



EMPATHIC PARENTING

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 22

Issue 3

Summer 1999

"For every thousand
hacking at the leaves
of evil, there is one
striking at the root."

Henry David Thoreau

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Children Deserve to Learn What Compassion Is

There is only one sure way to prevent crime, and that is to show our babies and toddlers what it means to care about someone else's needs and rights. When a baby's needs are ignored, he/she learns by example to mistrust others and to ignore the suffering of a fellow human being. This is a highly significant connection because the lessons we learn in our infancy stay with us into adulthood.

Early childhood is the starting point for all love and for all cruelty in later years. To the degree that a child has been shown compassion, he or she will pass it on to others in the future. There is a Swedish saying, "man får den respekt man ger": "one gets the respect one gives". Unfortunately the converse is also true. When we treat a child with disrespect, we breed disrespect, anger, and feelings of retaliation that will be passed on to others later.

Compassionate early parenting is like a well-built boat, protecting the child from the sea of all subsequent disappointments, temptations, frustrations and sorrows. Blaming teenage crime on peer pressure (or video games, movies, music, clothing, the Internet, the media, or anything else in the current culture) is like blaming a storm for overturning a child's poorly-built boat. We know that there will always be storms in our children's lives. There will always be temptations, disappointments, sorrows, even tragedies. Their ability to cope with these events is what really matters. Do they have a strong enough boat, or do they have a boat with holes? Do they have any boat at all, or have they been put to sea without any protection? And when they drown, do we blame the wind and the rain, the wake of passing motorboats, and the clutching hands of their boatless peers, or do we start building better boats for all of our children?

Jan Hunt

WHAT IS EMPATHIC PARENTING?

Being willing and able to put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and

Being willing and able to behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.

Empathic Parenting takes an enormous amount of time and energy and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.

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Childhood: The Unexplored Source of
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Some Thoughts On Columbine

by James Kimmel, Ph.D.

We are a society whose people and government are reluctant to accept what we now know about child development (and can easily confirm), because the solutions to the problem of social deviance do not fit our economic and political priorities.

The tragedy at Columbine has been responded to by the media and the public with disbelief and mystery. How could such a thing happen? Who and what are to blame? In contrast, my colleagues and I in the mental health field do not find the event a surprise, and certainly not a mystery.

As part of a profession whose business includes training and experience working with emotionally disturbed and antisocial individuals, we expect the occurrence of events like Columbine. We know firsthand that our population includes people who hate, kill, commit suicide, and are indifferent to the feelings and lives of others (even in the so-called "best" of families). We have studied normal and abnormal child development and know the signs and consequences of mental illness and psychopathy. In addition, almost all mental health practitioners believe that what happens to infants and young children greatly shapes their later character, personality and behavior. I do not believe the two teenage killers at Columbine were ex-

ceptions to this rule. It is also highly unlikely that they were exceptions to the fact that we have not yet found a mass murderer who had a happy, loving childhood.

Unlike those who are untrained in psychology (which includes most of those who work in the media), mental health professionals cannot, if they are to be effective in their work, deny the reality that childhood for many individuals in our society has been an extremely painful and harmful experience. Social scientists know better than ever before what infants and children need in order to develop mental and emotional health. They also know that a vast number of children do not get what they need, and further, that we are a people who do not support giving children what they need.

We are a society whose people and government are reluctant to accept what we now know about child development (and can easily confirm) because the solutions to the problem of social deviance do not fit our economic and political priori-

James Kimmel has been a psychologist, a poet, a sculptor and a toy designer. He received his Ph.D. in psychology from New York University in 1958. He has had extensive experience working with children and parents as a psychotherapist and as the director of a school and clinic for emotionally disturbed children. He presently migrates between Arizona, Nevada and New York where his three children and six grandchildren are scattered.

ties. The solutions also do not match our traditional non-nurturing values regarding human interaction. It is difficult in a culture where the goal of child-rearing is the development of individuation, self-sufficiency, self-survival, independence, separateness and competitiveness to accept the biological nurturing process normal to a mother and her newborn, which is rooted in dependency, a lack of individual separateness, and human unity. Compassionate mothering is the antithesis of being "on your own" and separate in the world, which is one reason why we have in Western civilization worked so hard to eliminate the need for mothers.

