

THE DIFFICULT JOB OF PARENTING

There are many difficult professions in life. One of the most difficult jobs, however, is parenthood. Some of the most successful persons have failed miserably as parents, while the children of many “seemingly failures” in life have done very well. It is as if children turn out badly despite our best efforts, while other kids who are neglected and left to themselves often make it in the world.

This is not to say that neglected children have an advantage. It’s just that raising children can be so complicated that it presents a monumental challenge to even the best-educated and well-meaning parents.

When we become parents, we have the highest hopes for our children. We gear up to do everything that is good for them. We plan for the best education, the most favorable environment we can afford. We promise ourselves to spend lots of quality time and always be there for them. And we give countless hours and enormous amounts of energy to see to it that we follow through on our plans. In spite of it all, we often fall far short of our expectations. And when we do “fail”, we cannot understand why. We are left with regrets, frustrations and even a measure of bitterness.

One parent put it colorfully this way: “When my son was born I had hoped he would become president. Now, I will feel relieved if he does not become an ax-murderer.” Another said: “My parents spoiled the first half of my life, and my children the second half.”

There are thousands of self-help books about parents. I don’t intend this column to add to them. What I would like to do is tell you how hard it is to raise kids nowadays. Perhaps this will give a measure of comfort to you parents who have done your very best but are less than happy with the results of your efforts.

If you turn to the experts for advice, you will find many prominent persons who contradict each other. Some will advise you to loosen up the controls, the rules you have imposed for fear of stifling the child’s creativity. Others will say that you need to tighten up and not allow the child too much liberty. He must learn discipline.

There are those who believe that a smack on the butt is good medicine for the child who doesn’t want to follow while others will accuse you of child physical abuse if you lay a hand on him in anger.

Another impossible factor is that mom and dad are rarely on the same page. They often cannot agree on the how, what and whom of raising children. Consequently, they work at odds with each other and confuse the kids who keep getting mixed signals. This is why it is often a greater challenge for parents to agree on strategies to raise their children than it is to apply them.

Read what Sophie Freud wrote about this topic: “Not everything is possible. We must learn to respect impossibilities... the very idea that we are in charge of our own perfections, let alone that of our children, is grandiose and presumptuous. The goal of becoming a perfect parent carries the seeds of guilt, shame, disappointed expectations and defeat.

“I think on reflection, that it is possible to become a parent by tolerating, forgiving, and transcending imperfections, our own and those of our children. We shall become perfect parents by accepting the impossibility of such a goal.”