discussion aid for

"a healthy personality for your child"

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This Discussion Aid has been prepared for use by parent study groups with the Children’s Bureau bulletin “A Healthy Personality for Your Child.” Mrs. Marion L. Faegre, Consultant in Parent Education, Children’s Bureau and Dr. James L. Hymes Jr., Professor of Education, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn., collaborated on this material.
Discussion Aid for

“A Healthy Personality for Your Child”

Children’s Bureau Publication No. 337

The booklet, A Healthy Personality for Your Child, is concerned, first of all, with the point of view through which adults see the child. This point of view in turn is very much determined by how parents feel about themselves. It is within this framework of attitudes that the booklet presents its specific facts about child growth and some down-to-earth suggestions for living with children. Because of this setting—point of view first, techniques second—it is particularly desirable to have the booklet used as a basis for discussion.

When groups of parents meet to talk over the contents of this pamphlet, their own immediate concerns are what matter. The discussion will often be so spontaneous, enthusiastic, and free-flowing that there will be no need to inject questions to stimulate flagging interest or encourage more people to take part.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The questions below are included for use “just in case.” Inexperienced leaders sometimes like to feel they have something to fall back on, though they may not need anything, when the time comes. Whether you use them or not, some of them may arouse other questions in the minds of members that are of greater value as discussion material. You won’t find actual answers in the pamphlet to these questions. Each person who thinks about them has to arrive at his own answers, because his life experiences and his children are not like those of anybody else.
Infancy and early childhood

What are some of the ways in which babies show us they need affection? Describe some of the ways in which parents can show their love, above and beyond the caresses and expressions of affection that we ordinarily think of.

How might the way in which a baby's or young child's food needs are met influence his developing personality?

Describe some of the disguised ways we go after "what we need to live," like the little boy who pulls his new baby brother's hair, the woman who clamsors for more money to spend on clothes, furniture, etc. How does it help (if it does) to realize what is back of such behavior?

Describe instances of how a parent can "smooth the road" for a child without running into the danger of "spoiling" him.

Discuss the difference between "restlessness" and lively, energetic activity.

What are some of the things a 6-month-old baby can do? A baby of 1 year? What is happening in his body to make these things possible?

What are some of the "growth essentials" that we can all provide, even though our means may be limited?

Do we sometimes say, "I hate to see my children grow out of babyhood?"

What are some of the playthings a 2-year-old can make good use of? Some that he's not yet ready for?

What kind of things could happen to a baby that might make him feel the world was an enemy?

Mrs. Allen says she finds it very hard to express her affection for her baby. She is the quiet, reserved kind, and she feels embarrassed when she tries to show her love for her baby in such ways as singing to him. What can you suggest?

The Olsons' little boy, Paul, always expects to be kissed, patted, and comforted every time he falls down, gets a scratch, or has any other slight mishap. Neighbors think the Olsons are making him soft by this treatment. What do you think Paul is really after, since we know he's not hurt much?

Why do we so easily become exasperated when, as we say, a 2-year-old "wants his own way?" What is it in our make-up that tends to lead us to respond this way?

What are some of the "No's" we must say that relieve a child from feeling too much freedom?

Have you ever had the problem of grandparents showing preference for one child in your family? What did you do, or would you do, in a case like this?
Do you know people who have had to fit their life plan into someone else's dream—that of a parent, a husband or wife? Though this may seem to work out well, what does it mean to the person whose life is manipulated?

When one child is the kind who "plays it safe," and another the kind who "smashes against every obstacle," how can you treat them both right without seeming to favor the first over the second?

What are some of the things mothers need to think over carefully when considering whether to take a job outside the home?

Can you put your finger on things in your childhood that you think "watered down" your self-confidence? Things that probably gave you a great boost?

Mrs. Baxter feels there are handicaps in the way of making her son's present living a good experience. They live in a very small apartment, with 1 bedroom. Junior, 3, is put to bed in the parents' bedroom and moved to the living room when his parents go to bed. There is no yard for him to play in, and she can take him to the park only for a couple of hours on pleasant days. Can you suggest how she can lessen these difficulties?