Simply providing paid maternity leave (as all other industrialized nations do), prenatal care, universal medical care for babies and children, genuinely supporting and promoting breastfeeding in children's first year of life (preferably two years), and teaching parents about healthy infant and child care would soon put a major dent in the number of asocial and anti-social individuals in our society. However, rather than supporting all children's need for a nurturing mother, we are a society which expends enormous sums of money, time and energy trying to prove that cow's milk and formula in a bottle are as good, or almost as good, as human milk from a mother's breast, that day care is as good (if not better) than

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care by a nurturing mother, that "quality time" is better than "all the time," and that children who are spanked and punished and left to cry themselves to sleep turn out better than children who are indulged and "spoiled" by their parents. None of these assumptions, of course, is true, and they are all in fact decidedly harmful to both the individual and the society.

Amazingly, those who deny the importance of attachment and nurturing on individual development then propose that social deviance is the result of genetic defect, while at the same time they discourage the most critically important "inheritance" a human can have: a nurturing mother, her loving and caring arms, and the human milk from her breasts.

As a psychologist, I cannot tell you exactly what happened to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold during their first two or three years of life, although I could make some pretty good guesses. But I can with confidence tell you what did not happen. Neither of them was cared for in the way that is genetically and biologically normal for the human species. They were not breastfed on demand for at least two years. They did not sleep with their mothers, their crying was not responded to immediately, and they were seldom held and carried. Babies and young children who receive compassion and care through warm and

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unwavering affection, breastfeeding, day-time carrying, and night-time closeness are simply not capable of the crimes committed by these two boys. Human beings who are appropriately nurtured in their infancy and early childhood are not emotionally indifferent to human life. They identify with the human species and with life itself. They have learned by example what it means to take another person's suffering seriously, and to respond to it in loving ways.

I do not mean to imply that the only way that attachment to parents, caretakers and the human species can be achieved is by following the specific practices mentioned above. Biological mothering is, however, the easiest and most proven way. It has served throughout most of our history to keep newborns alive and to establish in them a positive and affirmative emotional connection to other humans. We are not a species where the individual is born to live his or her life in separateness but in friendly and caring unity with others. Our many current substitutes for mammalian mothering are risky and experimental. They are able to keep babies alive. But they often fall far short of providing sufficiently the satisfying closeness and intimacy, the sociability, and the true socialization of biological mothering.

In the preface to my book, "Whatever Happened to Mother" I wrote: "A society which is not responsible to its children, which does not provide them with what they need, will breed a population of

asocial and anti-social individuals." I did not write this to blame parents but to indicate that the values and priorities inherent in our child-rearing practices do not, and have not, met the needs of babies and children for generations, and that is why there have been, and are, so many socially deviant people in our culture today.

Columbine is not a mysterious event. It will happen again, although not in the exact same way or in the numbers of dead and injured. Every day in our society someone murders. It is obvious to those who do not live in denial that the availability of guns and the violence our children are exposed to on TV, in movies, in video games and in contemporary music contributes to individual acts of violence. *But this only occurs in children who have experienced violence and indifference to their needs and feelings early in their lives.* We also need to realize that those whose creations and productions contain violence are not strangers to it. Individuals who have not experienced real violence in their own lives do not usually choose to include and project violence into their creations. In fact, they would have great difficulty doing so, as they do not have violent imaginations.

We are a culture which includes, and has always included, violent interactions between individuals, between different ethnic groups, and between economic classes. In addition, we are a culture which supports violence and anti-social behavior in our "anti-children" philosophy of parenting.

