Ability®

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how to live with children

by L. Ron Hubbard

The main problem with children is not so much how to process them into sanity as it is to live with them. The adult is the problem in child raising, not the child. An adult has certain rights around children which the children and modern adults rather tend to ignore. A good, stable adult with love and tolerance in his heart is about the best therapy a child can have.

The main consideration in raising children is the problem of training them without breaking them. You want to raise your child in such a way that you don't have to control him, so that he will be in full posession of himself at all times. Upon that depends his good behavior, his health, his sanity.

Children are not dogs. They can't be trained as dogs are trained. They are not controllable items. They are, and let's not overlook the point, men and women. A child is not a special species of animal distinct from Man. A child is a man or woman who has not attained full growth.

Any law which applies to the behavior of men and women applies to children.

How would you like to be pulled and hauled and ordered about and restrained from doing whatever you wanted to do? You'd resent it. The only reason a child "doesn't" resent it is because he s small. You'd half murder somebody who treated you, an adult, with the orders, contradiction and disrespect given to the average child. The child doesn't strike back because he isn't big enough. He gets your floor muddy, interrupts your nap, destroys the peace of the home instead. If he had equality with you in the matter of rights, he'd not ask this "revenge". This "revenge" is standard child behavior.

A child has a right to his self determinism. You say that if he is not restrained from pulling things down on himself, running in to the road, etc., he'll be hurt. What are you as an adult doing to make that child live in rooms or an environment where he can be hurt? The fault is yours, not his, if he breaks things.

The sweetness and love of a child is preserved only so long as he can exert his own self determinism. You interrupt that and to a degree you interrupt his life.

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There are only two reasons why a child's right to decide for himself has to be interrupted -- the fragility and danger of the environment and you. For you work out on him the things that were done to you regardless of what you think.

There are two courses you can take. Give the child leeway in an environment he can't hurt, which can't badly hurt him and which doesn't greatly restrict his space and time. And you can clean up your own aberrations to a point where your tolerance equals or surpasses his lack of education in how to please you.

When you give a child something, it's his. It's not still yours. Clothes, toys, quarters, what he has been given, MUST REMAIN UNDER HIS EXCLUSIVE CONTROL. So he tears up his shirt, wrecks his bed, breaks his fire engine. It's NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS. How would you like to have somebody give you a Christmas present and then tell you, day after day thereafter, what you are to do with it and even punish you if you failed to care for it the way the donor thinks. You'd wreck that donor and ruin that present. You know you would. The child wrecks your nerves when you do it to him. That's revenge. He cries. He pesters you. He breaks your things. He "accidentally" spills his milk. And he wrecks on purpose the possession about which he is so often cautioned. Why? Because he is fighting for his own self determinism, his own right to own and make his weight felt on his environment. This "possession" is another channel by which he can be controlled. So he has to fight the possession and the controller.

If you want to control your child, simply break him into complete apathy and he'll be as obedient as any hypnotized half-wit. If you want to know how to control him, get a book on dog training, name the child Rex and teach him first to "fetch" and then to "sit up" and then to bark for his food. You can train a child that way. Sure you can. But it's your hard luck if he turns out to be a blood-letter.

Of course you'll have a hard time of it. This -- a slight oversight-- is a human being. You'd better charge right in and do what you can to break him into apathy quickly. I'm warning you that it's going to be tough; it will be tough because Man became king of the beasts only because he couldn't as a species be licked. He doesn't easily go into obedient apathy like dogs do. Men own dogs because men are self determined and dogs aren't.

The truth lies in this direction:
Man is basically good.
Only by severe aberration can man be made evil.
Severe training drives him into non-sociability.
Man must retain his personal ability to adapt his environment to him to remain sane.
A man is as sane and safe as he is self determined.

In raising your child, you must avoid "training" him into a social animal. Your child begins by being more sociable, more dignified than you are. In a relatively short time, the treatment

he gets so checks him that he revolts. This revolt can be intensified until he is a terror to have around. He will be noisy, thoughtless, careless of possessions, unclean -anything, in short, which will annoy you. Train him, control him and you'll lose his love. You've lost the child forever that you seek to control and own.

Permit a child to sit on your lap. He'll sit there contented. Now put your arms around him and constrain him to sit there. Do this even though he wasn't even trying to leave. Instantly, he'll squirm. He'll fight to get away from you. He'll get angry. He'll cry. Recall now, he was happy before you started to hold him. (You should actually make this experiment.)

Your efforts to mold, train, control this child in general react on him exactly like trying to hold him on your lap.

Of course you will have difficulty if this child of yours has already been trained, controlled, ordered about, denied his own possessions. In mid-flight, you change your tactics. You try to give him his freedom. He's so suspicious of you he will have a terrible time trying to adjust. The transition period will be difficult. But at the end of it you'll have a well-ordered, well-trained, sociable child, thoughtful of you and, very important to you, a child who loves you.

The child who is under constraint, sheparded, handled, controlled, has a very bad anxiety postulated. His parents are survival entities. They mean food, clothing, shelter, affection. This means he wants to be near them. He wants to love them naturally, being their child.

