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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
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CHILDREN'S FEARS

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

"All the progress made by our race has been accomplished by those who were not afraid--fear always cramps and paralyzes."

It is said that the human race is characterized by an instinctive fear of the unknown, but John B. Watson tells us that the new born infant is afraid of only two things: loss of support and loud noises. How then did the fears of our boys and girls get started? How can fears be prevented? How if once started can they be destroyed?

The attached articles will throw a little light on all of these questions but they will not solve the problems that make us ask them. Tireless patience, an experimental attitude, understanding without sharing and gentleness without pity will be needed for that. Ridicule, of course, is of no use whatsoever.

"The Newcomer", by S. E. McCahey, illustrates the paralyzing effect that a succession of new situations will often produce in a child, and most of us have seen and many of us have experienced a similar effect from over severity. Prof. Gruenberg says, "We call upon courage when we want something done; we resort to fear when we want to prevent action. We make use of fear as a cheap device for obtaining immediate results from our children."

Below are some thought provoking questions based on suggestions by Dr. Lois Hayden Meek, in "How Children Build Habits". They are well worth taking plenty of time to consider.

1. How does a child become afraid? Make a list of the fears that children learn.

2. How are the fears of children effected by the behavior of the adults in the home? How can this effect be used to prevent fears in children?

3. What are some of the preventive measures that can be used to keep children from acquiring fears? Consider each fear in the list you made, and suggest means of preventing each.

4. How does increased knowledge and understanding of a situation help children to overcome fears? Give an illustration.

5. Should a child be pushed into the water if he is afraid of it? Should he be made to go into the dark or to stay in the dark if he has a fear of darkness? What effect is such treatment likely to have?

6. What value has direct action in destroying fear?

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7. Explain how a fear may be overcome by associating a pleasant experience with the fear situation.

8. Make a list of principles underlying re-education that must be taken into account when attempting to overcome children's fears.

TERROR HANG-OVERS FROM CHILDHOOD

Manthei Howe

The women were grouped about the tea table. The talk had drifted to "fear". One of the younger women turned to Grace Maitland, a beautiful white-haired woman.

"Miss Maitland, did you really stay out in the woods in your camp, alone Did you walk along that beach alone at eleven o'clock at night?"

"Why of course." Miss Maitland deftly broke her slice of cinnamon toast. "I have done that many times; I have never been afraid, in that way, in all my life."

"I'd die of fright before I got half way to camp, let alone staying there by myself all night," shivered the first speaker.

Thelma Thorsen, a well known musician, set her teacup down thoughtfully. Her eyes were hungrily envious as she stared at Miss Maitland.

"Do you know," she remarked, "I think that would be as near heaven as one could hope to get on earth--to have no fear. Not to fear the dark, not to fear silence, not to be dependent on other people, just NOT to be AFRAID. It must be truly wonderful. I confess I envy you."

Miss Maitland was surprised and a bit abashed before the intensity of feeling displayed by Thelma Thorsen.

"You probably are just as unafraid as I, Thelma" she replied a bit lamely. "You've never put yourself to the test."

"Oh, but I have!" exclaimed Thelma. "That's why I know! All the while I am suffering from fear because of the dark I know perfectly well that I am being silly but I can't help it. That fear is stronger than I; It is a terror hang-over from childhood. There was an older girl who used to tell me that ghosts lurked in the dark and that they tapped on the windows. Since then I've learned that those ghost taps, the dread of which from that time on made the darkness intolerable to me, were but the rattling of dry branches against the window pane. My mind has long known the explanation perfectly well, but to this day if I am in a dark room and hear a tapping sound, my heart jumps into my throat and I am shaken with terror. Then, instead of being punished in a rational manner when I did wrong the threat was held out to me that the brownies would take my best doll if I misbehaved or the Snickerbosh, a fictitious bogey in our household, would get me."

Thelma Thorsen's blue eyes were cold as ice as she related those memories of a terrified childhood. "My mother," she continued, "probably meant to be kind; she was 'tender-hearted' and did not have the courage to exact obedience except by such threats. She never knew what torture she inflicted, but I have never ceased to suffer from the effects of her method; my childhood was fear-ridden; and my life today is less efficient and worth while because of it."

"I think it is due to my mother's wiser method that I have never known fear," replied Miss Maitland quietly. "My mother was one of the bravest persons I ever knew. She had no fear of mice, lightning, dark, tramps nor any of the dozen and one bogey-ideas that most women have and pass on to their children, nor would she permit anyone to frighten us."

