

The Family Council

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen and a newspaper editor. Each article is a summary of an actual report. The Family Council does not give advice; it merely reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and educators.

Martha S.—Nat should come to live with us. Mrs. E. J.—Children belong with their parents.

Martha S.—I am a young married woman with one child. My problem concerns my kid brother, who is 16 and living with my parents.

My mother is terribly upset about Nat because he has gotten involved with a married woman of 22 living in the neighborhood. This woman is separated from her husband and has two children. My brother visits her and spends the night with her.

I want Nat to come to live with us because I feel we can manage him better. My husband is fond of him and willing to have him. My father is an invalid and neither of my parents understand American ways. They came here 12 years ago and have never really adjusted. Nat needs understanding, but he can't get it at home.

Mrs. E. J.—In America, like any place in the world, children belong with their parents. Our children think we don't know anything, but we aren't so stupid as they think.

Our son has gotten mixed up with a bad woman. We have talked our hearts out trying to make him understand this. I know that soon he'll come to his senses. Right now this woman has a terrible hold over him. Martha would not be able to keep him away from her.

Martha thinks we want to keep him for selfish reasons—because we would be lonely without him. It's true we'd be lonely, but we'd make any sacrifice for his sake—if we thought it would be good for him. All Martha knows is to criticize us for not understanding America.

The Council: Apparently Martha takes a very dim view of her parents' competence and has made go secret of it. Naturally her parents resent it and feel threatened by her influence over their son.

It is too bad that the issue has been raised because too much is at stake here to allow time or energy for irrelevant squabbles.

We don't think that understanding is a monopoly of well-adjusted Americans, but we do think that a change of environment often brings about a shake-up in an individual's emotional state and mental outlook. When a 16-year-old becomes sexually involved with an unscrupulous woman, there is dynamite around the place and the far-

ther away Nat can be gotten, the better off he'll be—for the moment. Even if Martha lives in the same community, a temporary change of household might bring about favorable inner change.

Such a change, however, is far from the whole answer to this serious problem. Other answer may be found through an inquiry into Nat's over-all situation. This family should consider how Nat is getting along in school, whether he has any social life with his own age group, whether he has interests in sports, clubs, or hobbies.

Boys who meet frustration in school and who have few or no other interests are very likely to seek some expression, some sense of power through sex. If Nat is slacking in schoolwork, this family should see what can be done about bringing it up to par. They should encourage him to earn his own pocket money, to develop a moderate degree of skill in sports and to involve himself in some supervised group activity.

In general, this family should be aware that what Nat needs more than anything else is to find self-respect and confidence. These will help him build moral strength and a more sensible attitude toward his own life.

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