be properly parented begins at birth. Parents need to be given the tools to deal with their children's difficult or negative behaviors. There are **proven** successful alternative ways to help parents effectively deal with these behaviors.

***"The biter will need the most comfort for she will be frightened both by her act and by the bitten child's reaction."
"Pick her up - comfort her and explain that it hurts and the other child didn't like it. Sooth her until she's in control and then try to give her other ways to approach the child."***

"Discipline is important but first you must acknowledge feelings."

"When your child acts up you should get curious, not furious."

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