"Lucky you," smiled Thelma tremulously, as they gathered up gloves and purses.

TAKING TIME WITH A CHILD

Mary S. Stover

A dear woman of my acquaintance spent her childhood amid pioneer conditions in the Canadian bush. As the family sons were all daughters it soon became her task to bring home the cows pastured fully a mile away.

One afternoon, as she was running down the brush bordered lane which was the last of her route, the child saw what appeared to be a very strange animal with downbent head and terrifying horns. She stopped and watched from a safe distance, but it remained in the same menacing attitude at the side of the lane.

If there had been some other way to reach the cows and drive them home, Laura would have gone on, but she felt that no little girl ought to get any nearer to that peculiar creature. She ran in panic to the place where her father was at work.

He assured her that there were no dangerous animals about and said she must have taken fright at one of the steady old cows. Laura couldn't believe this, she was certain it was some monster very different from anything with which she had had to do but of course it might have gone away, so she dutifully started back.

The creature had not left the lane, and the early dusk made it appear even more formidable than before. Back she ran in tears. This time the father left his work, took the child by the hand and, talking calmly, led over the whole way again, so that she could see with her own eyes how harmless was whatever had frightened her.

It proved to be just a dead tree that the child had daily passed in unconcern till something in the atmosphere of this afternoon, or the angle from which she first caught sight of the gaunt old ruin, stimulated the young imagination to transform it into a frightful beast.

In her womanhood, Laura cherished this experience as one of the most precious memories of her father. He was a somewhat stern man, preoccupied with his tasks, exacting, if judged by modern standards, and she knew what it meant for a farmer to leave his work and patiently walk a mile beside a frightened child.

Yet for him to have gone after those cows by himself would not have meant nearly as much. A man who did that would be likely to say: "You were scared of just an old dead tree!" Such a statement, no matter how kindly given, back in the home kitchen, would have bruised the child's spirit. There is doubt if it could have fully convinced her.

Taking time with a child in need is a far more valuable service than investments of time, patience and effort merely given for him. What skill is

required to impress the ordinary child with the importance of anything that is merely done for him! Whereas the kindly service undertaken with him to meet a felt need of his wins both immediate and lasting appreciation. Wise, therefore, is the parent who is not so cumbered with much serving of a material sort as to fail the boy or girl in acts of comradely helpfulness.

CHILDISH FEAR
Edith Lochridge Reid

"You'd better behave for that policeman's looking at you - he grabs little boys that cry." So spoke Donald's mother when her small son was making a scene because she didn't have a penny to let him get some candy from the slot machine while they were waiting for the street car at the corner. Less than a month later Donald got separated from his mother when they were watching a street parade. A blue-coated officer attempted to help the child locate his home and parents but Donald was so terrified to have the policeman touch him that he almost had a spasm. The nervous shock of feeling he was in the power of the man he had been taught to fear left him half sick.

One only needs to walk the streets of any city for a day to hear similar remarks by parents. "The conductor will throw you off the car," or, "See that man watching you -- he'll chase you with his cane," these are typical expressions to quiet or frighten children because the parent is too weak in discipline to control them in any other way.

Recently a doctor remarked confidentially in describing the trouble he had encountered with a frightened child, "Some one ought to wake up mothers to the fact that it is very serious to have a child fear the doctor. This child today had been taught that I carry terrible things in my black bag for children that coax for rich desserts and fall out of trees because they disobey. She raised her temperature several degrees fighting me off."

And this case is only one of many. I heard a mother say to a child that was impatient about staying in bed for the necessary time after an attack of measles, "If you don't mind I'll send you to the hospital and the nurse will come along and strap you right in bed and not give you any dinner."

How much better to have read to the restless tot or planned surprises for her or to have played a new record on the victrola. She should have willingly stayed in bed because she loved her mother and had been taught to respect authority rather than through fear of being sent to the hospital.

A threat to a child always denotes a weakness in the tie that binds that child to respectful authority. Why does a mother need to tell a child a big black bear will get him if he doesn't shut his eyes and go to sleep? Probably because she has managed his bedtime very erratically. Perhaps one night, he went at seven and the next night if the family wanted to go to a movie he trailed along and was put to bed at nine or later. Now, tonight, because there are guests and son must be disposed of summarily he is told he must go right to sleep or -- then follow the penalties that will come if he disobeys, all of which instill fear into his heart that lasts until he is old enough to become disillusioned and continues its ill effects indefinitely.

Can't we try to have our children do right because it is right, and not because they fear doctors, hospitals, officers and bears? Let us develop caution and judgment but not senseless fear.

