

The 15 causes of delinquency

(Continued)

groups and clubs—and “gangs” if you like. They see these things in adult society and they want the same privileges. They also find in group life a measure of security and stature which they can attain no other way in our society. Until this situation changes, responsible adults should see to it that wholesome, properly motivated group activity—all they want—is available to kids.

You would be shocked and dismayed to know what goes on in some of these clubs under the heading of “social activities.” We should have our schools, churches, and other public buildings open 24 hours a day to accommodate the needs of young people for a meeting place. And we should know what they’re doing—and provide direction as far as we can without defeating the purpose for which the direction is offered.

11. Idleness and Unemployment.

Teen-agers with “nothing to do” have a tremendous facility for finding trouble. How many of the difficulties which brought young people into my court started with a gang of idlers on a city street corner! Every effort should be exerted by parents—and by the community, too—to keep its young people constructively busy.

12. Lack of Religious Training.

It’s a strange anomaly that in this day and age of burgeoning church membership, so many of our young people have had practically no religious training. I consider this primarily the fault of the parents. Going to church once a week doesn’t constitute religious training.

Religion—whichever faith it may embrace—should be a living, vital thing. It should be part and parcel of the living philosophy of young people. Only in this way can it exert a powerful deterrent effect on juvenile delinquency. And only in the home can religious faith be made a powerful and exciting force in young lives.

13. Lack of Discipline in the Home.

I’ve had many a perplexed father tell me: “I can’t understand how my boy could go so wrong. I’ve always been a buddy to him.” My answer to that statement is: “Sure, but have you been a father, too?”

It’s all right for fathers to be pals with their sons—but they shouldn’t be

palsy-walsy. Discipline is the father’s province. He should exert it kindly and conscientiously, but firmly. The hard-nosed disciplinarian is as likely to get disastrous results as the father who doesn’t discipline at all. But there’s a middle ground that every father should strive for. It permits him plenty of latitude—and it does wonders for a boy. Crime prevention begins in the high chair—not the electric chair.



Juveniles account for nearly half of this country's major crime arrests.

14. Lack of Discipline in the Schools.

We’ve been carried away for too many years with some of the extremities of what is loosely called progressive education. In my opinion, it isn’t progressive to encourage undisciplined and frequently misdirected and wrongly motivated activity in young people who need the stabilizing feel of both discipline and direction. There should be no foolishness, no lack of consideration for other people’s property, no disrespect, no breaking of rules tolerated in our schools—anywhere, any time.

15. Lack of Love and Affection in the Home.

From 80 to 85 percent of the young people who were tried in my court came from broken homes! Who knows what leavening and constructive effect a little love might have exerted on these youngsters?

And this isn’t just true in physically broken homes, either. I remember one 12-year-old lad—the youngest in a large family—who was simply ignored at home, where the parents weren’t getting along but were still living together. He justifiably felt rejected, and one day he took more than \$100 from his father’s wallet and ran off.

He rented a cheap hotel room in the city and surrounded himself with new clothes and lurid comic books. When he ran out of money, he phoned his mother, decoyed her away from home with a promise to meet her in front of a school building, then went home in her absence and stole a revolver his father had hidden. The boy was seen carrying the gun and apprehended by a policeman. He told me that he planned to use it to get money.

This boy needed nothing more than some affection and understanding at home. A growing child should be able to wallow in love in his home—love from the parents for him and for each other. It’s difficult for delinquency to flourish in such an atmosphere. But parents who think they can lead one kind of life and expect their growing children to live altogether differently are deluding themselves.

It’s true that all I see in my work are young people who are socially sick—just as a doctor works mostly with physically ill people. I try to keep my perspective—to know that the overwhelming percentage of youngsters are good, solid, law-abiding citizens. And although this is true, we musn’t lull ourselves with this rationalization.

According to the FBI crime reports last year, young people under 21 accounted for almost half of all major crime arrests. And the crime rate among youngsters under 18 has increased 55 percent since 1952.

The answer to this alarming growth in juvenile crime must come from individual parents, teachers, churchmen, and civic leaders who recognize the pre-disposing causes of delinquency—and then act firmly and positively to eliminate them in their own periphery of action. It can be done this way—and you can help. You must help.

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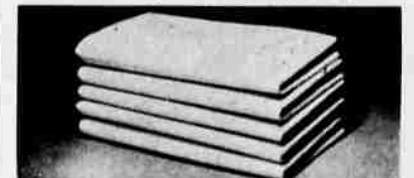
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