

Growing up with the Mother

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IN AN ERA when man is confronted with a complex, rapidly changing world and threatened by his own well-known capacity to use his discoveries against himself, learning to live in harmony with oneself and one's environment is more important than ever. But man has no inborn ways to interpersonal satisfaction. All the human traits that are called identification, empathy, love that extends beyond self-love, protectiveness of life, and resistance to acts of destruction must be acquired from growth-producing relationships and education in the earliest years. When problems at home and in other nations are so critical to man's survival, it is timely to emphasize again and again man's need to preserve the art of parenthood. Continued search must be made to find more effective ways to strengthen and support the family, where the most vital part of this art is learned. Only the healthy family can provide the warm, intimate and continuous relationships and individualized care which the human infant and young child requires for maximum protection of his human potential.

Before the children are born

The mother makes major contributions to the human organism's capacity for optimum physical growth, character development, parenthood and commitment to world citizenship. This does not negate the vital role the father plays in supporting his wife and his offspring, but mother and her care are highlighted because she is the organism's initial protector during the period of its most rapid physical growth. She is also the first person the baby will learn to relate to and love. All subsequent warm relationships will contribute to his ability to become emotionally close to others during childhood and then, in adulthood, to all mankind. The pattern for these relationships will already have been cast by the character of his initial relationships with his mother.

The quality of the environment provided by the mother's body determines the degree to which the inherited potentials of the embryo will be realized. The mother's body supplies the nutrients, warmth, protection and intimacy the organism needs to become prepared to adapt to life outside the womb. Well protected though the developing organism is in the womb, it can be affected by the mother's state of health and nutrition, by her age, by certain drugs, by some diseases she may acquire, and by her emotional state as well.

Prospective mothers and fathers contribute immeasurably to health promotion when they work together to make an honest appraisal of their interests, goals and capabilities for the assumption of the parental role. Determining when they are most physically, emotionally and economically ready to begin a family or to increase its size also reflects the couple's sense of responsibility to themselves and to others.

The expectant mother contributes further to family

health when she seeks care early in pregnancy and makes use of personnel trained to guide her. In her behaviour she manifests healthy self-love and protectiveness when she maintains her health with adequate rest, exercise and an ample supply of protein, minerals and vitamins. She can help herself further by sharing with nurses and other health personnel her reactions to the changes occurring in her body and emotional life as a consequence of the physiologically induced crisis she is confronting. Shared experiences can help expectant mothers to understand themselves and reduce their fears, and to prepare for active participation in labour, delivery and the gradual assumption of the mother role.

The physical and emotional changes that occur in a woman during pregnancy stimulate further preparation for parenthood. She becomes more closely identified with her own mother; she practices the skills in mothering she acquired during her childhood. She studies the mothering given and recommended by others, and she replenishes herself with satisfactions she had less need of before she became pregnant. She daydreams about the baby within her body, sharing her fantasies with her mate, and together they try to imagine the changes about to occur in their lives. The expectant mother and father often become acutely aware that their responsibilities are increasing.

Participation in a programme for continued family health supervision before the baby is born can help to lighten the load of responsibility the couple must carry when they become parents: it also makes support available to them during the crises which are inevitable in child-rearing. For instance, parents can share with health workers their problems, concerns and needs, and get help in coping with them. Health workers can also help by making health assessments with periodic examinations, by immunizing against disease, by teaching methods to prevent disease, by detecting body changes that require correction, and by anticipating changes in behaviour that will occur as the child's body and mind grow and develop. They help prepare parents to supply the guidance their child will require as he moves from one stage of development into another. They also help parents when the child becomes ill and, if other health services are required, offer guidance on how best to use them.

When parents protect their *own* health as well as their child's, they serve their child in other important ways. They provide a healthy model from which he can fashion himself. Through their experiences with him, parents also help him to learn the value of protective health measures. Furthermore, they contribute to his acquisition of self-respect which will sustain his motivation to protect his own health and the health of others when he becomes an adult.

There are other changes that occur while the mother's body is protecting and supporting the growth of the foetus in its most fragile, helpless state. Enjoyment and appreciation of her femininity is increased if she can depend upon her mate and others when she longs for such gratification. This helps to build up her ability to assume the mother role and helps her to maintain her composure. Thus energy is freed for