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CHILDREN'S FEARS

Viola Woodville

Whenever you hear a mother say, "I nearly go wild when there's a storm, it frightens me so," you may be sure her children are afraid when there is wind or excessive rain.

A mother I know usually calls the children together when it rains and makes a pleasant occasion of the event. She shows them how the thirsty earth is drinking up the moisture and points out the reviving vegetation, if there is any green about. If there is not, she explains the phenomena of lightning and thunder, and interests the children in the origin of storms.

True, there are people who are supersensitive to atmospheric conditions, and there are others who have been in cyclones or have had unhappy experiences in storms; still, nervous affections are only increased by giving way to them and they need not be passed on to children.

Modern psychologists tell us that there are only three or four fears that are instinctive in children. The rest are instilled by parent, nurse, or other person. Take the fear of the dark, for instance. This fear does not appear until the child is over two years old. Then gradually he receives the idea that all sorts of things lurk in darkness.

He ought not to get the idea, but if he does he must be trained as quickly as possible to think differently. The same imagination that pictures the dark peopled with horrors can be taught to feel that it is a hovering wing that protects the little bird-child while he sleeps. Or if the child is older, he could have a flashlight by his bed to turn on when he thinks harm is near. Probably he will not use it more than a few times, but the assurance that he has it there will bring him tranquil sleep.

Fear of animals is not instinctive in children. If a mother boasts that she has a spasm when a cat comes into the room or that the sight of a dog throws her into hysteria, her children are likely to imagine themselves so affected. It is a pity to deprive children of the pleasure and training that comes with the care of pets. The mother ought to find some way to overcome her phobia if she has let it go so far, and certainly not pass it on to her children.

And then there is the world of mental fear that many children must live in - dread of displeasing parents or teachers, fear of punishment, fear of failure to make grades or to pass examinations. I knew a teacher who prided herself that she never scolded or punished her children, yet never a day passed that she did not threaten them again and again with failure in their work.

"I tell you, children, just as sure as you live you're going to fail in arithmetic. You'll have to study day and night or you'll not pass, Tommy Watkins."

And the poor little wretch did fail.

Some day all schools will be conducted on a basis of success instead of failure. Children will be given things that they can do, and tasks will be made harder as their capacity grows. But in the meantime they need not be frightened into failure.

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THE NEWCOMER

S. E. McCahey

"Come on! Come on in and listen to my radio!" but the scuffle that followed showed that the reluctant one had made his escape.

"He won't go into anybody's house--just runs home and sticks there -- well, let him!" and Robert Dunn slammed the front door in disgust as he entered his home.

"He's strange, Sonny, wait until he gets better acquainted," comforted his grandmother. "He came from the far west and is strange to our city and its ways." For wise Grandmother had already divined that the young stranger who came to their neighborhood some months previous had made a happy impression on her impetuous grandson whose friendly overtures were not meeting with the success he would have liked.

"He's the same with everybody, even Teacher can't make him talk," complained Robert.

"How can she teach him?" asked Grandmother.

"She can't. He just sits there and looks, and says never a word, and they can't keep the whole class back for him. They are going to put him in 'special'."

"Oh, I hope not! He is a bright boy and should stay with his grade." And the woman who had brought up three sons of her own and was now mothering this seven-year-old grandson, grew thoughtful.

A few minutes later she was in Mrs. Meyer's little sitting room explaining to the newcomer that the placing of her little son, Harry, in "special" meant a stop backward for him.

"I can't make out why he won't talk at school," said the mother exasperatedly. "He talks well enough around here, but in school, they tell me, he's dumb."

"What is the difference between his surroundings here and in Iowa?" asked Mrs. Dunn kindly, feeling sure that Mrs. Meyer would understand her interest.

"It was a farm there, and it's a city here, but he has always adapted himself easily to his surroundings in cities we have visited."

"There is a difference. You see he has been living here steadily for nearly a year and has been completely uprooted from his old life. Did he ever seem to be interested in any one thing to the exclusion of others in his Iowa home?"

"I never noticed. There were horses, cows, sheep, farm pets; he took them all casually enough. But, yes!" suddenly, "he loved his rabbits!"

"I've brought up three sons, will you lend me your little boy occasionally? You see, my Robert is fond of him, and they make ideal playmates."

"If you can make him talk and answer his teacher, I'll be grateful." said Harry Meyer's mother.

Robert Dunn was surprised at his grandmother's gift the next day -- a pure white rabbit with eyes as pink as a summer evening sky.

