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Love

If it can be said that one of the three legs of a tripod is the most important, then of the three requirements for the normal development of a child's personality—love, discipline, and independence—the first is the most important. It has been repeatedly shown that a child can withstand the most awesome buffetings of Fate if there is sufficient love in his life. An impressive demonstration of this fact is found in the generally good adjustment of the children who survived the bombings of London compared with the maladjustments of those English children who were sent away from their families to places of physical safety.

It is a simple matter to agree to the need for love in childhood. But it is well to spend a little time considering just what the implications of this word are.

Love is unique among the three basic requirements for the development of normal emotional health. It is unique in that of this one ingredient *there can never be too much*.

An excess or a scarcity of discipline, too much or too little independence, can be harmful. But of love, the more the merrier. This is an important point.

As a result of a popular but misguided philosophy in the 1920's of the needs of growing children, there is still an uneasy feeling among parents that to bestow too much love upon the child is to spoil him. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is imperative to understand that the withholding of discipline may spoil the child, but never a surplus of love. These two factors are not in any sense inversely related. That is, it is *not* true that the more you love, therefore the less you must discipline. Nor that the more you discipline, the less you love.

For the sake of simplicity, it might be helpful to consider that love and discipline are *entirely* unrelated and that one should in no way affect the other. In actuality, however, it is true that you bother to discipline only insofar as you love. In other words, you would scarcely bother to discipline the stranger's child down the street, because you don't love the stranger's child. This association between discipline and love, that you discipline because you love, children readily perceive and accept.

What is love? Many different things. In the interest of clear thinking, it is a handicap that we have only the one word to mean so many related but different aspects of this all-important emotion. It will be worthwhile in dealing with children (and with adults) to consider some of the implications of "love."

The type of love most important for the normal personality development of the child is the kind that says, "I love you, Joe, not for what you do or don't do, but just because you're you." We might speak of this as uncritical love. This undemanding sort of love, or acceptance if you will, is indispensable to the *development* of a normal personality. Indeed, it is strongly supportive to the *maintenance* of a normal personality, even throughout adulthood. It is the sort of love that just about says, "I love you *despite* what you do. I love you because you're alive."

Obviously, this is not the only form that love assumes. Nor is it the only type of love that affects the child. But I must make my point crystal-clear. We are exploring the three absolute needs of the child's personality. We are not considering any of the lesser factors that will have *some* significance for his self-confidence. Other influences upon the child in addition to the vital

three, other categories of love, will be discussed later in this book.

In our educated, competitive society, it is far too common for the young child inadvertently to be given the impression that his parents (or his teachers or his friends) love him because of what he does. This unfortunately conveys the obvious negative corollary: "If you don't do well, I won't love you." Or: "The better you do, and the more you succeed, the more I love you; the more you err, and the oftener you fail, the less I love you." This too frequent misunderstanding is a frightening thing, a destructive influence upon the child's developing personality. It is a major cause of many problems, present and future, and is perhaps the most important of the communication confusions between generations.

Consider the analogy of the support and comfort the husband receives from knowing that his wife loves him in an amount that has no relation to whether he succeeds or fails. Not that she loves him more when he does well in the world, and loves him less when he meets failure in his work, but rather that she loves him when he succeeds and she loves him *exactly the same* when he fails. Or take the wife who must live with the knowledge that her husband loves her *in direct proportion* to how young and beautiful she is, to how well she manages the home and prepares the meals, to how successfully she conducts herself in community affairs; compare her lot with that of the wife who can luxuriate in the knowledge that her husband loves her because she *is* Jill, and will love her, not more, not less, though her charms and productivity might wax and wane.

This is the kind of love I mean when I say that love is one of the three basic ingredients that contribute to the normal personality development of children. This is the kind of love that builds self-confidence, creates a good self-image, leads to a willingness to try without fear of the consequences of failing. This is the kind of love that makes heroes and that makes well-oriented children.

This blind, accepting love from the parents is most vital during the first five to ten years of a child's life; it is not unimportant, though, throughout one's entire life. The failure to convince the

growing child that this is the feeling his parents have for him is probably the single most important cause of future personality deviations in later childhood, in adolescence, and in adulthood.

