



CHILD SENSE

*A Pediatrician's Guide
for Today's Families*



WILLIAM E. HOMAN, M.D.

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William E. Homan is an uncommon pediatrician. His consultations with children and their parents frequently last two hours and longer, and more often than not deal with emotional and behavioral, rather than strictly medical problems. Here, in *Child Sense*, Dr. Homan has distilled the experience and knowledge he has gained in over 20 years of practice—observing, advising, and learning from more than 10,000 children.

“Child Sense” is a way of understanding all your child’s needs in terms of his whole personality. It is a way of loving, disciplining, and guiding him through the myriad difficulties of childhood so as to improve his chances for a happy, fruitful life. With it, you are likely to cope with his problems in a correct, sensible manner.

Child Sense deals with almost every potential problem you are likely to encounter, as a parent, physician, or teacher, from the time a child is born until he is on the threshold of young adulthood—from toilet training and temper tantrums to school problems and sex education.

Child Sense is always positive and practical; its advice is often provocative and it sometimes offends the “orthodox” views. But whether you agree with it or not, chances are that you will look upon your child and his problems in a different, more understanding way. You may develop “Child Sense” of your own.

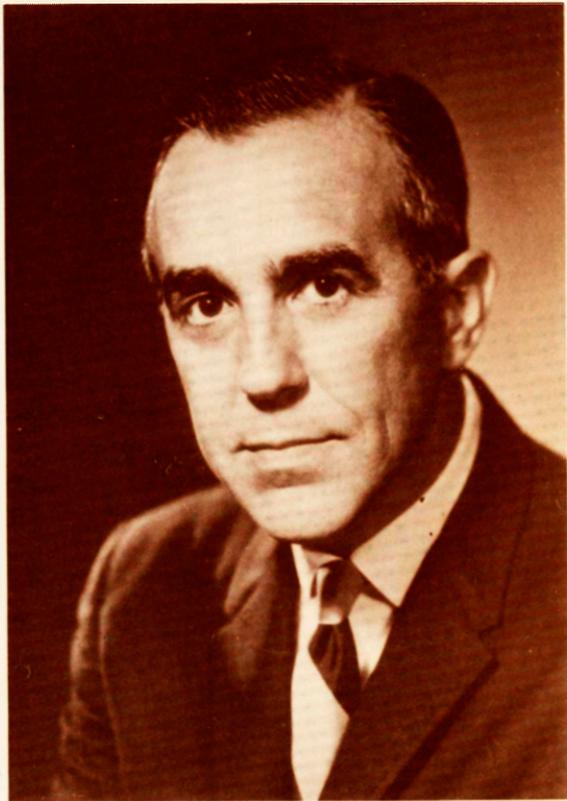


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WILLIAM E. HOMAN, M.D., has practiced pediatrics in Westchester County, New York, for the past twenty years as the senior member of a singular group of pediatricians whose practice is oriented toward the physical, emotional, and educational health of the child. He was an Associate in Pediatrics, Columbia University, and was long affiliated with the Pediatric Service of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. Dr. Homan lectures extensively on sex education and on the personality development of children.

JACKET DESIGN BY VINCENT TORRE

Immediate acclaim for **CHILD SENSE**:

"*Child Sense* brings the most sense, in an enlightening and often entertaining fashion, to all the troublesome, troubled aspects of bringing up children of any book in many years (including Dr. Ginott's fashionable conversion of Freud)...A pleasure to read and ponder."—*The Kirkus Reviews*, in a starred review

"I have grown a little tired of the constant stream of guides for parents, but I found this new book most refreshing. It is clearly and simply written, but it does not oversimplify the complexities of personality development in children or the everyday dilemmas facing parents.... This is a book I would be proud to have written. It is full of wise practical advice."—Gerald Caplan, Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard, and author of *Emotional Problems of Early Childhood*

"...a profound statement of respect and awareness for the growing child."—*Journal of Emotional Education*

"Dr. Homan not only brings a wealth of professional experience to this well-organized, thoughtful 'guide,' but an ability to express himself clearly, sympathetically and with humor. Like Dr. Spock, he... works through simple, factual statements and an appeal to common sense."—*Publishers' Weekly*

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"...a sparkling exposition of views based on a vast experience with parents and children."—Dr. William A. Silverman, Children's Hospital of San Francisco

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My most particular gratitude to the many dedicated parents who shared their wisdom and their rewards with me.

