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## EC5551 The Little Child's Relation to Society

Florence J. Ovens

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THE LITTLE CHILD'S RELATION TO SOCIETY

Florence J. Owens  
Editor, National Kindergarten Association, New York City

The child does not begin his social life when he first goes visiting, nor yet on the day that "company" first arrives in his home. He possesses at birth natural tendencies towards social reactions and they begin to be stimulated as soon as he becomes conscious of mother, father, sister, brother or nurse; the family is the first social group.

As the child does not choose his parents, or his environment during his early years, and as these largely determine his life attitudes towards society, it devolves upon the adults of the home to give careful consideration to its social atmosphere. Only to a limited extent can the child's contacts beyond the home be controlled, but if home-relationships are of the best there will be abundant opportunity to assist the child to make the adjustments necessary when he becomes one of new and larger groups.

With regard to young children, it should be remembered that "they learn to be whatever will secure them the greatest advantage, coy, whining, patient and good tempered or vociferous and teasing, shy, obedient, polite, bold, according to the value in personal returns which such behavior brings. Right, according to their judgment, is that which wins the approval of the elders, or which provides the satisfaction of a desire." Example is always better than precept, but the child must have a chance to practice or else even those lessons taught by example will be of little value. For instance, of course mothers and fathers should be unselfish with their children from the beginning and let them see unselfishness constantly practiced by father towards mother and mother towards father, but the children must be allowed to practice unselfishness themselves, with regard to each member of the family. A word of suggestion may be helpful and even necessary occasionally, but the child's unselfishness should not be talked about, it should be taken as a matter of course.

Every phase of the child's social intercourse is a subject for individual treatment. The following articles touch upon a few of them and will be found helpful inasmuch as the generalities gleaned from them are introduced gradually into life situations. Professor O'Shea in the first article, referring to the child who was being spoiled by too much attention, says, "She must grow from within quietly." There is much food for thought in this short statement.

SPOILING A CHILD BY TOO MUCH ATTENTION  
By Professor M. V. O'Shea

Frances is three years old, very pretty and winsome. There are in the family two older sisters and one brother, besides the father and mother and an aunt. All the members of the family have been much interested in the baby since her birth and they have given her a good deal of attention. They are a social family and many friends call upon them and they go frequently to visit their friends. Whoever comes



to the house must say something to Frances and show how much they think of her by talking much to her, taking her in their arms, offering to do this or that for her, and so on. The members of the family like to have people notice the child because she is such an attractive little thing. But she is causing some apprehension now because whenever anyone speaks to her, she says, "No, no," in a petulant voice. If any question is asked or any advances made toward her, her one response will be, "No, no." The parents think she is developing a bad habit and should have some training to correct it.

One way to prevent Frances from forming an annoying habit and acquiring an irritable disposition is for the members of the family and all others to leave her alone more than they now do. She is being spoiled by over-much attention. Her "No, no," is a kind of protection against the irritating actions of the people around her. She should be taken only very rarely to neighbors and friends for visits. When friends come to the house she should be kept out of sight for the most part - in her sand-pile or playing with blocks or dolls alone. The brothers and sisters should leave her to her own devices more than they do. She must grow from within quietly. It will take some time for the family to learn that they should not make a plaything of their little girl. They have not done this purposely of course; they think they have been doing the right thing in showing her off and making her the center of attention.

There are a great many children like Frances in American families who cause their parents trouble because of their irritability and lack of appreciation of what is being done for them. They would be more appreciative if they received less attention, and were left to themselves most of the time without interference, even by members of the family and certainly by friends and neighbors.

#### CULTIVATE ADAPTABILITY IN CHILDREN By Edith Lochridge Reid

A characteristic too often overlooked, or at least ~~unemphasized~~ in the training of children, is that of adaptability. How does your child respond to adverse conditions or new contacts? When you take him visiting does he make a roar because he can't sleep in his own bed or eat with his own spoon or ride in the front seat of the car as he does at home? If he responds unfavorably to new conditions, then his training in conforming to circumstances has been neglected.

A child that can not comply with the routine of the home in which he is a guest can upset plans and create friction until the pleasure of the visit is spoiled for mother and hostess; and to prepare him so that this unpleasantness may be avoided can not be done in the two or three days that precede a visit.