There is no doubt that most parents have a good deal of this sort of affection for their children. How then do they so often manage to convince their children otherwise? There seem to me to be three common unintended errors which unwittingly suggest to the child that his parents love him for *what he does* rather than for *who he is*. To avoid them, it is helpful to keep in mind the following:

1. *Disapprove of what the child does, not of who he is.* It is imperative to keep clear in your own thinking, and to convey to the child from the beginning, the fact that, though you often disapprove of what he *does*, you do not therefore disapprove of *him*. It is the rare high-school counselor who has the uncommon good sense to say to the delinquent student, "I abhor what you are doing; I will not tolerate such actions for a moment; but I think you're a great guy, one of the most appealing students we've had around here in a long time; I would enjoy your company." Here is the essence of being a successful counselor—and also the essence of being a successful parent.

There would be absolutely nothing contradictory in correcting and criticizing a child's actions and behavior and at the same time letting him know how much you love him as a person, just because he is he. To make this point in the extreme case, there is no inconsistency in knocking a child across the room for misbehavior, and then immediately picking him up, putting your arms around him, and telling him what a fine boy he is and how much you love him. Indeed, not only are the acts not inconsistent, but in effect they convey the two notions that (a) "I bother to correct your behavior *because* I love you" and (b) "I disapprove of your actions, but I love *you* just as much, *regardless* of how you act."

There is no hint of apology in this sequence of events. A parent need not apologize for his efforts to teach or for his instinct to love his child. Nor is there any implication of parental wrongdoing or remorse. The sincere teacher may feel pride, but

not doubt, in his earnest attempts to improve his student. It will not be understood, either, that the parent is trying to buy the child's affection. The bid for the child's love lies in the parent's willingness to correct the child; the subsequent cuddling is a simple affirmation of the parent's love for the child.

There is no contradiction implied to the child—simply, "I love you. I love you independently of your behavior. I love you even though your actions made me angry. I love you enough to make you behave."

2. *Praise the child more for being, more than you praise him for doing.* A second cause of misconception on the child's part stems from our eagerness to see that our children succeed in our competitive society. In this effort, we quite properly praise and reward our children when they make a good effort and when they achieve a measure of success. For instance, parents generally react favorably to a good report card or to a kind and thoughtful act on the child's part. This is all well and good, and profitable and proper. However, it is too easy to let these accomplishments become the child's major or sole source of praise, reward, acceptance, and love.

It is important that the child receive the greater measure of praise and love *unrelated to his achievements and successes*. The child should have the opportunity to see that a good report card and a thoughtful act merit a pat on the head, a slap on the shoulder, a smile, a warm word of encouragement, even perhaps a silver quarter; but he should see more often that he receives the greater reward of five minutes of cuddling, ten words of praise, a friendly tousling of the hair, and perhaps even a one-dollar bill when he is producing nothing, is merely walking through the room, is non-constructively daydreaming, or in fact has recently done something that had to be criticized.

When the wife has just, on short notice, produced a spectacular dinner for her husband's boss, has the house immaculate and the children tucked into bed, and has groomed herself impeccably, and then her husband rewards her with a dozen red roses, that's nice. When the wife has just burned the roast, the house is a shambles, her dress is slovenly, and the children are raging

through the home, and then her husband brings her a dozen red roses, that's magnificent.

3. *Communicate your love.* A third thought concerning unquestioning love that parents must consciously consider, and keep in mind, involves the difficulties that people of all ages have in communicating with one another. A person can, unfortunately, love the very devil out of another person, but if that second person is totally unaware of the fact, the love is to no avail. For example, a man and wife may deeply and sincerely love each other, he sitting on one side of the room watching television and she on the other side reading her book, and the marriage may go down the drain.

In brief, it is not enough for you to feel love; you must in some manner make the recipient *aware* of the presence of this love.

You may show your love by a thousand little acts and gestures of thoughtfulness throughout every day. Some of these *indirect* expressions of love are catalogued in context later on. Among them are:

Tucking a child into bed at night while forbearing to review with him his daily misdeeds. Tucking him in long after he is too old to require such attention.