But on the other hand his parents are non-survival entities. His whole being and life depend upon his rights to use his own decision about his movements and his possessions and his body. Parents seek to interrupt this out of the mistaken idea that a child is an idiot who won't leard unless "controlled". So he has to fight shy, to fight against, to annoy and harrass an enemy.

Here is anxiety. "I love them dearly. I also need them. But they mean an interruption of my ability, my mind, my potential life. What am I going to do about my parents? I can't live with them. I can't live without them. Oh, dear, oh, dear!" There he sits in his rompers running this problem through his head. That problem, that anxiety, will be with him for eighteen years, more of less. And it will half wreck his life.

Freedom for the child means freedom for you.

Abandoning the possessions of the child to their fate means eventual safety for the child's possessions.

What terrible will power is demanded of a parent not to give constant streams of directions to a child! What agony to watch his possessions going to ruin! What upset to refuse to order his time and space!

But it has to be done if you want a well, a happy, a careful, a beautiful, an intelligent child!

Another thing is the matter of contribution. You have no right to deny your child the right to contribute.

A human being feels able and competent only so long as he is permitted to contribute as much as or more than he has contributed to him.

A man can over-contribute and feel secure in an environment. He feels insecure the moment he under-contributes, which is to say, gives less than he receives. If you don't believe this, recall a time when everyone else brought something to the party but you didn't. How did you feel?

A human being will revolt against and distrust any source which contributes to him more than he contributes to it.

Parents, naturally, contribute more to a child than a child contributes in return. As soon as the child sees this he becomes unhappy. He seeks to raise his contribution level, failing, he gets angry at the contributing source. He begins to detest his parents. They try to override this revolt by contributing more. The child revolts more. It is a bad dwindling spiral because the end of it is that the child will go into apathy.

You MUST let the child contribute to you. You can't order him to contribute. You can't command him to mow the grass and then think that's contribution. He has to figure out what his contribution is and then give it. If he hasn't selected it, it isn't his, but only more control.

A baby contributes by trying to make you smile. The baby will show off. A little later he will dance for you, bring you sticks, try to repeat your work motions to help you. If you don't accept those smiles, those dances, those sticks, those work motions in the spirit they are given, you have begun to interrupt the child's contribution. Now he will start to get anxious. He will do unthinking and strange things to your possessions in an effort to make them "better" for you. You scold him. That finishes him.

Something else enters in here. And that is DATA. How can a child possibly know what to contribute to you or his family or home if he hasn't any idea of the working principles on which it runs?

A family is a group with the common goal of group survival and advancement. The child not allowed to contribute or failing to understand the goals and working principles of family life is cast adrift from the family. He is shown he is not part of the family because he can't contribute. So he becomes anti-family -- the first step on the road to being anit-social. He spills milk, annoys your guests and yells outside your window in "play". He will even get sick just to make you work. He is shown to be nothing by being shown that he isn't powerful enough to contribute.

You can do nothing more than accept the smiles, the dances, the sticks of the very young. But as soon as a child can understand he should be given the whole story of the family operation.

What is the source of his allowance? Clothes? A clean house? A car?

Daddy works. He expends hours and brains and brawn and for this he gets money. The money, handed over at a store, buys food. A car is cared for because of money scarcity. A calm house and care of Daddy means that Daddy works better and that means food and clothes and cars.

Education is necessary because one earns better after he has learned.

Play is necessary in order to give a reason for hard work.

Give him the whole picture. If he's been revolting, he may keep right on revolting. But he'll eventually come around. If he can't get the point in a calm talk about it, you'll simply have to get an auditor to process him a little because you went a long way too far.

First of all a child needs security. Part of that security is understanding. Part of it is a code of conduct which is invariable. What is against law today can't be ignored tomorrow.

You can actually punish a child physically to defend your rights, so long as he owns what he owns and can contribute to you and work for you.

Adults have rights. He ought to know this. A child has growing up as his goal. If an adult doesn't have more rights, why grow up?

A child has a duty toward you. He has to be able to take care of you; not an illusion that he is, but actually. And you have to have patience to allow yourself to be cared for sloppily until by sheer experience itself -- not by your directions-- he learns how to do it well. Care for the child?-- nonsense! He's probably got a better grasp of immediate situations than you have. Only when he's almost psychotic with aberration will a child be accident prone.

You're well and enjoy life because you aren't owned. Your American forefathers fought slavery twice -- 1776 and 1861. You couldn't enjoy life if you were sheparded and owned. You'd revolt. And if your revolt was quenched, you'd turn into a subversive. That's what you make out of your child when you own, manage and control him.

Potentially, parent, he's saner than you are and the world is a lot brighter to him. His sense of values and reality are sharper. Don't dull them and your child will be a fine, successful human being. Own, control, manage and reject and you'll get the treatment you deserve -- subversive revolt.

Now, are we going to have a happy house around here or aren't we?

L. RON HUBBARD, Wichita, 1951.

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