"What do you think, Grandmother? Harry is coming in to see my rabbit!" Robert burst out as he pushed open the door that night.

"He's lovely, isn't he?" asked Grandmother picking up the little white beauty and putting him into Harry's eagerly outstretched arms. "You love rabbits?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Harry sturdily.

"Did you ever own any?" asked gentle Grandmother.

"Yes ma'am -- seventeen -- and some hares."

"Oh," said Grandmother innocently, "is there much difference between a hare and a rabbit?"

"Course there is," said Harry eagerly, "rabbits are smaller and have shorter ears -- they burrow -- hares don't. Hares can run faster than rabbits."

"Oh," said Grandmother again.

Robert Dunn carried a note to his teacher the next day which read:

"Dear Miss Reid:--

Regarding your problem in connection with Harry Meyer, try 'Rabbits'.

Sincerely,
(Mrs.) M. H. Dunn."

"It's the funniest thing," confided Robert Dunn to his grandmother the following evening when they were alone, "Miss Reid asked Harry today how many rabbits he would have if he had five and she gave him five more."

"Yes," said Grandmother, "and what did he say?"

"He gave the right answer. 'Ten rabbits,' then she asked him how many he'd have if a boy took three rabbits away from his ten rabbits, and he said, 'Seven' but that if he really had ten rabbits and anybody took three away from him, there would be a fight."

AFRAID

Russell M. Coryell

Having had all the failings of children when we ourselves were young, we, as parents, determined to raise our boy to have none of them. In the first place we decided that he was never to know the meaning of fear. There were to be no imaginary wolves lurking in the darkness or under his bed such as we had suffered from in our childhood.

For the first three years of his life the word "afraid" was never used in his presence, or if it was, it was spelled so that he could not get a hint of its significance. Nobody was permitted to read "Little Red Riding Hood" to him or to jump out from behind a door with a startling "Booh!" He was put at a regular time in his little bed upstairs and left there to go serenely to sleep while his parents sat down below. Fine! It worked like a charm.

On his third Christmas, with our permission a doting aunt presented him with a gallant little rocking-horse -- mouth open as he strained at the bit and

nostrils spread wide and red to indicate his indomitable spirit. The boy loved it. He stroked it and petted it in an ecstasy of delight. He patted its back and put his hand into the mouth to caress the red tongue and the white teeth; and at this point the aunt felt she must add a realistic touch to enhance the child's pleasure and cried out with mock alarm: "Look out he doesn't bite you!"

There was a gasp from my little boy. His hand was snatched out of the mouth and he stood petrified, waiting to be bitten. The aunt laughed merrily. We parents assured him it was a joke and after a moment he went on playing with his wooden horse -- but still out of range of a possible vicious bite from the gaping jaws. Before Christmas day was passed the incident seemed to have been dismissed for good and all. But it wasn't. My young son soon learned that his toy horse would not and could not bite but he also learned that real horses do bite, and he gave them a wide berth on the street from that day on.

Then there came the night when he woke up screaming that a horse had bitten him, and from then on he associated fear of horses with the darkness. Other animals rapidly joined the ranks. It was useless to argue or explain. Fear is not a matter of logic. A single little sentence had startled fear into being but not all the sentences, however persuasive and reasonable, have been able to drive out fear. He is saddled with it until he shall reach an age when of itself it will go.

And until that time what are we two parents to do? How can we combat fear?

Some of our friends advise ignoring it; some of them advise discipline -- put him to bed, blow out his light and leave him alone no matter what the boy does. Make him face it!

We are not taking anybody's advice, however. Parents never do. We are pampering our boy's fear of the darkness -- at least so we are told -- by letting him have a candle burning in his room till he has fallen asleep. I tried disciplining him just once and was convinced by his panic-stricken screams that if I kept it up I should be branding the fear more deeply into him, perhaps, so deeply he would never get over it.

So I am pampering him, hoping to lead him by forgetfulness out of the dread clutch of fear. I know I can't discipline it out of him. I know I can't argue it out of him. But I have reason to think I am weaning it out of him, for the other night, when I was putting him to bed my boy said: "Blow out the candle, Daddy. I want to try sleeping the way you and Mother do in the dark."

So I blew it out and he went to sleep without a murmur.

I wish I could announce that from that night forth he never wanted the candle again, but that wouldn't be telling the truth. He wanted it the next night. I know, however, that the night isn't far off when he will again ask to have his candle blown out and that this will occur again and again until he has learned to prefer the darkness when he sleeps, just as his daddy and his mother do.