Offering a comforting arm or an unbegrudged lap even though she's not hurt badly enough to need them.

Overlooking the sermon "You're a big boy now," or "You're a big girl now," at the moment he or she least wants to be a big boy or girl.

Eliminating references to some other child, related or unknown, from all conversations with him.

Interpreting her furious "You don't love me" correctly as "Let me hear you say you love me again, even though I've just displeased you."

Understanding his outraged "I hate you!" as "Is it all right for me to get mad at you?"

Biting your lip and waiting for a better moment instead of calling him down in front of his peers.

Not asking her to perform in front of visitors or family until she has already volunteered.

Being at home when the school day ends, even if only to see the complete belief in your love demonstrated by the casualness of your child's "Hi" followed by contented indifference. Or a thoughtful note to be found on the table or a telephone call that says, "I love you though I can't be home."

Letting him off the hook with "Nice try" when an easy lob is dropped, and while your vision of a box at Yankee Stadium becomes a mirage.

Offering her your *unsolicited* help with her homework and her chores.

Protecting him from annoyance by his younger brother even though both children were culpable.

Darning his trousers without sinking in further the already self-inflicted harpoon after he has torn them in a forbidden adventure.

Being visibly proud of him when he has given you no earthly reason even to admit that he's yours.

Placing the acne medicine remindfully but tactfully in view on the pillow without shoving the blight down his self-conscious throat.

But this subtle communication is not always enough, particularly for young children. And you may wonder whether it is enough even for adolescents and grownups. It is necessary in dealing with children to take the time occasionally to be as direct in expressing your love as to say, "Gee, I love you," "You're a swell boy," "I think you're the best daughter in the whole world." And remember that the most effective time to blurt out these not-so-corny clichés is when the child is actually doing nothing. Perhaps one of the ideal times is offered by the opportunity to tuck the child into bed for his nap or at nighttime.

An elegant way to communicate your love to a child is to praise him—not so much his accomplishments as the child himself—out loud to strangers, to relatives, and to your mate, in the presence of or within earshot of the child. This method of talking

to a child, without talking *at* him, can serve well in many areas of communication. But be conscious of the importance of its opposite number—the harm that can develop from belittling or deriding a child to a third person within voice range of the child.

How about parents who are self-conscious, and so embarrassed by such overt statements of affection as to be made uncomfortable by them? No one should pretend that it makes any sense for a parent to upset his own sense of propriety to benefit his children. But there is a simple device that can quickly become a pleasant habit in this instance, whereby you may both have your cake and eat it. If you squirm at the thought of saying, face to face, "I love you," all you need do is develop the habit of jotting down, in appropriate seclusion, one- or two-sentence notes to the child and leaving them where he alone can find them to read—or to have read to him by the other parent if he is of preschool age. Most parents have moments of warm sentimental feelings toward their children, especially when the parent is alone and the brats are long since asleep or are away from home, and the memory of their transgressions has been dulled by time. These are the fleeting moments in which to tell your children how you feel about them, in writing. Not a long, involved pageful, but just a sentence or two.

Sharing Your Love

Few, if any, parents feel exactly the same amount of love for each of their children. Nor should they. Yet most struggle valiantly to show equal affection for each child in a spirit of dedicated "fairness." This effort is utter nonsense.

I suggest to you a radical proposition: Each child has the right and the need to believe that he is his parents' *favorite* child. Not that he receives love in equal shares with his brothers and sisters, but that he receives *more* love than any of his siblings.

Does this notion offend your sense of justice? Then try telling your wife that, with utter fairness, you love her equally and every bit as much as you do your secretary, the young blond down the block, or an old flame.

Each child should, at appropriate times, be bluntly told that he is the special favorite of the parents. There is an old Hawaiian fable in which a dying father summons each of his children individually to his bedside, and distributes his greatest gift by telling each in turn, "*You* have always been secretly my best-loved child. You have brought me the greatest pride and happiness. You are the one I believe in the most."