W. E. H.

Foreword

by W. K. McKnight, M.D.

Nowadays, it must be the rare parent who is not somewhat confused, if not mystified, in the face of the vitally important task of bringing up his children. Books, magazine articles, newspaper columns, television, and other channels of communication offer the parent a steady stream of advice—some of it complicated, some of it confusing, some of it contradictory. This is one reason why I believe that the book you have in your hands may well become a major source of help for both parents and others who are intimately involved in the guidance of children.

In a straightforward, readable style, Dr. Homan deals with all of the salient issues in the personality development of the child and, most importantly, in such a way that parents can understand them clearly and can test the author's judgments in the daily events of their own children's lives. Thus, Dr. Homan, with his keen perception and kindly wit, has provided us with a handbook that has its own strong, clear voice and offers lucid guidelines for raising children in our increasingly complex society.

Dr. McKnight is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at The Cornell University Medical College, and is Physician-in-Charge, The Mental Hygiene Clinic of the Westchester Division, Inc., New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

Child Sense is both an expression of Dr. Homan's considered judgments and a unique record of his many years of experience as a practicing pediatrician. His unusual practice provides for special hours-long appointments for exploring signs of personality or behavior problems with his patients and their parents. In this way, Dr. Homan not only practices the best kind of preventive medicine but also has gained an intensive, practical knowledge of children and the needs of their developing personalities.

Dr. Homan places strong emphasis on the importance of the family as a balanced unit as well as on the necessary balance among the various other influences in the developing child's life, including those responsibilities which must be shared by schools and other agencies within the community. His concept of the "triad of basic needs for the normal development of a child's personality" is, in my opinion, a sound and practical basis for parental guidance, as it represents in a simple, fundamental way many of the truths that have emerged from observation and research.

In *Child Sense*, I believe, Dr. Homan has written an essential guide for today's families which will merit the wide readership it is certain to have.

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Introduction

This book represents thirty years of blood and sweat and worry and sleeplessness. It is an inadequate monument to agonized children I have talked to and laughed with and cried with; children who have suffered, and who have wept, and who have lost their birthright to happiness, and who have died. It distills the sacrifices and the ceaseless efforts of their twenty thousand parents—determined efforts to comprehend, to do a better job, to improve and to support their children.

If you believe that raising children is a spare-time job, if you find it incredible that guiding children is the most difficult, the most challenging, the most significant, and the least mastered and most promising frontier for man—then this book is not for you.

Or if you have been persuaded that the problems of the young can be solved by speaking “childrenese”—if you are convinced that children can reach meaningful happiness through such parental evasions as permissiveness, or can be fitted for tomorrow’s problems by an egocentric preparation for responsibility and legality—if you think that the complexities of parenthood can be catalogued in an ivory tower by staring at a hundred children selected with statistical bias—if you believe that unaided parental instinct can suffice to rear an enlightened generation, or that the establishment of conditioned reflexes in the child will insure appropriate values—if you imagine that parents can successfully help their children to a productive and harmonious maturity without dedication and painstaking consideration—then this book will enrage you.

But if you can see the hope that resides in the children of this

generation, and can envision their progress against the burdens of the world—if you can endorse the need to prepare them as adequately as possible—if you can subscribe to the worthwhileness of making the effort to start them on their way without handicaps, I wish you would give me a little of your time to discuss and assess what we know about the stewardship of the young.