We condone punishing children physically and emotionally, we encourage parents to ignore children's tears, and we advocate that parents should use force with their children. Fortunately, parents differ in the kind and severity of the punishment they use, in the extent of their alienation from their children's need for nurturing, and in their willingness to consciously manipulate their children for parental ends. If they did not differ, if all parents punished their children frequently and severely, and were never nurturing or tender toward them, we would probably all be psychotic psychopaths.

It is only recently on the human time scale that we have been able to keep children alive without the mothering that is biologically and genetically natural to a mammalian species. The exploitation of this possibility in the present and in the history of western civilization coincides with the advent of the alienated individual, and, in my opinion, the creation of the asocial and anti-social person. We are not the first culture to eliminate the need for human mothering or whose prescribed and accepted ways of caring for their babies and children includes cruel and non-nurturing practices, nor are we the first society whose population has a large number of psychopathic, psychotic, and emotionally disturbed individuals.

Lloyd deMause, in his well-documented book on the history of child care in Western civilization has stated: "The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused."

Sadly, we are still not awake. The nightmare continues. The mistreatment of infants and children is now less open, more subtle, more rationalized, more denied, and easier to hide in our greater privacy. Like previous generations, we are still unwilling to fully commit ourselves to our children and to accept responsibility for them. We pretend to our children, to ourselves, and to others that we have such a commitment, but the behavior of a culture's children always exposes who its people are, as individuals, as parents, and as a society. Columbine, and its horror, are us. ☹

Quotations

deMause, Lloyd. *The History of Childhood*. New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974). 1.

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"A society is best judged by how it treats its children."

Anonymous

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MOTHER?

*– A Primer For Those Who Care
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JAMES KIMMEL

Dr. Kimmel has written a number of articles which can be found on www.naturalchild.com

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Whatever Happened to Mother? (on-line book)

Whatever Happened to Mother? can also be purchased in hardcopy from Sweet & Simple Publishing, 2229 East Hedrick Drive, Tucson, Arizona 85719

Childhood: The Unexplored Source of Knowledge

Alice Miller

Frequently we believe we are acting in the interests of the children and fail to realize that we may be doing the very opposite, simply because we have learned to be unfeeling in this respect at such an early stage that the effects of this inculcation are stronger than all the things we learn later.

Probably ever since civilization began, people have been debating about how Evil came into the world and what we can do to combat it. There has always been a diffuse intuitive conviction that the seeds of Evil are to be sought in childhood, but the ruling tendency has been to imagine it as something congenital, the manifestation of innate destructive instincts best transformed into goodness, decency, and nobility of character by a liberal dose of corporal punishment.

This is a position that is still frequently championed. Today, no one seriously believes that the Devil has a hand in things, smuggling some changeling into the cradle and forcing us to employ strict upbringing methods to batter this diabolical offspring into submission. But from some quarters we do hear the serious contention that there are such things as genes that predispose

certain individuals to delinquency. The quest for these rogue genes has inspired many a respectable research project, even though the hypotheses behind it fly in the face of a number of proven facts. Advocates of the "congenital evil" theory would, for example, have to explain why, 30 to 40 years before the Third Reich reared its ugly head, there was such a sudden spate of children with "bad genes" ready at a later date to do Hitler's bidding with such alacrity.

Sufficient scientific evidence has been marshaled to refute the notion that some people are just "born bad." This absurd myth, encountered in almost all cultures, has been effectively exploded. It is dead, but it refuses to lie down. We know today that the brain we are born with is not the finished product it was once thought to be. The structuring of the brain depends

After having obtained her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Basel, Alice Miller went through Freudian psychoanalytic training in Zurich and worked for 20 years as analyst and supervisor. Since 1980 she has devoted herself to research on childhood and wrote 9 books focussing on the causes and effects of child abuse. She has found confirmation of her hypotheses not only in the numerous reports of her readers but also in the current research of neurobiologists who proved the influence of the first experience to the developing structure of the human brain in the first 3 years of life.

In 1986 Alice Miller received the Janusz Korczak prize in New York. In the same year were published some of her spontaneous paintings that had helped her to discover her own deeply repressed childhood history.