If you do indulge in the game of "each child the favorite," how do you handle note comparing by the children? As a matter of fact, the problem arises with remarkable infrequency. Perhaps children early sense that some subjects are too intimate for public revelation. Perhaps each child feels a little personal doubt and protects himself by not putting his knowledge to the test of comparison. In any event, parents who utilize this technique tell me they seldom are confronted. On my part, I know that if you tell me I am your favorite doctor, I don't go out of my way to prove to myself that you don't really mean it.

But your children are brilliant skeptics? Or vicious gossips? Even if so, you don't have to flee in anxiety from a concerted onslaught. The truth is: "Of course I love Jill best; she is my oldest daughter. Of course I love Sally best; she has the curliest hair. Of course I love John best; he is my smallest child. Just so, I love Daddy best; he is my husband." Please take note, only, that each is best-loved for some integral part of his being, not for something he does or has done or has to do. To be "best-loved" for an accomplishment—politest, smartest, best-behaved—is to risk one's status by failing to continue to perform. To be best-loved because you exist is delightful.

Sources of Love

If we agree upon the absolute necessity for noncritical love in the development of a normal personality, we may then inquire who it is that can supply the child with this ingredient.

Ideally, of course, both parents working in harmony are best able to accomplish this.

On the other hand, if one parent is completely absent from

the family (as through death or through divorce without visiting privileges), the remaining parent can quite adequately provide the needed love.

But, when both parents are taking an active part in raising the child, and when either one of them does not supply this essential ingredient, the ultimate personality of the child becomes in doubt. It is true that by middle adolescence some children are able to obtain sufficient acceptance to fulfill their needs from persons, young and old, outside of the parent-child arena. But, in general, if both parents are present and only one of them is able to communicate some degree of uncritical acceptance to the child, trouble should be anticipated. Professional help should be sought early.

Saving Face as Part of Love

Finding ways and opportunities to communicate your love for a child is difficult. There is, however, one completely foreseeable set of circumstances which inevitably will arise more than once in every parent's experience. This situation will invite and demand a statement of your love. An ill-conceived answer will wither the child. An appropriately planned answer will enhance the parent-child relationship. I refer to the times when a third person (not the other parent) will, in the presence of the child and parent, accuse the child of misconduct.

For example, Mrs. Beauregard arrives in hot pursuit of little Johnny and berates him before his mother for having willfully shattered her picture window. Or Robert explodes into the room, blood gushing from his brow, while sister Joan hangs expectantly over the banister: "Daddy, Daddy, Joanie hit me, and I wasn't doin' nuthin'!"

The unprepared parent reacts like a human. Painfully aware of the potential of little Johnny and of Joan the Ripper, embarrassed by the apparent demonstration of his own failure as a raiser of children, the unforewarned parent jumps into the soup and alternately denigrates the accused and cringes before the accuser. In this way an opportunity to communicate love is re-

duced to a strong expression of rejection. Is the accused offspring guilty as charged? That's not the point. The harm is done.

Does the mother grizzily seek the wisdom of the situation before she cuffs her cub's tormentor?

The experienced parent—who has mapped his response months in advance—automatically denies the accusation and defends his child.

"Yes, Mrs. Beauregard, I am sorry someone broke your window. But I am sure that it was someone else. Or if it was my Johnny, that it was an unavoidable accident. Yes, I'll get to the bottom of it with Johnny *in private*. Yes, if *our family* was responsible *we* will restore the window." Result: demonstration of love and support; rallying of faith and family cohesiveness; avoidance of false condemnation from which there is no graceful reprieve. Much face saving on all sides.

"Let's get you patched up first, Robbie. Then I'll talk to Joan in private. I'm sure there was a mistake." No kangaroo court here. No hastily spoken parental hostility toward Joan despite the circumstantial evidence.

Regardless of who is right and who is wrong, you lose as a parent if you join an outsider (even if the outsider is another member of the family) in scolding your own child in front of the intruder.

If all accusations subsequently turn out to be true, you, by not joining in the attack, have salvaged from the debacle the great prize of having demonstrated your love to your child. If, as happens so often, some important element of the accusation turns out to have been false, you will have adroitly sidestepped the need to perform hara-kiri.