What does a child tell you about his needs when he fires many questions at you, but shows that it's not really information that he's interested in getting?
What do you think 3-year-old Mary's mother should do when she finds Mary has made dots of lipstick in the pattern of her best bedspread?

*The middle years of childhood*

What are some of the things a child should have accomplished before he is really ready to start school?
What if a child shows no interest in learning skills with his hands?
How do you go about uncovering where his talents do lie?
Why is it important for parents to take part in community affairs during their children's first years at school?
Discuss ways in which a handicapped child (whether his handicap be deafness, cerebral palsy, or some other crippling condition) may be made to feel that he "belongs" in a neighborhood group of children.
What is your school doing to see that no child becomes discouraged, but that each has a chance to succeed in his own way? How can parents help in such a program?
List some of the good things your neighborhood or community furnishes for children. What do you see as further needs, as yet unmet?
Why is a child on the opposite side of the country, who is suffering disadvantages, as important in your child's life as one next door?
If there is some truth in the often-made statement that American women are too concerned over neatness and cleanliness, what are some of the reasons back of this?
Suggest ways in which children in minority groups can be helped in gaining acceptance by their peers.
Give all the reasons you can think of why a collection (of anything from match covers to paper dolls) can be important to a child.
Point out ways in which parents can strengthen a child's sense of accomplishment when his performance along some lines is not equal to his ambition. Discuss whether it is desirable to encourage a child to be "the best" in his group, in a school subject or in a sport. How can we be sure he gets a feeling of pride over accomplishment?
Why should parents feel good, rather than let down, when their children begin to show they no longer feel father and mother are tops in wisdom, and begin to pay more attention to what their friends think?
How can a mother and father keep from feeling left out at the age when gang loyalty is so strong?
Suggest some of the many reasons why parents and teachers need to keep in mind that each child is a unique individual, different in his needs from others of his age or sex.
Adolescence

What are some of the problems that come up because girls reach puberty earlier than boys do? And because some girls and boys mature early and some much later? What can parents do to help?

Why do you think adults are so often tempted to make fun of adolescents (the cartoons about "Emmy Lou" and "Susie Q" are illustrations), when underneath they feel real sympathy?

Arthur, 15, says he is ashamed of his home, though his parents think it is a pretty good one for people in their circumstances. What could be some of the reasons Arthur feels this way?

Perhaps your children never seemed to pass through the stages described in the second paragraph on page 19 of *A Healthy Personality for Your Child*. If not, did they show other behavior that seemed related to certain ages or steps in their development? If so, describe instances, and how they were handled.

What are some of the ways in which children “struggle to make their point,” that we are likely to resist?

Discuss some of the ways in which you have been trying to give your adolescents or preadolescents more freedom.

What are some of the things the adolescent has to accomplish? What are some of the ways in which he shows he is trying to accomplish them?

Why do adolescents feel the need to be in groups? What do they get out of such association with their peers? Suggest ways in which existing organizations can help adolescents form groups that will contribute to satisfying growth.

It has been said that all of us belong to “minority groups” of one sort or another. Describe ways in which you have felt this to be true of yourself.

Are there ways in which parents can help their older adolescents “care for others,” or must they learn to do this alone?

Suggest reasons why the “loud talk” and other attention-getting devices of the adolescent are often irritating to adults.

Describe situations in which you have gained more insight into and sympathy for self-centered persons by studying the reasons why a person resorts to this behavior. What are the lacks such persons must have suffered?

Explain how a person has “grown” when he is able to contribute to a fund for sufferers he never saw instead of taking a basket of food to a poor family.
SUGGESTIONS FOR
CONDUCTING GROUPS

The groups that meet to discuss how they can put into practice ideas about developing healthy personalities in children may be people who are in the habit of working together in this way, or they may have come together for the first time because of their interest in promoting these Midcentury White House Conference findings. Such groups may have an experienced leader, or they may be holding informal meetings at which different members take turns in guiding the discussion. Whether or not a trained leader is present, the aim of the group discussion will be the same. In general, the aim of meeting together is that everyone's ideas may be heard, and that more ideas, and more useful thinking may be stimulated than if each member merely read the pamphlet by herself, and let it go at that. Its purpose will not be to check on who has read the booklet, or how well, nor will it be to get agreement on specific ways of meeting what children do.