In her most recent book, **Paths of Life, Pantheon 1998**, Alice Miller explains among other things how hatred develops. She discovers a striking connection between the systematic cruel taming of infants in Germany around 1900 and the systematic terror used 40 years later by Hitler's willing executioners.

very much on experiences gone through in the first hours, days and weeks of a person's life. The stimulus indispensable for developing the capacity for empathy, say, is the experience of loving care. In the absence of such care, when a child is forced to grow up neglected, emotionally starved and subjected to physical cruelty, he or she will forfeit this innate capacity.

Of course we do not arrive in this world as a clean slate. Every new baby comes with a history of its own, the history of the nine months between conception and birth. In addition, children have the genetic blueprint they inherit from their parents. These factors may determine what kind of a temperament a child will have, what inclinations, gifts, pre-dispositions. But character depends crucially upon whether a person is given love, protection, tenderness and understanding in the early formative years or exposed to rejection, coldness, indifference, cruelty. The number of children committing murders is on the increase, and very many of them were born to adolescent, drug-dependent mothers. Extreme neglect, lack of attachment, and traumatization are the rule in such cases.

In the last few years, neuro-biologists have further established that traumatized and neglected children display severe lesions affecting anything up to 30% of those areas of the brain that control our emo-

tions. Severe traumas inflicted on infants lead to an increase in the release of stress hormones that destroy the existing, newly formed neurons and their interconnections.

More than anyone else, the credit for recognizing the immense import of these discoveries for our understanding of infant development and the delayed effects of traumas and neglect must go to neurologist and child psychiatrist Dr. Bruce D. Perry. His studies confirm what I described

in my book *For Your Own Good* twenty years ago as a result of observing my patients and studying educational literature. In that work I quoted extensively from the manuals of what I have called poisonous pedagogy with their insistence on the importance of drumming the principles of obedience and cleanliness into babies in the very first days and weeks of their existence.

Studying this literature helped me to understand what made it possible for individuals such as Adolf Eichmann to function like killer robots without even the slightest stirrings of compunction. The people who turned into Hitler's willing executioners had accounts to settle that dated back to their earliest days. They were people who had never been given the opportunity for an adequate response to the extreme cruelty inflicted on them in infancy. Their latent destructive potential was not the product of some Freudian "death drive" but the early sup-

As long as we are unaware of the degree to which the right to human dignity has been denied us in our own childhood, it is anything but easy to truly concede that right to our children, however sincerely we may wish to do so.

We know today that the brain we are born with is not the finished product it was once thought to be. The structuring of the brain depends very much on experiences gone through in the first hours, days and weeks of a person's life.

pression of natural reactions.

The fact that the monstrous advice about "good" parenting disseminated by self-styled educationalists in Germany around 1860 went into as many as 40 editions led me to conclude that most parents had read them and did indeed act -- in good faith -- on the recommendations set out there. They beat their children from the outset because they had been told this was the way to make decent members of society out of them. Forty years later, the children thus treated did the same with their children. They didn't know any better. Born thirty to forty years before the Holocaust, those traumatized children later became Hitler's adherents, adulators, and henchmen. In my view, it was the direct result of their early drilling. The cruelty they experienced turned them into emotional cripples incapable of developing any kind of empathy for the sufferings of others. At the same time it made them into people living with a time-bomb, unconsciously waiting for an opportunity of venting on others the rage pent up inside them. Hitler gave them the legal scapegoat they needed to act out their early feelings and their thirst for vengeance.

The latest discoveries about the human brain might have been expected to bring about a radical change in our thinking about children and the way we treat them. But as we know only too well, old habits die hard. It takes at least two generations for young parents to free themselves of the burden of inherited "wisdom" and stop beating their own children, two

generations until it has become sheerly impossible to give one's child a slap "inadvertently", two generations before the weight of newly acquired knowledge gets in the way of the hand raised to deal the "unthinking" blow.

