

together



Dr. James P. Comer

Getting Along

Tall Women



Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint

(James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint are psychiatrists and the authors of the book "Black Child Care." Dr. Comer is professor of child psychiatry and associate dean for student affairs at Yale University School of Medicine. Dr. Poussaint is associate professor of psychiatry and associate dean for student affairs at Harvard Medical School.)

Dear Dr. Comer: Recently you advised the aunt of a disturbed child to encourage his mother to seek professional help. My 6 year old nephew is a problem but I don't think he needs such help. He is just obnoxious and aggressive. He fights, lies and steals--nothing important, but I'm afraid that will be the next step. He lives nearby and I hate to see him coming. His father is too strict and his mother, my niece, lets him do whatever he wants to do. She thinks it's cute. I don't want to ban them from our house, but I am tempted. How else might I handle the problem?

Worried Aunt

Dear Worried Aunt: The child may not need professional help, but the parents may. But before considering that possibility, let's talk about what may be going on and ways to deal with it short of professional treatment.

Sharp differences in childrearing beliefs and styles may represent different upbringing, beliefs and temperament. But it may represent subtle but serious marital disharmony.

It may be a simple communication problem or a failure to recognize the harm their difference of opinion about childrearing can cause and, therefore, they have no motivation to reconcile their differences.

Even if there is no serious marital problem now, it can develop as the problems of the child, and perhaps their own, grow more difficult.

A number of young people feel that traditional childrearing practices made children too passive. Some young parents who feel that they were too passive and conforming themselves try to rear their own children so that they will be more assertive and aggressive.

I have met young black parents who feel that their children must be assertive and aggressive so that they won't permit conditions of the past to return and so that they will attack racial problems of today.

As I have stated before in this column, helping children become assertive and aggressive enough to fight for their rights and opportunities is desirable. But it's desirable only as long as children are also encouraged to be fair, responsible and not to compromise the legitimate rights and opportunities of others.

Far too many people from all kinds of groups--racial, religious, income--are more interested in obtaining opportunities for themselves, often calling them rights, than in being concerned about fair play, personal responsibility and the rights and opportunities of others. Social problems from increased white collar crime to dangerous streets are related to this growing tendency.

I suggest that you pick a time when your niece is most

likely to be receptive and discuss the problem with her. A likely time would be an occasion when she is temporarily overwhelmed by her son's behavior.

It often helps to ask whether you can make some observations or give some advice rather than to barge in and start preaching. You can point out that you are commenting because you care about her and her family. Then describe how your nephew's behavior makes you and the members of your family feel. It should be obvious--but if not, make it so--that others with less reason to be accepting of such behavior must be even more irritated.

You should suggest to your niece that she discuss the problem of a different childrearing style with her husband so that they can begin to work toward greater agreement. Some of your nephew's behavior is probably related to the confusion and insecurity that the extreme differences in childrearing style create for a child.

Incidentally, children who are six are not really lying or stealing. They are usually trying to control the situation to get what they want. They don't understand that they can't have what belongs to others. They need help in learning this.

That is why your niece can't permit her son to do whatever he likes. You might point out that unless children are helped to develop the balance between standing up for their own rights and opportunities and not compromising those of others, there is a good chance that they will become selfish, unfair people who exploit others.

Families and neighbors are most often the victims of such people. Social problems aren't solved by such people. Children aren't born with the balance necessary to be effective, fair, responsible people. They must be reared to become responsible.

(If you have any questions for the doctors, send them to "Getting Along," care of this newspaper.)
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Day Care Centers Must Immunize

Children attending licensed day-care centers now must be immunized against the childhood diseases, or an offending operator runs the risk of losing the facility's license.

Under the new state immunization law, any child attending a licensed day-care center must have been vaccinated against measles, polio, diphtheria, rubella (German measles), whooping cough, and tetanus before admission, or within 30 days after admission.

Previously children were not required to get this protection until they started to kindergarten or first grade.

"We see this stronger law as an important step toward eliminating unprotected children from our pre-school populations," said Dr. J.N. MacCormack, head of the communicable disease branch of the Department of Human Resources. "While we have the mechanism for enforcing the law at licensed facilities, we must depend on the good judgement of the small, unlicensed operators to speak to the children's parents about immunization. However, an outbreak in any facility, li-

censed or not, may result in closure under the new quarantine law."

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