Although it usually helps to have someone in charge, to start and to steer the discussion, every member plays just as important a part as the leader. All have an equal responsibility to see that everyone gets something out of the meeting. All should feel free to bring up ideas that the pamphlet has started them thinking about, and some one of these suggestions will almost surely lead to general discussion.

Being a good group member (and the leader is one, too) does not necessarily mean talking a lot. Sometimes a person who contributes just one illustration, or tells how she feels about one problem, throws as much light on the subject as someone who enters in more often. Listening is a big part of a group member's role, and sometimes a leader who listens sensitively and sympathetically finds that the group members help more when she does not jump in too quickly or too often.

The questions that are grouped on pages 2-5 are set down not as a guide to be followed strictly, but merely as suggestions in case the group doesn't seem to know just how to start. There are as many ways of getting into discussion as there are groups. Sometimes one person will ask or say something of general interest, and others will quickly support it by comments of their own. If the contribution does not awaken in the minds of others concerns or interests of their own, they will change the subject.

If someone—leader or member—asks a question to start off with, there may be a momentary silence. People need time to organize their thoughts and put their ideas into words. The person who is leading shouldn't feel that it's necessary always to give a push at such a point.
Silence for a minute or two may be evidence that people are thinking. There will be plenty of time later to give an answer, or to restate the question, or to tell an incident that starts people giving their reactions.

If the responses of group members linger too long on one problem, it is up to someone in the group—not always the leader—to bring up a new question or idea. While groups tend to stick by the ideas that matter to them, group members have to be watchful to see that a small minority does not keep on one point so long that others lose interest. Mentioning to the group that each member should have a chance to take part before anyone makes a second contribution is one way of reminding more talkative members not to run away with the discussion.

_A “permissive” climate helps_

To create an atmosphere of friendliness and of interest in all ideas is a much more important part of a leader’s job than to try to focus people’s thinking on some specific point. Such an atmosphere frees people to think. People create this atmosphere more by their own feeling of relaxation and of genuine interest than by words. Sometimes it does help to show this interest by comments like: “That’s an interesting point... That’s an important idea... You’ve brought up a very real question.” Sometimes showing agreement is all that’s necessary, by repeating, “You’re concerned about what you should do when your youngster...” This leaves the door open for other members to give suggestions, and frees the leader from having to give “answers.”

For after all, that is not the job of a leader. She’s there to keep the discussion going and to draw members into it. She doesn’t assume she has more wisdom out of which to furnish a reply. So she calls on a member for help or she turns the question back to the group by asking how other members have met a similar situation, or if they have read anything that gives some clues. She can, if it seems desirable, turn back to the booklet and say, “Let’s see if something in here would help clear up that question.”

With the discussion going, the chairman tries to see that it stays on the track. A successful discussion is a step-by-step progression, not an aimless wandering. So she needs to watch the side trips and bring the group back to the subject by restating the question under discussion. Sometimes the person who is leading the discussion feels it desirable to break new ground. In order to bring up a new topic, she may want to use such questions as:

“This business of when to say ‘No’ to a child is a hard question for most people. Are any of you concerned with it?”
"The booklet talks a lot about going along with children and trying to adjust to their concerns. This opens up the question of spoiling children. Did any of you wonder about that?"

**Let feelings come out**

It is always helpful for the leader to be sensitive to parents' need for reassurance. The emphasis on young children and on the continuity of development in *A Healthy Personality for Your Child*, for example, may be a cause of worry to some parents in a group, making them feel "it is too late" for their youngsters. Instead of taking strength from the booklet to do what they can do now, they feel plagued by what they did not do yesterday. The leader can help by pointing out how ready children are to forgive parents' mistakes, when they feel that their parents are, in the main, back of them, cheering them on.