Alongside the habits stored in our bodies and favoring misguided behavior, there are also a host of opinions still passionately advocated by experts although they are demonstrably false. One of these is the belief that in the long run the effects of corporal punishment are salutary rather than detrimental. Such opinions can only be espoused by dint of completely ignoring the childhood factor and its effects on the later development of individuals. As the experts in question inherited these opinions from their parents when they were children themselves, their belief in them prevails over all the weight of scientific evidence pointing to the contrary.

These thoughts, which I have set out in much greater detail in my latest book *Paths of Life*, will perhaps suffice to suggest the immense significance I ascribe to the experiences undergone by infants in the first days, weeks and months of their lives to explain their later behavior. In no way do I wish to assert that later influences are completely ineffectual. On the contrary. For a traumatized or neglected child it is of crucial importance to encounter what I call a "helping" or a "knowing witness" in its immediate circle. But such witnesses can only really help if they are aware of the consequences of early deprivations and do not play them down. It is

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in disseminating the information required by such potential knowing witnesses that I see my prime mission.

For a long time, the significance of the first few months of life for the later adult was a neglected subject even among psychologists. In several of my books I have tried to cast some light on this area by discussing the biographies of dictators like Hitler, Stalin, Ceaucescu and Mao and demonstrating how they unconsciously reenacted their childhood situation on the political stage. Here, however, I want to turn my attention away from history and the past and train my gaze on our present practice. My conviction is that in numerous areas of practical life we could be more productive if we paid the childhood factor greater heed than is customarily the case. Here are some examples.

Penal System

The area in which the wilful neglect of the childhood factor is most apparent is, so it seems to me, the **penal system**. Statistics tell us that 90% of the prisoners in American jails were abused in childhood. This figure is astonishingly high if we bear in mind the denial and repression factor. Probably the real figure is closer to a full 100%. A sheltered and respected child does not turn criminal. But most delinquents deny the sufferings they went

through as a child. Despite that, we still have this high -- and highly eloquent -- figure. Unfortunately little has been done to integrate this knowledge into the way prisons are organized and run. Outwardly, of course, today's prisons and penitentiaries have little in common with the grim fortresses of the 19th century. But one thing has stayed much the same: questions like what made an individual prisoner a criminal in the first place, what features of his early life set him off in that direction, and what he could do to avoid falling into the same trap over and over again are very rarely posed. In order to answer these questions himself, the prisoner would have to be encouraged to talk, write and think about his life as a child and share these facts with others in a structured group setting.

In my latest book I report on a program of this nature in Canada. Thanks to group work, a number of fathers who had sexually abused their daughters understood for the first time that their actions were criminal. Of crucial importance for them was that they were able to talk about their childhood to other people they trusted. That way they learned to grasp how they had automatically passed on something they had experienced themselves without realizing it.

We are accustomed not to say anything about the things we have suffered in

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childhood and frequently, instead of saying anything, we act blindly instead. But it was precisely the opportunity for talking about these things that released these prisoners from their blindness, gave them access to heightened awareness and protected them from acting out. Programs like these are unfortunately still very much the exception. The only other one I know of is at a prison in Arizona where violent criminals can talk about their childhood and with the help of the group learn to decipher the covert meaning in their life histories. I have seen video recordings of these group sessions and I was impressed by the change in the facial expressions of these men after therapy. Proceeding in this way regularly would probably save a great deal of the taxpayer's money; programs like these are not expensive to organize and the danger of relapse is significantly diminished. It is thus doubly surprising that they have not found their way into most prisons.