"FALLING -- FALLING"

By Martha Gallaudet Waring

This title, so familiar to students of the Mother Play Book, by Friedrich Froebel, is the introduction to a large subject. To those who wonder

that a man, as well as a philosopher, should have spent his time on a book of Nursery Plays, we have only to point out the deep psychology underlying each play.

The psychology of fear as an inheritance, an instinct, a symptom, as due to repressions, unconscious impression, "taboos" imposed from without, has been the subject of much modern psychological discussion, so it is well sometimes to go back to beginnings and look at it simply and from a practical standpoint.

"Better a broken arm than the fear of it all one's life," says Jean-Paul Richter. "Better still to have neither," says the Mother who considers every accident, and every disease that befalls her child a direct accusation that she had failed somewhere and somehow in knowledge or care.

"Falling—Falling" is a simple exercise for the tiny child, the Mother taking her supporting hands from the child and catching him again as he begins to fall, giving him the suggestion of support, freedom, and support again, before the feeling of freedom turns into that of fear. I have played this with all my children when they were getting their air-bath, to their great delight.

From this point may come the first important training of the early years, how to do things freely but without fear because one does them correctly and therefore safely. Show the little child how to lift his feet to avoid stumbling and tripping. Show him how to open and shut doors and drawers properly, and there will be no mashed fingers. Show him the danger of all openings like stairs and windows. Teach him to go carefully up and down stairs and there will be no need for gates and bars. Show him that banisters are to hold by and that stairs may be safely descended one foot at a time, and after instruction let him do it himself until the right movement becomes a habit. Caution should be taught from the start but never fear. A child knows no fear naturally and to teach it to him is a crime against nature.

A child of twenty-eight months was one day descending the stairs in the approved way when his hat got over his eyes and his feet slipped, but as he had been taught to do, he clung firmly to the banisters, and when we reached him was holding up his weight by one chubby hand, glad to be rescued, but not in the slightest degree alarmed for his safety, merely remarking by way of explaining his novel position "Baby boy's 'at on, got in his eyes."

The same little boy from this age up would sing himself to sleep in the dark absolutely without fear. He has been allowed to experiment in every possible way, under direction at first, then alone, and although a few unforeseen experiments have proved disastrous to property, he has fine use of himself and of material things.

This is the physical result, but there is much more to it than mere safety. His disposition is of the cheeriest. And he finds joy in everything.

THE TIMID CHILD

Mrs. Luther C. Smith

We all admire a boy who is brave and courageous -- one who is not afraid of football or in fact of anything -- but not all boys are naturally fearless. Sometimes this trait of character must be encouraged and cultivated.

I know a little boy who was naturally timid and shy -- afraid of the dark, afraid to climb, afraid of certain boys, afraid to play the rough-and-tumble games that other children played. He would come home from kindergarten day after day, crying, and when questioned, would say that the other boys had chased him. He often went around the block to avoid meeting some of them.

His mother realized that she must help him to cultivate courage if he were ever to be a self-reliant man. She taught him to defend himself when necessary. She told him not to begin a fight, especially with a child smaller than himself, but to stand up for himself when attacked. He learned this lesson slowly, but in a year's time could hold his own with the other boys, and, to his mother's regret, would sometimes even start a fight.

The fear of the dark she handled very carefully. When he was old enough to occupy a room of his own, for a time she allowed him to have a light in the hall near his room. Then sometimes she would turn out the light and always when he called would turn it on again for a short time. One night he surprised her by saying that he guessed he didn't want a light any more.

As he grew older, she bought him roller-skates, then ice-skates, anything that required self-mastery and control of the muscles. Next came a baseball and bat, and finally, though she disliked the game, a football. At first he would play with the ball only by himself; then one or two other boys were allowed to play with him; soon he had his regular team. Of course, this brought a lot of noisy boys to the yard, endangered the windows and spoiled the lawn, but it was worth it all, for it taught the boy valuable lessons, and he became almost fearless in the game and gloried in a black eye or a lame leg received while playing.

The first summer they went camping he was afraid of the water. His mother bought him a bathing suit and encouraged him to paddle along the shore. She never allowed the older children to frighten him or coax him beyond his depth. Gradually he came to like the water and though he has not yet ventured to swim, he has an ambition to do so.

This mother encourages and praises her son when he performs any act of courage and gradually but surely he is developing into a self-reliant lad. Moreover, she teaches him that the truest courage is shown in doing a thing, when occasion demands, even though one is afraid. This, of course, really is the highest form of bravery.

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The Agricultural Extension Service does not have any of these books.

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