Other people, because of many pressures, may feel that to be good parents they have to be perfect. Still others may find themselves more able to see the various obstacles—lack of space, of time; inadequate schooling and housing and community life; disagreements within the family, etc.—than they are able to see the good things that they can do. It's possible for a group member or leader to bring out some of these good things by asking a question like, "When do you have your happiest times with your children?" and then encouraging people to suggest why these times are good.

Group members can learn to be alert to these various feelings as they are expressed either directly or indirectly in what people say. Once out in the open, the power of a negative or hopeless attitude to block thinking is often lessened. It often is good, then, to encourage their expression with some such comment as: "That's very real and a lot of people feel that way. Shall we stay on this for a little while?"

**Broaden the discussion**

Although most people talk first of their own children and react to the problems they are now facing, often it is a good idea to make sure that more than one age level is taken up in the discussion. When there is a lull someone can suggest: "We've been talking most about this one age level. Let's look at younger children, too, and at older ones." This is especially important if the ages of the children represented in the group vary widely. When time allows, taking this wider
view is one good means of getting a broader perspective, and perspective seems to be one key to a helpful point of view. Even if the members all have children pretty much of an age, it is an advantage to range over the whole period of childhood.

Or it may be desirable for the members to think about children of economic or racial or cultural groups that differ from their own. This may not come up spontaneously but most people do realize that their child does not grow up alone, in a vacuum. They may welcome being steered into thinking about the forces that affect other children directly, and then their own children indirectly. It may even be that this thinking will be the seed that, falling on fertile ground, develops into community action.

In the same way parents may not think immediately of the wider social conditions which also have a very great effect on how children live. Community resources, housing, recreation facilities, the temper of the times, are all of real concern to parents, even though such topics do not always crop up in a discussion unless someone makes a point of bringing them to mind.

Many parents have questions and reactions in the area of children’s sex interests but some find it hard to word what they want to say in a group. Sometimes by opening up this area, one person in a group can free others to bring out what is in their minds. For example, in dis-
cussing how parents develop in young children a feeling of trust, the
question might be asked, "Have you found that answering truthfully
questions about where babies come from adds to your children's feel-
ings that it is safe to ask you anything they like?"

The over-all goal

After taking part in any group discussion, each parent takes away
a different reaction. Sometimes the leader may want to ask someone,
ahead of time, to try to summarize at the end of each meeting what
has been done: the various points of view expressed, the points of
agreement and the points of disagreement. In some instances, the
leader, herself, may want to do this. Essentially, each person makes
his own summary inside of himself. And often, if the discussion in
the group has been very lively, the leader may feel that the time is
better spent in letting people have their say than in making a
summary.

Some will feel that they have learned some facts about children's
growth or have had their minds relieved by learning that certain be-
havior is usual at a certain stage. Some will have learned of ways of
handling problems that worked with one family that possibly they can
adapt to their own situation. Some will come away with a little bet-
ter understanding of themselves.

One goal, however, ought to be paramount in each meeting. The
discussion should provide those who attend with an experience in
which their concerns, their statements, their reactions are treated with
interest and respect. It should be one time when leader and group
members take seriously whatever is important to each person present,
and when both leader and group see to it that everyone who wants to
has a chance to take part. The discussion should have the effect of
saying to those who attend: "What matters to you, where you want to
begin, what you think is important, is the important thing. The
people here are the people who count, not some preconceived outline
of material or some other person's goal for his child."

Such a way of "living" together—for one meeting or three or six—
allows parents to experience, themselves, the general point of view
which pervades A Healthy Personality for Your Child. Meetings
conducted in this spirit might seemingly end up with less definite
accomplishment than others which follow an outline and focus on
facts to be learned and on answers to be listened to. There is a good
chance, however, that they will have a greater influence in freeing
people to find their own good ways of guiding their children to a
healthy personality.
How many meetings?