Political Stage

A similar lack of interest is discernible on the **political stage**. The more the danger of nationalism threatens our world, the more frequently we must reckon with the emergence of unpredictable dictators. Dictators are simply a subgroup of people exposed to serious physical and mental jeopardy during childhood. They invest all their innate energies and talents in making sure that they are never placed in that kind of helpless position again. They frequently develop a maniac hatred for one particular group in society (Jews, intellec-

tuals, ethnic groups) who for them represent, vicariously and symbolically, their former persecutors and whom they feel they must overcome if not eradicate at all costs if they want to survive. They expend all their military power on protecting themselves from a danger that has long since ceased to exist except in their imaginations and are all but inaccessible to logical arguments in connection with that danger. Thus in order to achieve any kind of constructive and productive communication with them we would need to know a great deal about the childhood of these people and the dynamics of childhood in general. Unhappily this is normally not the case and it is hard to find anyone who would be prepared to act upon the results of such an inquiry. The tendency is to trust to the destructive measures of direct confrontation rather than the productive fruits of direct communication. But it is not enough to know that we are dealing with dangerous individuals who ought to be "taken out of circulation" before they can kill other people, or to know that the ethnic group in question only has a symbolic significance for the dictator. The point is to understand the motives behind his maniac actions on the basis of his life history and not to play his game, not to be maneuvered into the role of persecutor, thus playing along with the role assigned to us in the dictator's own personal reenactment or scenario. Threats and the use of destructive weaponry can set off paradoxical reactions in individuals laboring under a legacy of serious humiliation. They help dictators to cement their hardened positions, to exploit the lack of contacts to

They invest all their innate energies and talents in making sure that they are never placed in that kind of helpless position again.

cover their tracks even more effectively, and to profit from the image of the persecuted victim.

School

There are many areas where concern with early childhood can represent a liberation from age-old blind alleys. One of these is **school**. Here the findings of the neuro-biologists have yet to be given any real credence. Many teachers cannot imagine a school system without punishment and penalization. But we know beyond doubt that punishment has at best a short-term "positive" effect. In the long run, the exertion of force merely serves to reinforce aggressive behavior on the part of children and adolescents. If children from a background of domestic violence have to devote all their attention to averting danger, they will hardly be able to concentrate on the subject matter they are being taught. They may well expend a great deal of effort on observing the teacher so as to be prepared for the physical "correction" that they feel, fatalistically, to be inevitable. In reality as they see it, they can hardly afford to develop an interest in what their teachers are trying to tell them. Yet more blows, yet more punishment are hardly likely to allay this effect; on the other hand, understanding for these children's fears could quite literally "move mountains." But the teacher must never play down the reality of the abused child if he or she really wants to help. And helping instead of punishing would be to the advantage of the teacher and his role as an instructor. But

teachers who have themselves grown up with punishment favour punishment in the face of all the logic that militates against it because they have learned at a very early stage to believe in its efficacy. Neither in their own childhood nor during their training as teachers have they had the opportunity to develop a sensibility for the sufferings of children.

Legislation

We come across the same phenomenon in the field of **legislation**. As long as we are unaware of the degree to which the right to human dignity has been denied us in our own childhood, it is anything but easy to truly concede that right to our children, however sincerely we may wish to do so. Frequently we believe we are acting in the interests of the children and fail to realize that we may be doing the very opposite, simply because we have learned to be unfeeling in this respect at such an early stage that the effects of this inculcation are stronger than all the things we learn later. We can see this from an actual instance of present-day legislation. Only a short while ago, 1997, the German Parliament expressly conceded natural parents the right to physical correction. This right is only denied to non-blood relatives: teachers, foster-parents, guardians etc. So we see that the majority of the parliamentarians (4/5) are firmly convinced that in certain cases corporal punishment meted out by the parents can have a salutary effect. The argument persistently advanced for this was that physical force should not be

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prohibited because this phenomenon could be drawn upon to acquaint children with the dangers lying in wait for them on the roads, thus helping them to learn to protect themselves.

