

Understand the Child

By Dr. V. Rajagopal Raju*

IN THE PAST children have been regarded as miniature adults with similar thoughts, feelings, emotions and desires, only on a more limited scale children were therefore treated as adults and expected to behave accordingly to adult standards. It was a very wrong conception. The children are as you know are different from adults physically, mentally and even emotionally. Even among children no two children are alike. Even identical twins are not the same. Each child has got its own physical and mental make up quite different from others. In other words each child is a distinct individual, i.e., each has a distinct personality.

By personality we mean the child with all his physical, emotional and intellectual peculiarities tries to realise happiness and efficiency in the environment in which he lives. This is not something which a child develops entirely at a later age. He is born with a personality of his own which is developed further on right or wrong lines depending on the environment. You may see identical twins—one is placid and cries a little when it is hungry and easily satisfied. The other one brings down the roof even with a little discomfort or hunger.

For this personality to develop there are tremendous urges bottled up in the baby which are called RAW drives. Raw drives are basic materials for motivation and learning. These raw drives should be normally sublimated as years pass by if the environment is right. For example:

- (a) **Jealousy** is a normal emotion for human being. It is a self-protective device to better one's prospects.
- (b) **Fear** is another Raw drive, which should be sublimated to prudence and caution.
- (c) Similar **anger** is a useful protective mechanism if controlled properly.
- (d) **Stealing**: By this we mean taking away another's property without his knowledge. But a child does it, because it has no knowledge of rights of private property. If this Raw drive is properly sublimated when it grows as an adult, he will acquire lot of properties by fair means. Otherwise by foul means.
- (e) **Lying**: A small child cannot differentiate from actual happenings and imagination. Later when it could differentiate, it always speaks truth till it is made uncomfortable. Then environment and society sublimate it to diplomacy.

For development of personality on proper lines, certain basic emotional needs are to be satisfied. They are:

- (1) **Love**: Every child needs to feel that the parents love, want and enjoy him.

- (2) **Security**: Every child needs to know that his 'home' is a good safe place he can feel sure about.

- (3) **Faith**: Every child needs to have a set of moral standards to live by.

- (4) **Guidance**: Every child needs to have friendly help, i.e., how to behave towards persons and things.

- (5) **Acceptance**: Every child needs to feel that his parents always accept him, though they may not approve his actions all the time.

- (6) **Independence**: Every child needs to know that his parents have confidence in him and want him to grow up.

- (7) **Protection**: Every child needs to feel that his parents will protect him from strange persons and things.

- (8) **Control**: Every child needs to know that there are limits to which he is permitted to go and his parents will hold him to these limits.

Stages of Development of a Child

Before the birth there are 3 stages of development.

First Stage is from the moment of conception till the products of conception are fairly embedded in the uterine wall. This stage lasts about 3 weeks from the time of conception. The second stage is from 3 weeks up to the end of 8 weeks. During this period, all the organs of the body are being differentiated like, heart, lungs, brain, intestines, etc. The first two periods are the most delicate periods where even a little disturbance or damage to the foetal cells produce serious defects for the baby and often the products of conception are expelled. Many conditions which do not produce any illness or at least serious illness in the mother, damages the baby during this stage of the development. Even certain ordinary infections with virus, extreme changes in temperature and many drugs which mother generally takes and even excess of vitamin A, affects the foetus. No medicine should be taken at this period without consulting the doctor. The third stage is the period from the end of 2nd month till the delivery; during this period the baby grows mainly in size.

After birth, there are seven stages of development before a child could become a mature adult. They are not water-tight compartments as one stage merges imperceptibly into another. However, there are predominant characteristics which differentiate one stage from another and it is better for us to know that for proper understanding of the behaviour of the child and for guiding him.

The first stage is the new-born period. This lasts for a month from birth. This is called a period of 'Biological Helplessness'. During this period, baby must get used to breathing, as in utero, oxygen was directly supplied to its blood from the mother's blood through the placenta. Even food has to be taken through mouth, digested and then only enter the blood, while in utero, it was directly carried to the blood. Baby's control over its muscle groups are also very poor as he cannot move its limbs at will, even though it may be throwing about its limbs without any control. This is because the nervous system

*Director and Superintendent, Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children, Egmore, Madras-8