A lifetime spent with children and the problems of children yields no conclusion more haunting than this: each set of new parents approaches the formidable assignment of raising humans with meager experience and spotty knowledge; each set of parents learns by a process of trial and error, committing the same mistakes that have been committed by countless other parents; the new parents learn—some more, some less—by their missteps, and they become, in some respect, more adept at parenthood with every succeeding child; the parents wish at some point that they had known at the beginning what they have come to know by the end.

There is a striking similarity, a remarkable repetition, among the lessons learned by parents in family after family during the on-the-job training that constitutes parenthood: the same errors, the same finally acquired understanding.

It is almost as though each neophyte scientist were to be handed a flintstone and a wheel and made to rediscover for himself all the basic scientific knowledge of the ages, instead of being allowed to start from the shoulders of his predecessors, forearmed with their laboriously assembled experiences, mistakes, and facts. How many years of education in mathematics are devoted to mastering the relatively simple demands of accounting? How many weeks, or even hours, of education are allotted to preparing for the complex demands of child raising?

No other task in the world compares in consequence with that of raising children. From the point of view of the individual child, much of the balance between happiness and unhappiness that will ultimately comprise his life's experiences depends upon the orientation he receives in his childhood. From the point of

view of the community, the success or lack of success with which an individual contributes to the welfare of the world depends in the main upon the environment he had as a child.

Pitifully few persons are granted the opportunity to improve this earth in any permanent manner through their own achievements. The chance, however, to have a profound and lasting effect upon the world, either for good or for bad, is thrust upon each person who is given the privilege of raising a child. In terms of personal satisfaction, the rewards of being, for instance, a good professional educator are immense, for a teacher has the daily opportunity to enrich the state of mankind through properly orienting the child. But if teaching is a notable profession, how far more exalted is the role of the parent, whose influence on the child, willy-nilly, constitutes the majority of the child's educational experiences.

At the same time, and quite aside from its importance, the job of raising children must surely be classified as the most complicated, most intricate, and most challenging of all man's tasks. To guide and shape the formative years of a human being dwarfs in complexity the problems of computer design or of international diplomacy. How strange it is, then, that for this most demanding and most vital task of parenthood one finds the least imaginable training and preparation. For the simple roles of doctor, lawyer, and Indian chief, it is taken for granted that years of preparation will be necessary to attain even mediocrity. To be a plumber, a clerk, or a soldier one undergoes months and years of training. For operating the new toaster, assembling the knocked-down carriage, controlling the three-way light bulb, precise manuals of instruction are available. But you are apparently assumed to come to the job of being a parent divinely endowed with knowledge and experience. And when you stumble along the path, and the resulting product is less than perfect, you are made to experience guilty feelings of inadequacy, and the world in its wisdom feels free to point an accusing finger at you.

If by chance you had the foresight to seek out the knowledge that would help you as a parent, you would be doomed to chaos. The fact is that the rare schoolroom course and the many in-

struction books on parenthood—unlike the plethora of material relating to handweaving and to home carpentry—are unrealistic and contradictory. Even in this day of specialization and unlimited wisdom, there seems not yet to be a true expert on the subject of child raising.

Some books urge that a parent need only rely upon his instincts to guide his relationships with his child. "The normal mother will instinctively know how to . . ." This is assuredly true if your aim is to produce a young adult who would do well in an aboriginal state. Unfortunately, instincts do not equip a parent to guide his child to meet the requirements of a complex competitive society.

Furthermore, were I a perplexed parent seeking a solution to a question, the ingenuous advice: "As a normal parent you will instinctively see how to act" would throw me into a guilty panic when I realized that I felt no surging rush of intuition growing within *my* body. Please remember that the author or teacher who says, "You will readily understand this without my telling you about it," is using a shorthand for: "Quit bugging me. I don't know the answer either."