To be sure, a child should have his own things and should be held to a system of conduct at home - else how can he form any habits of regularity; not for a moment can this theory be discounted. And it is very well to add that small children should be left at home as much as possible and not subjected to a change of living conditions - but every mother knows that there are exceptions to this rule. We can not all have nurse girls and housekeepers, and we can not always stay at home; so while we are training the children in good habits, let us **not** give them the idea that these habits are not adjustable.



Well, how shall we do it? The fundamental point in adjustability is unselfishness. In fact when you stop to think of it, doesn't unselfishness almost always solve the problem of friction in social and business life?

One little mother helped her children by having a guest day at home. On this day the whole family pretended they were dining some place else. Bobbie, instead of having his high chair, sat on two books and a cushion as he has to do at Aunt Ellen's when he visits her. And Esther had to eat with a big knife and fork and drink from a "grown-up glass" and there wasn't any milk so they drank water and were very polite about it.

You get the idea! The family are lifted out of the rut - boosted up as it were to peek over the highboard fence to see what is in the neighbor's yard. And the change of scene is inspiring rather than annoying.

In social life the happiest individual and the most popular is the one commonly known as a good mixer, the qualifications for which are simply adaptability to circumstances and respect for the interests and ideas of others. So the sooner and the more thoroly our children cultivate these traits, the easier will everyday living be for them and their associates, but only by the careful patient guidance of the mother can these acquirements be attained.

#### TALK ON CITIZENSHIP

By Hon. P. P. Claxton, Formerly United States Commissioner of Education

Democracy is a cooperative institution in which every citizen is a shareholder and an active agent. Preparation for citizenship is, therefore, chiefly a matter of training for intelligent, effective cooperation. For such cooperation, health, strength, knowledge, skill, industry, self-respect, self-confidence, self-restraint, truthfulness, activity and a clear recognition of one's own duties and of the rights of others are necessary. Above all, ability to play one's part well, easily and gracefully in groups of equals, large or small. If these and other requirements of good citizenship are kept in mind, it will help in training loyal citizens for our great American democracy.

It should also be remembered that boys and girls of five and six, or fifteen and sixteen, are as truly citizens as are men and women of fifty and sixty or thirty and forty. The task is, therefore, not so much one of preparing boys and girls for future citizenship as it is one of helping them now by kindly instruction, advice and proper discipline. It is not so much a taking thought for their tomorrow as it is of helping them to live fully today. By such living today they will be better and more fully prepared for every tomorrow.

Neither in the home, in the school, nor in the state does autocracy prepare for democracy but only for servile submission, or for revolt and violent revolution. The child who at home and school forms the habit of thoughtful initiative and learns to use freedom without license and to substitute principle more and more for personal and institutional authority is gaining at least one valuable element in citizenship. In learning to lose his selfish purposes in broader interests and a better understanding of the common good, he is gaining another indispensable element; and still another when he understands the importance of self-support and takes pride in it.



Therefore, the home and the school and all the groups and institutions of which the young citizens are a part should be busy, intelligent, unselfish and therefore joyous and happy cooperative societies, democratic in form and in spirit.

It is just because the kindergarten is pre-eminently a democratic institution that it has so great a value for young children and that a large infusion of the spirit of the kindergarten in the home and in all the schools for older children and youth is so desirable.

The kindergarten does not flourish in an autocracy nor will wise autocracies that desire to preserve their existence tolerate it. Autocratic Germany forbade the Froebel Kindergarten and Froebel looked to free America for its development.

#### HOW CHILDREN LEARN EASE OF MANNER By Edith Lochridge Reid

A mother remarked the other day in the course of a conversation on child discipline, "I don't see why it is that children always act worse when we have guests than at any other time. I'm sure it isn't because they haven't been instructed how to behave."

Now this mother was perfectly sincere in her remark, yet her own phrasing contains the secret of her distress over her children's behavior. Would a child learn to play the piano by being instructed if he didn't practice playing every day? Yet that mother was expecting just as improbable a performance in behavior. She was stressing the old idea of "company manners," and expecting the children to put on culture just as they put on clothes for the dinner party. And because they didn't, she was deeply grieved and disappointed.