This suggested method of "face saving" will not always endear you to the neighbors or to the police. But we might just as well face this problem now. In the life of virtually every parent this moment of truth sooner or later appears. You appropriately will make up your mind in advance whether you are raising your children properly or whether you are bent first and foremost upon appeasing your neighbors. I leave this decision, as all others, to you. For myself, I see no real choice in the matter.

Subsequent correction of the erring child, and compensation of the aggrieved complainant, must be accomplished later, with no unwarranted price having been paid by yourself or your child either in terms of loss of love or in terms of loss of discipline.

Allowances

I recommend to you a method of expressing your love through a device that is erroneously approached as a way of teaching "responsibility." Indeed it cannot serve such a purpose. Rather it can symbolize a family's acceptance of one of its members for the sake of himself and without regard for his ability to contribute. This device you call his allowance.

The granting of a weekly monetary allowance to a child is a tradition based upon the concept that such a gift can have a positive effect upon the molding of the child. And so it can. Unfortunately, in many families the proper purpose of an allowance is so distorted that the whole subject becomes a major source of family discontent and wrangling.

An allowance is an important statement to the child of the willing acceptance of him into the family circle. He receives it because he is an appreciated member of a loving group, in which each member is glad to share with the others his good fortune. It represents a sharing not only of the material wealth of the family but also of the wealth of love, acceptance, trust, and faith possessed by the family.

The child earns his allowance simply by being alive and by belonging to the family. He does not earn it by performing well or by pleasing his parents through his behavior and accomplishments. This would represent wages for services rendered. Wages and an allowance are two entirely different things. The allowance is earned by the pleasure brought to the family by the child's presence, not by the child's productivity.

The allowance has no strings attached. Once the family decides how much of its financial wealth is the child's part, it becomes solely the child's. If the money must be handled in such and such a way, if part of it must be allocated to the bank, or

Allowances

spent for lunches, or otherwise accounted for, it is not an allowance. To foster saving, give the child money to put into the bank; to buy lunches, give the child lunch money. But don't confuse these sums with an allowance.

An allowance says, "You are ours, and we are pleased that you are ours. You share in what we have. We believe in you and have trust in you. What you do with your share is solely your decision. If your use of the money seems odd to us, we have faith enough in you to understand that from your viewpoint it is not odd."

Thus an allowance serves many useful purposes. Through demonstration it proclaims family strength in sharing, and symbolizes sacrifice for others. It emphasizes the worthwhileness to the parents of the child's being, and not of his performance. It illustrates faith and confidence, and silently invites the child to consider himself worthy of them.

Therefore, an allowance is not withheld as a method of discipline any more than love is withheld. An allowance is not increased or decreased because of deserving performance—it is already deserved just for being. And if the allowance is "foolishly" dissipated, it is not commented upon, for this is the basis of independence founded on love—initiative which sometimes results in erroneous actions which are not belittled by one's judges.

The quantity of the allowance is not important. It should be an amount that involves no serious sacrifice by the rest of the family. It should increase with age. It should conform, within reason, to community standards. It should not be so large as to represent a lie to the child concerning the family's financial status, or so small as to be demonstrative of family miserliness. It should be started at an early age, more or less coincident with the beginning of schooling.

A child who elects to perform chores for money, within or without the family, is paid for his work, and this is unrelated to his allowance. A child who chooses not to perform chores for wages is not paid, and this too has nothing to do with his allowance. Encouraging a child to work for extra money must stand or fall on its own merits, and not be confused with the good that can be accomplished by an allowance.

Perhaps it is contributory to later attitudes to insist that a child earn his extra rewards. There may be some value in establishing the connection between the willingness to sweat and the receiving of commensurate material compensation. "I am a successful individual. I learned early that I had to work hard to get what I wanted." Maybe so! Maybe so! How about the possibility, though, that what you learned early was to judge yourself in terms of material achievement? And that somewhere along the way you missed discovering that there are other reasons for working hard, such as pride in doing your best, such as the pleasure of helping those who love you? Is it conceivable that you might better have learned early to work hard for no tangible reward, and merely for the gratification of conforming to the pattern of mutual helpfulness of your family?