Many factors determine how many times a group will meet. Some may want to spend only one meeting on *A Healthy Personality for Your Child*, taking the whole point of view of the booklet as the target for the meeting. Other groups may want and be able to meet several times. Some may be interested in as many as six meetings, perhaps devoting each session to one of the six main headings in the pamphlet. Still others may find it more desirable to hold three meetings: one on the concerns of the child under 6 years of age; one on the school-age child; one on adolescents and the later years. Or, one large group may want to break up into three smaller ones to cover the different age levels represented by the members. A few groups may find that at the end of one meeting, a particular problem has been opened up which clearly should be explored more fully at the beginning of the next meeting, even if it does not fit under the headings of the booklet.

Following this part of the discussion aid are suggestions for additional reading related to each major age level. If possible, it's a good plan to have a supply of some of the pamphlets on hand so that members can buy or borrow them to read between meetings. Public libraries are very cooperative about setting aside a shelf of books for the use of parents' study groups.

SOME USEFUL MATERIALS

Pamphlets

In the following list, a few titles only from the list of each organization are given. The complete list of publications of each organization may be had on application.

Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 525 West One Hundred and Twentieth Street, New York, N. Y. 60c each.

Discipline.
Being a Good Parent.
Answering Children's Questions.
Children in the Family: Rivals and Friends.
Child Study Association of America, 132 East Seventy-fourth Street, New York 21, N. Y. Prices indicated.

Aggressiveness in Children. 25¢.


When Fifteen and Fifty Disagree. 15¢.

Committee on Mental Health of State Charities Aid Association, 105 East Twenty-second Street, New York 10, N. Y. Prices indicated.

Fundamental Needs of the Child. 25¢.


The Adolescent and the Family. 15¢.

Teacher Listen, the Children Speak. 25¢.

National Association for Mental Health, 1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Prices indicated.

Eating Problems of Children. 15¢.

You Don't Have To Be Perfect—Even If You Are a Parent. 20¢.

This Is the Adolescent. 10¢.
Public Affairs Committee, 22 East Thirty-eighth Street, New York 16, N. Y. 25¢ each.

Enjoy Your Child—Ages 1, 2, 3.
Three to Six: Your Child Starts to School.
How To Tell Your Child About Sex.
Comics, Radio, Movies—and Children.
Keeping Up With Teen-Agers.
Making the Grade as Dad.
How To Be a Good Mother-in-Law and Grandmother.

Science Research Associates, 57 West Grand Avenue, Chicago 10, Ill. 40¢ each.

Why Children Misbehave.
How To Live With Children.
Fears of Children.
When Children Start Dating.


Infant Care. (Children’s Bureau Publication No. 8.) 20¢.
Your Child From One to Six. (Children’s Bureau Publication No. 30.) 20¢.
Your Child From Six to Twelve. (Children’s Bureau Publication No. 324.) 20¢.

Additional pamphlet material is also available from the following organizations who will send on request their list of publications:

Association for Family Living, 28 East Jackson, Chicago 4, Ill.
Health Publications Institute, 216 North Dawson Street, Raleigh, N. C.
National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 600 South Michigan Boulevard, Chicago 5, Ill.

Books

This is a classic description of the needs of babies and their behavior in relation to the satisfaction of those needs.

The collaboration of two specialists produces this valuable guide.
This book bridges the gap between home and school, with clear explanations and genuine understanding. Lists many books and organizations to which parents can turn for help.

Our American customs and habits are compared and contrasted with those of other peoples.

Contributions from distinguished specialists in many fields make possible the wide coverage presented in this volume.


Describes the development of children up to adolescence, with practical suggestions for their guidance.

This pleasantly informal discussion carries very practical help.

The author understands not only children, but parents, too, which makes his informally presented ideas especially helpful.

Tells how young children can be helped to become a part of the social world they will grow up in, with special emphasis on play group and cooperative nursery school experience.