The reason why children of this type act worse when there are guests than they do ordinarily is because of strain and nervous tension. In the mother's anxiety to have affairs move smoothly she has held out threats as to what will happen if all the last minute "Don'ts" aren't observed, and the result has been to create an unnatural condition that is confusing and disastrous to poise and courtesy.

But aside from the mother's embarrassment over slips of etiquette and behavior this idea of "putting on manners" is very unwise training for children. They gradually learn to act on artificial motives and lose sight of the genuine and vital character traits that are worth while and lasting.

Just the idea of alluding to the various articles of table appointment as "company silver" and "guest linen", and so on, through all the china and glassware, suggests to the child a feeling of stiffness, and an atmosphere formal and conventional, though he does not analyze it in just those terms.

Why not use the good dishes and linen and silverware occasionally for just the home folks? Then daughter Lois will not cause a panic when there are guests by piping up, "O, goody, we have the fruit in the best hand-painted bowl." If the little ones become accustomed every day to what is good enough for guests, a great deal of strain for both parents and children is bound to be eliminated.

Right in line with this follows the fact that the place to start preparing the child in "company manners" is the first day he sits in his high chair to eat a meal. There is no need for a tot even this age to throw his spoon and cracker on the



floor continually, or to upset his broth or porridge. He may as well learn right then not to stand up in his chair, not to put his face down in his plate and not to scream for what he can't have. This much at least can then be omitted from the "instructions" when the Browns come over to dine a few years later.

When mother is alone and playing with the babies she can teach them much by pretending visitors. They may come in and call on her and advance and take her hand. It will become natural in a very short time.

A mother who includes good manners and polite behavior in the every day home life, will never have reason to force courtesy upon her children.

#### "FUN AT HOME"

Alice Crowell Hoffman

"Mother will be glad to have us all come indoors and finish the game", announced a small boy when a sudden heavy gust of rain, replacing the gentle drizzle, interrupted the fun of the happy group.

Joyfully the host marshalled half a dozen live-wire boys into the kitchen where Mother was busily engaged with the ironing. Seeing the crowded condition of the kitchen one of the boys, because of his own experience at home under like circumstances, wished for a moment that he had not come in. His doubts regarding their welcome, however, were quickly dispelled by the cheery greeting which Billy's mother had for the group.

"What a fine chance to play up in the attic", said Mother enthusiastically, "I'm so glad, Billy, that you brought a lot of boys in to enjoy a rainy day in the attic with you."

The little boy who had temporary misgivings on entering the busy kitchen could hardly believe his ears. "Glad" that Billy "brought a lot of boys in" on a rainy day when the kitchen was already full and every pair of shoes carried traces of mud. How different from what would have happened at his own home under like circumstances!

And such a wonderful time as those boys had in that attic! First they finished the rollicking game which they had started out of doors. They could play it as well in the big bare space up there as in the yard. There was nothing that needed to be taken care of and no chance of getting in anyone's way.

Several times during the afternoon Mother found time to slip up and enjoy the fun. Nor did she come empty handed. Once she brought wonderful animal cookies which went around the group several times, later there was iced lemonade with strawberry juice to make it "nice and pinky".

When the ironing was finished she brought her mending and stayed for a while. Seating herself in an old rocker which stood by the window, she was an interested and sympathetic audience for the "stunts" in which the various members of the group excelled. She did not try to help with the play nor even to direct it.

"What a fine time you boys have given me", she said as she rose to go down to get supper. "You've kept me so interested while I was darning these stockings that I can scarcely believe they are all finished."



"Say, Billy," said the lad who had had doubts regarding their welcome, "isn't it great to be able to have so much fun at home!"

GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP  
L. S. Archer

Five box rabbit traps and a two-by-four briar patch played a very important part in the lives of two small boys of my acquaintance. They lived in the country on a small farm, all of which was under cultivation except the pasture field at the back of the place. In this pasture was a wonderful briar patch, a stone pile and some ground-hog holes. Bordering this was a piece of woodland and an uncultivated swamp.

The briar patch had long been the home and refuge of all the Peter Rabbits and Molly Cottontails of the surrounding country. The pasture was the playground of the two small boys. For hours they and their dog romped unmolested, waded in the brook, built dams at the spring, climbed trees, threw stones and occasionally joined the dog in a chase for an unwary rabbit. This field belonged to them - with all its delightful nooks and crannies, all its birds, all its rabbits - it all belonged to them. The old rabbit with a knowing wink would sometimes jump out ahead of the dog, circle the field and come back to disappear in a groundhog hole. Small wonder the boys loved this place and claimed every rabbit in it.