But the only thing a beaten child will learn is to fear its parents, not to be careful on the roads. This way, children will also learn to play down their own pain and feel guilty. Being subjected to physical attacks they are defenseless to fend off merely instills in them a "gut" conviction that children obviously merit neither protection nor respect. This false message is then stored in the children's bodies as information and will influence their view of the world and their later attitude to their own children. Such children will be unable to defend their right to human dignity, unable to recognize physical pain as a danger signal and act accordingly. Even their immune system may be affected. In the absence of other persons to model their behavior on, without knowing or at least helping witnesses, these children will see the language of violence and hypocrisy as the only really effective means of communication. Naturally enough, they will avail themselves of that language themselves when they grow up because adults will normally elect to keep suppressed feelings of powerlessness in a state of suppression. Unfortunately, many of us defend the old

system of care-giving with all the energy and conviction we can muster. This may be the reason behind this astounding decision to vote against a ban on corporal punishment.

This universal denial of sufferings most of us have been through also leads to a situation where even in cases of mass murder hardly anyone takes any real interest in the origins and causes of such bottomless hatred. All kinds of factors are examined with great care but no one ever asks where and how the perpetrators of such acts acquired these models of violence. We live in a society which regards hatred as innate, that is to say God-given. It is a society that refuses to see that we keep on producing hatred by inculcating models of violence into our children, behavior patterns that can prove stronger than anything they may learn at a later stage. There is a widespread tendency to blame all kinds of uncongenial things on the education system but education to violence begins much earlier and there is nothing that schools can do about those cases where a child has grown up devoid of an empathic home environment, without anyone prepared to relate and sympathize with his or her distress.

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Biographers

Equally surprising is the lack of interest shown by **biographers** about the initial, all-important imprint left on people by the treatment given them in their early years. With the exception of psychohistorians, hardly any biographer has delved into the childhood of political leaders, individuals whose sometimes fateful decisions can mean life or death, happiness or horror for millions of people. In all the thousands of books about Hitler or Stalin hardly any mention is made of the tell-tale details of their childhood. And where mention is made of them, lack of psychological knowledge leads to their being played down and denied any crucial significance. But there is much to learn from these facts. We can see this more clearly from two contrasting examples: Stalin and Gorbachev.

Stalin was the only child of an alcoholic who beat him soundly every day and a mother who never protected him, was beaten herself and usually stayed away from home. Like Hitler's mother she had already lost three children when her son was born. Joseph, the only surviving child, never knew with any certainty whether his father might not decide to kill him at the next opportunity. When he grew up, his suppressed panic fear was transformed into paranoia, the maniac conviction that everyone else was out to kill him. That was why in the 1930s he had millions of people slaughtered or put into concentra-

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tion camps. The impression one has is that when all is said and done the all-powerful and idolized dictator was nothing other than a helpless child still fighting a hopeless battle against the overwhelming threat of a brutal father. In the trials orchestrated against thinkers and writers Stalin was perhaps trying to prevent his own father from killing the little boy he once was. Naturally he had no knowledge of this. If he had, it might have saved millions of lives.

A very different picture is presented by the Gorbachev family, where there was no tradition of child-maltreatment but instead a tradition of respect for the child and his needs. The consequences can be observed from the behavior displayed by the adult Gorbachev. He has given ample evidence of qualities hardly any other living statesman has

demonstrated to the same degree: the courage to look facts in the face and to seek flexible solutions, respect for others, give-and-take in dialog situations, absence of hypocrisy, a complete absence of grandeur in the conduct of his personal life. He has never been driven by blind self-assertion to make absurd decisions. Both his parents and his grandparents (the latter looked after him during the war years) appear to have been people with an unusual capacity for love and affection. The unanimous verdict on Gorbachev's father, who died in 1976, is that he was a lovable, modest man, amicable and peaceable in his dealings with others, a man who was never heard to raise his voice. The mother is described as sturdy, sincere

