

"NOTES ON BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP"

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Many social scientists blame parents for the misconduct of their children. Knowing the importance of child rearing it is shocking to see how poorly prepared most parents are for this role.

In general it can be said that the traditional family structure has evolved from a close knit interdependent structure to one where family members seek independence and self sufficiency. Many feel that this has also resulted in a superficial emotional attachment between parents and children.

One view portrays today's youth as rebellious against their parents, a more realistic and sympathetic view might be that young people are reacting to their parents inappropriate behavior.

Parents reject their traditional authoritarian role and instead attempt to influence the behavior of their children by acting as sincere friends eager to assist their offsprings in acquiring the skills necessary to cope with the problems they will face.

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Experts of behavioral science have attained a great deal of knowledge concerning parent-child relationship and how one can create a healthy atmosphere to strengthen children's physical and mental growth. However, this store of knowledge is limited to a minority of experts of the field.

Although the mass media might seem to be the effective means for instructing parents in methods for improving communication with their children, the results are not sufficiently satisfactory. The parents are more confused than ever in ways and means of relating to their children. The reason may be either the incompleteness or unclearness of the mass media messages.

As a psychiatrist, I believe the result of scientific findings must be accessible to the parents and practical uses of these findings must be promoted among them.

During an experiment involving university students / parents one father asked, "Do you want us to give our kids unconditional freedom?" The answer was, "Those parents who give their children unlimited freedom are just as wrong as the dictator parents. In the first case, the children become irresponsible and in the second they will become repressed and indifferent to social values.

In the next sessions we tried to convince the parents not to resolve every problem facing their children. It would be much better if they help them to help themselves. The parents' role should be as a helping friend, not as god. They have to accept their children by listening to them. The parents have to realize this fact that not having to solve all the children's problems is relieving.

Today the old and new generations are separate and alone, unable to bridge the communication gap. A father complains that he does not have the influence over his son,

also a mother admits that she and her daughter have nothing in common to share. "None of your business" is what is all too often heard by the parents. On the other hand the children claim that their Parents do not understand them That instead of two communication the only response they get is preaching.

Why so many youth perceive their parents as their enemies? Why the generation gap has become so common among the families? And why the children are rebelling perpetually against systems, tradition, and relations? What parents do in respond is nothing but taking side against them.

It is tragic that sincere and satisfying relationship has been replaced by emptiness and on occassion hostility.

A parent told me about his sixteen year old son, Manuchehr "he was our biggest problem in our family," the father explained . " He was wild, irresponsible and careless. He came home very late every night and would create funny excuses like not having the correct time, or having a flat tire and son on....

We noticed that he was lying and we would accuse each other for different reasons. We never thought that one day we are going to be able to have a warm , happy relationship again.

When we decided to listen to each other uncritically, we realized that we are building up a friendly relationship. We developed a kind of independency, trust and love which stirred up the atmosphere. Now we are living together very peacefully and that is very blessing."

Studies have shown that there are three types of parents:

1- Authoritarian (dominant)

2- Permissive (submissive)

3- Middling (inconstant)

Based on the contributions of sociologists, psychologists, behavioral scientists and educators, it appears that a fourth way exists that will enable satisfying child/parent relationship and the resolution of conflicts. It is democratic relationship and the resolution of conflicts. It is a democratic relationship based on:

1- Mutual rights, functioning as a contract system accepted by both parties.

2- Active listening; Learning how to listen scientifically in such a way that the parent clearly understands what the child is saying. Thus the parent draws out the child's feeling so that the child can first feel secure in discussing his problems with the parents and second together they can arrive at a satisfactory resolution of the problem.

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