There is one month in the year when men are allowed to gun for the rabbit; which is considered a real delicacy in this section, and boys may set traps. Each of these small boys had one box trap which he carefully baited and hid in the briar patch and one which he placed just beyond the fence in the swamp. A neighbor's boy - a playmate and chum - brought three traps and set them in the beloved briar patch, and each morning for six successive days caught one of Peter's family while the other two boys got none. Hot resentment filled their breasts. Friendship was forgotten. "It is our briar patch", they said. "They are our rabbits. Reds has no right to put his traps in our field."

My sympathy was with the two small boys, but no matter how we "lean" the principles of good sportsmanship remain the same.

The father of these two embryonic citizens used this incident for a lesson. If they felt free to set a trap on the other side of their fence in the swamp, then, by the same code, Reds had a right to put his traps in the briar patch. He showed them that a rabbit was a small thing in the world of men; that just such trifles as rabbits, line fences and trespassing claims could make bitter enemies; that they needed to get the right perspective of their relationship of Life's events.

This was training in fair play and good citizenship. The lesson was not taught nor learned in a single day, but, before the month was up the boys could hail their comrade with a cheerful grin and, "What luck this morning, Reds? Gee, he's a big one!"

If children can be taught to get the right slant on childish difficulties then men will have a broader outlook and a clearer sense of justice when it comes to dealing with the larger problems that confront them, for, "Men are but children of a larger growth."



WRECKERS OR BUILDERS  
By Clara Louise Burnham

Elsie Maynard, nine years old, came into her gate swinging her school books, accompanied by her friend, Marion Bush. Marion was pretty, her father owned two motor cars and she was a power in the school room.

The two children went up on the piazza, Elsie looking to see if her mother was sitting by the open window. Yes, there she was, giving her little girl a welcoming smile and nod, then going on with her sewing. The children settled down comfortably on the steps and continued the subject they were discussing.

"I could see as soon as she came into the room," said Marion decidedly "that she is a girl I should never like. She showed all over how much she thought of herself."

"O, yes," replied Elsie, proud to agree with Marion Bush about anything. "She's probably just as stuck up as she can be."

"And so overdressed!" said Marion.

"Did you notice her diamond ring?" asked Elsie, uncertain whether or not to praise the lovely stone whose lights had fascinated her.

Marion turned up her nose. "I should say I did. The idea of a little girl wearing a ring like that, and to school of all places. Well, she'll find her airs and graces won't go down in our room."

"Hello, there's Michael!" exclaimed the visitor, then she emitted a shrill whistle which caused the chauffeur of a passing limousine to look around.

"Well, so long, Elsie," she cried as she ran down the steps.

"Goodbye," murmured Elsie gazing in admiration at the nonchalant manner in which Marion hopped into the limousine.

Then she went into the house.

"Mother, I'm glad we're not newly rich," she said.

Mrs. Maynard laughed. "I wouldn't mind," she replied. "What's the news, today?"

"Nothing much," answered the little girl. "O, yes, somebody has smashed the windows of that empty house on Orchard street."

"Isn't it strange," said Mrs. Maynard, "that some people would rather wreck than build?"

"Yes," agreed Elsie, "that was a nice house. Whoever did it ought to be put in prison."

"You wouldn't like them for your friends, then?"



"Of course not, Mother! What are you thinking of!"

"Marion Bush."

Elsie looked up and met a gaze whose loving gravity surprised her.

"Yes, I heard Marion wrecking and smashing a few minutes ago. She was breaking the commandment; 'Thou shalt not steal' What meaner stealing is there than taking away one person's good opinion of another?"

"But, Mother, the new girl looked awfully proud and she had a diamond ring. Wasn't that silly?"

"And my poor little girl didn't even dare to think it was pretty or say anything to stop Marion in her smashing. Think, Elsie, of that new little girl coming a stranger into a school where all the children knew each other. Wouldn't that be a hard position for anyone?"