Films

Groups that meet more than once and which identify a problem area for discussion at a future meeting may make good use of films as a springboard for discussion.
The following films relate closely in general to the over-all point of view which is presented in A Healthy Personality for Your Child.
When planning to use a film, check with your local library, your State university film library, and your State departments of health,
education, and mental health. Often you may find that a film listed below as “purchase” or “rent” is distributed free by one of these agencies. In case the one you want is not available, write to the distributor for the rental price when the film is listed as “rent.”

**Angry Boy.** 33 minutes, sound, 1951. Purchase, rent, or loan. International Film Bureau, Suite 1500, 6 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago 2, Ill.

Describes how emotional conflict arises, and how parents and child guidance clinic workers can cooperate in removing the obstacles to healthy emotional development.

**A Child Went Forth.** 20 minutes, sound, 1942. Purchase or rent. Brandon Films, Inc., 1700 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y.

Shows 2- to 7-year-olds in a nursery camp, with a strong and wholesome emphasis on the child’s own urge to grow and his ability to make good use of the life around him.

**Face of Youth.** 28 minutes, sound, 1951. Purchase, rent, or loan. Wisconsin State Board of Health, 1 West Wilson Street, Madison 2, Wis.

Shows the way child guidance clinic workers, with parents’ cooperation, can encourage the development of a healthy personality in a child.

**Family Circles.** 31 minutes, sound, 1950. Purchase or rent. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Text-Film Department, 330 West Forty-second Street, New York 18, N. Y.

Shows how parents and teachers can help to develop children’s interests and talents.

**Fears of Children.** 30 minutes, sound, 1951. Purchase. International Film Bureau, Suite 1500, 6 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago 2, Ill.

Describes how overprotection may endanger a child’s chances of developing self-reliance and courage.

**Human Beginnings.** 22 minutes, sound, color, 1950. Purchase or rent. Association Films, Inc., 35 West Forty-fifth Street, New York 19, N. Y.

Includes the drawings of a group of young children showing their ideas about how life begins.

**Human Growth.** 20 minutes, sound, color, 1948. Purchase. University of Oregon Medical School, Portland 1, Oreg.

A group of seventh-grade children discusses a film on reproduction.

These last two films, taken in schoolrooms where children are learning about the part sex plays in life, provide an excellent background for parents’ exploration of how they feel about their ability to develop their children’s attitudes on this subject, and what they feel is the school’s share of the responsibility.

The need of teachers to realize how different two children in the same family may be is illustrated by showing what happens when there is lack of this understanding.

A Long Time to Grow. 35 minutes, sound, 1951. Purchase or rent. New York University Film Library, 26 Washington Place, New York 3, N. Y.

Shows youngsters in their many activities in a nursery school, but highlighting how children seek out those experiences which are important for them.

Meeting Emotional Needs in Childhood. 33 minutes, sound, 1947. Rent. New York University Film Library, 26 Washington Place, New York 3, N. Y.

Focuses on security and independence as two basic needs of children.

Palmour Street. 26 minutes, sound, 1950. Purchase or rent. Health Publications Institute, 216 North Dawson Street, Raleigh, N. C.

Warmly shows some of the basic ingredients of good family living which are not dependent on the externals of life.

Preface to a Life. 29 minutes, sound, 1950. On loan from State mental health officers and educational film libraries.

Three alternatives are presented, with the scales tipped in favor of living with children with sympathy and understanding.

The Terrible Twos and Trusting Threes. 20 minutes, sound, color, 1951. Purchase. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Text-Film Department, 330 West Forty-second Street, New York 18, N. Y.

Though its title is a little misleading, this film showing scenes in the home and in nursery school is reassuring and full of constructive ideas for parents.

To Live Together. 30 minutes, sound, 1950. Purchase or rent. Anti-Defamation League, 212 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Shows how an interracial summer camp contributes to children's understanding and enjoyment of one another.

Your Children and You. 31 minutes, sound, 1947. Rent. British Information Services, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Shows homes, parents, and children as they really are, and offers warmly sympathetic counsel on everyday problems from babyhood up to 4 or 5.