Some books, on the other hand, insist upon the total repression of parental instincts. Great-grandma and Great-grandpa had all the advantages over today's parents in dealing with this advice. Uninhibited and unembarrassed by such advice from "experts," they often succumbed to their common sense, and sometimes provided their children with more than enough love and approval to counterbalance whatever other shortcomings they had as parents.

My child has just dismembered his sister, castigated his mother, and kindled the house, and I discover from the experts that to communicate effectively with him I should say, presumably in a level voice, "I see something is bothering you; you are angry at your teacher; Daddy often feels this way himself." Reading such advice, I know that, if it be true, I can never be a good parent. Not without prolonged psychotherapy and treatment for my colitis.

Some books maintain that heredity overwhelmingly outweighs

the effects of environment in determining the child's personality. "Stop blaming the parents for the child's transgressions. Look how often good parents produce bad children." As a matter of fact, if a normal child studies spelling, say, for sixteen years under the same teacher, and ends up a non-speller, is it not possible that the teacher shares the blame? I, for one, wherever else I looked for the cause of the failure, would at least have to wonder whether the teacher *might* be the cause. And where is the credibility in the supposition that "good" people automatically make good parents? Many "good" people are rotten plumbers, rotten bridge players, rotten parents. Sometimes entirely because of lack of knowledge of the subject. The emphasis upon heredity provides far too much sand for head burying when a child has problems, as a substitute for an honest search into the cause of the problems.

Some books overwhelm the reader with learned jargon that obscures the "whole cloth" from which the pontifical advice stems.

Some books outline in minute detail how the child will behave at age three years, two months, and ten days, based upon observations of how four other children were once recorded to behave at this age. Sometimes nothing seems to qualify one as a child expert quite so much as either being childless oneself or being secluded in a remote office in an imposing brick edifice from which one occasionally looks to "observe" a child.

Some books tell you how to prepare your child for some utopian society that does not yet exist on our planet. I commend these to you for the purpose to which they are suited—light fictional reading.

Or you will be assured that the raising of children to the attainment of normal emotional development and desirable attitudes and character traits can be reduced to the simplicity of conditioned reflexes. Know which actions to condition your child to and you will produce a man capable of feeling love, compassion, tolerance, and self-confidence! Or perhaps it will be a salivating dog.

With such scarcely intelligible guides to this complicated and

important assignment, one can only marvel respectfully at the extraordinary job the average American parent, and most particularly the average mother, manages to perform. From each mistake the parents acquire skill; from each child they acquire knowledge. And from my vantage point as observer and student of thousands of typical American parents, it is clear to me that this generation of child-rearers is somehow muddling through to a better product than did their forebears.

If each parent eventually becomes self-educated in the care of children, should it not then be possible to record some of these hard-won facts to serve as a guide for future parents? As the sage mourns, "I wish I had known twenty years ago what I know now." In this book I hope to set down some of the facts or semi-facts, and some of the mistakes, concerning the raising of children which have been brought to the attention of my two associates and me through the generous teachings of thousands of dedicated parents during what amounts to a half-century of combined pediatric experience.

From well over 10,000 charts and 100,000 pages of notes recording the intimate tribulations and personal conclusions of "real, live" parents, I have tried to choose those observations which seem most often to repeat themselves in family after family, and which seem to be the most significant in helping or hindering the child. Errors in choosing and in interpretation and organization are mine. Any wisdom present is creditable to the parents of my patients.

These observations have come from "normal" parents with "normal" children and are directed to normal parents with normal children. Emotionally disturbed parents need psychiatry and sympathy, not advice. Moreover, all matters I shall discuss relate to emotional development in growing youngsters, and problems of physical health are omitted. Likewise, the subject of what values you should elect to pass on to your children I have not considered an appropriate topic.