Elsie's cheeks were burning now, and her eyes were thoughtful. "Nobody ate luncheon with her," she admitted reluctantly, "because Marion said - "

"Never mind Marion," interrupted Mrs. Maynard. "The question to me is whether my child is going to be a wrecker or a builder."

"But it is so hard to do anything that Marion doesn't like," protested Elsie.

"Yes, but if you take a firm stand and show kindness to the new schoolmate you will find the other children glad to follow your example. Marion's opinions rule many of you; but there is only one thing that should rule, and that is RIGHT. Let LOVE guide you and remember the Golden Rule. I want to be the mother of a brave little girl, not a coward."

Elsie's brain was busy with thoughts of the new girl and the way she had all day tried to behave as if she didn't care what the other children did. She decided that she, herself, had been a coward.

"I wish it were tomorrow," she said suddenly.

"Why?"

"I'm going to begin to be a builder, no matter what happens."

#### THE ANTIDOTE

By Florence J. Owens

"Don't tell Dorothy anything about the feud, please, Mother," said Mrs. Perkins appealingly as she and her husband boarded the train which was to separate them from their seven-year-old daughter. The little girl was to spend two months at her father's boyhood home and Mrs. Perkins well knew that the mental atmosphere of the town was not at all in keeping with its natural beauty and charming climate.



Several weeks later Dorothy was talking to her doll on the back porch while her grandmother, and her Uncle Alfred just home from college, were sitting within hearing and smiling together at her prattle.

"Oh, no! Phyllis," the little voice piped up suddenly, "you must not play with the little girl next door and you must not ask me why. No she is not sick. Maybe she is naughty, 'cause we mustn't even smile at her. I wish she was good 'cause she has a nice dolly and a carriage like yours. You would look nice riding out together. I think we could have lots of fun."

Alfred's face had changed.

"For goodness' sake, Mother!" he exclaimed in disgust. "Has another generation imbibed the poison?"

"Poison?"

"Yes, the poison of ignorant bigotry and hatred."

"Shame on you, Alfred! Dorothy doesn't know the meaning of the word 'hatred' and nothing has been said to her about the feud. Of course I had to keep her away from the Morrisons."

"Why, Mother?"

"Ask me that, after all these years, Alfred?"

"That is just it, Mother. Why perpetuate the quarrel year after year and generation after generation? Why feed it to Dorothy?"

"Alfred, I told you I said nothing to Dorothy about it. I only told her not to talk to Mr. Morrison's grandchild. Dorothy asked if she might smile at her and I said, 'No, you'd better not.'"

"And of course Dorothy put her own construction on the prohibition just as other generations of children have done. She has taken only a small attenuation of the poison but it has begun to do its work. Cousin Everett is an example of what large doses administered regularly from infancy to manhood will do to a really fine nature. It was just before the Prom Dance that he said to me in an unusually confidential moment, 'None of the girls have any use for me - nor the fellows either.' It seemed kind to be frank with him. 'Do you know why?' I asked. 'You habitually appear morose, opinionated, intolerant and suspicious. It is the poison of the spirit of hatred always rife in our town.' 'You breathed the same atmosphere,' he said a bit resentfully. 'I had an antidote,' I answered - I had a wiser mother than he, but I did not like to tell him that - I told him about the summers that I spent with Grandfather Rollins when I was ten and eleven."

"I guess Grandfather realized what I was up against in our town. He made no mention of it, however, but he kept me with him constantly, feeding me on stories



from secular and sacred history that illustrated nobility, tolerance and magnanimity. But it was not only the commendable act to which he drew my attention. He showed me that wrong-doing was usually the result of weakness, and we spoke not of bad men and good men but of weak men and strong men. I learned that the strong should have compassion for the weak, that the strong were themselves susceptible to moments of weakness and the weak at times showed surprising strength. We searched for exhibitions of strength in the weak characters of history and these always led us to wish they might have had the help they needed in their times of weakness.

"Then Grandfather would point out distant objects to me from the plain, the hill top and the valley, and afterwards we came upon them from different angles. In this way, with his help, I learned the meaning of 'point of view' and also the wisdom of suspended judgment.

"Those summer experiences were a wonderful antidote, Mother, for the poison of a feud. I guess we fellows take most of the good things that come to us as a matter of course, but I really have been grateful for my grandfather."

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