and cheerful. Even after her son had become a prominent personality, she went on living modestly and happily in her small farmhouse. Gorbachev's childhood also supplies further proof that even severest penury will have no adverse effect on the character of a child as long as that child's personal integrity is not damaged by hypocrisy, cruelty, abuse, corporal punishment, and psychological humiliation. Stalin's regime of terror, the horrors of war, the brutal occupation of his country, immense poverty, crippling physical labor -- all these things were part and parcel of Gorbachev's youth. But a child can survive all that unscathed as long as the emotional atmosphere prevailing at home provides protection and security. One incident may serve to illustrate the atmosphere I am referring to. At the end of the war Mikhail Gorbachev was unable to attend school for 3 months because he had no shoes to wear. When his father was told of this (he was wounded and had been committed to a field hospital) he wrote to his wife saying that she must at all costs ensure that Mischa could go back to school because he was such an avid scholar. The mother sold the last of her sheep for 1,500 roubles and bought her son a pair of military boots. His grandfather procured a warm coat for him and at the request of his grandson another one for a friend of his.

Protection and respect for the needs of a child -- this is surely something we ought to be able to take for granted. But it is far from being the case. We live in a world peopled by individuals who have grown up deprived of their rights, deprived of respect. As adults they then attempt to regain those rights by force (blackmail, threats, the use of weapons). As Gorbachev's childhood is apparently much more the exception than the rule, the society we live in continues to turn a blind eye

to the facts of child abuse in all its forms. Thousands of professors at hundreds of universities teach all manner of subjects, but there is not one single university chair for research into child abuse and cruelty to children. How strange, when we recall that the majority of the people living on this earth are victims of precisely that kind of treatment! It is entirely conceivable that the world as we know it might come to an end as a result of the consequence of those ubiquitous violations of human dignity. At all events, it is high time that we investigated the regularities discernible behind each and every individual case.

As a priority commitment for the next decade, the United Nations Organization has declared its allegiance to the idea and implementation of Education for Peace. This cannot be achieved by fine words alone. We need to set an example to our children as the people who will decide what the next generation will look like, and show them that coexistence and communication without violence is actually possible. There are an ever greater number of parents who are capable of doing so and who are aware of the far-reaching implications of their own behavior. Many of them agree that physical force against children should be banned by law.

This verified and firmly established knowledge cannot but spread, albeit gradually, in the millennium to come, even though at present the number of people who have understood what is at stake is small. But if this group succeeds in getting physical correction banned by law -- as has already happened in nine European countries -- then the next generation will grow up without spanking and beating, and that means growing up free of a legacy that can only set them off on a course that is fateful indeed. It is realistic to hope that this fact will lead to an increase in the number of knowing witnesses and hence to a swift change in general mentality. ●

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The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

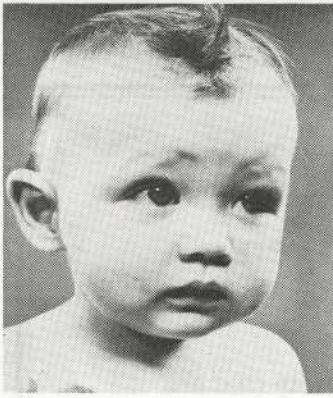
The CSPCC is working to change those things in Canadian society that are making it difficult for parents to give their children the care they need to grow into healthy, confident, non-violent, loving adults.

In general we are working for:

- ◆ a shift from arbitrary male dominance to no-one's arbitrary dominance
- ◆ a shift from the essential beliefs of our society's consumer religion -- 'envy, selfishness and greed -- to trust, empathy and affection in a community-centred, sustainable society
- ◆ a shift from violence and sexism as the warp and woof of entertainment
- ◆ a shift from treating children as sinful or stupid to empathizing with them and fulfilling their expanding and particular needs

In particular we are working to:

- ◆ raise the status of parenting
- ◆ implement universal parenting education from kindergarten to grade eight
- ◆ encourage parents to make their children's emotional needs their highest priority during the critical first three years
- ◆ facilitate a positive birthing experience for every father, mother and baby
- ◆ promote extended breastfeeding with child-led weaning
- ◆ make it easier for parents to meet the emotional needs of each child by encouraging a minimum three year spacing between siblings
- ◆ increase awareness of the potential long term hazards of separations between children under three and their mothers.



Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

CREDO



WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.