I do not propose that I have covered the entire subject in this book, for the more you experience the difficulties and joys of

being a parent the more you must realize how little you know. Nor do I claim that these pages contain immutable truth. You will clearly decide for yourself that which sounds sensible to you and that which is to be disregarded for your own use as "bunk." But if you will only be made to pause occasionally to re-examine from a fresh point of view your own beliefs concerning a topic, this book will have served its purpose. I must re-emphasize the obvious fact that there are no true experts in this field; the closest thing to an expert becomes the parent himself.

The Perfect Parent

Since it is my hopeful intention to help some of you become better parents, we should pause here to consider the attributes of the ideal parent.

Who is the perfect parent? That depends a lot upon what you mean. If you mean the parent who knows *all* there is to know about raising children, who knows *exactly* what to do, and *when* to do it, and then *unfailingly* does it, I could safely say, "Thank God, there ain't no such parent."

Furthermore, any parent who even knows *almost all* the right things to do, and who *most* of the time does them, would, I am sure, inevitably produce an unfortunate child, completely unfit and unprepared to deal with any of the meanness and inequities of the real world he would have to live in.

To me, the perfect parent is simply the one who knows a good many of the right things to do in raising a child, and who *more than half the time* does the right thing instead of the wrong. He is the parent who makes mistakes, and then forgets about them and passes cheerfully on to the next task with some thought to doing better. One of the great rewards of being this kind of a successful and bumbling parent is to have your sixth-grader come home and cheerfully announce, "Hey, Dad, I got Mr. Sweeney as a teacher. He's swell! He can yell even louder than you can."

*Basic Requirements of
Normal Personality Development*

One last thing, before starting upon the main topics of the book proper. I would like to introduce the single most important theme, which is indeed the unifying foundation of all that is to follow. This is the concept of what constitutes the essential ingredients that insure the normal emotional development of the child—and of how few in number these requisites are.

I am going to be using the word "personality" a good deal. It is better that we have an understanding of what this word means before we get started. I will be using the term "personality" in its broadest sense, to include the individual's sense of happiness and unhappiness, his self-confidence, his attitudes toward himself, toward his family, and toward his community, his motivation, goals, ideals, ethics, morals, physical actions, and his feelings of "security," that ubiquitous and imprecise word. "Personality," within the meaning of these pages, implies "the total mental state."

It is true that thousands of factors contribute to, and shape, the final personality of a growing human being. It is equally true that in the long run only *three* basic needs are essential to the development of a normal personality. *Essential!* This minimal need of three, and only three, factors is an important point around which to orient your thinking, both in raising a child and in searching for a cause of any aberrations of personality that may seem to be arising along the way. These three absolute requisites for the normal development of a child's personality may be stated, with some temporary oversimplification, as (1) love, (2) discipline, and (3) independence.

Each of these three factors which determine the child's personality operates in the three geographical divisions of a child's environment: (1) the home and family, (2) the school, and (3) the neighborhood and social contacts. Thus the personality development of the child may be said to depend upon love in the family, love in the school, love in the neighborhood contacts; discipline in the family, discipline in the school; and so forth. It

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is clear before we begin that of these nine areas some will be more important at one age than at another.

I do not want to minimize unduly the importance of hereditary or congenital factors and their influence upon the personality of the child. It is certainly true that children do come into the world with varying degrees of talents, skills, and personality attributes. I want to emphasize, however, that these inborn potentials simply make the development of a normal personality more or less easy or difficult. Most parents of more than one child quickly recognize that each child is easier or harder to deal with in one regard or another from early infancy.

Though sometimes with more, and sometimes with less, effort, the personality of *any* child, *regardless of his potentials* at birth, can be *overwhelmingly* influenced and molded by his environment. And regardless of his genetic endowments, each child requires without exception the three fundamental factors of love, discipline, and independence. Since, once he is born, we can do nothing to control the hereditary endowment of the child, little mention of this contribution to the child's personality will be made. I am concerned not with theory, but with practicality. Furthermore, I am unprofessionally disgusted with parents who "give up" on a child's problem with only half an effort, under the excuse, "Oh well, what do you expect? That's the kind of person he was born to be."