

Family Council

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Mrs. G.N. - I'm afraid Philip will run away again.

Mr. G.N. - He won't. He's just trying to scare his mother.

Mrs. G.N. - Our son is 11 and has just put us through an agonizing and humiliating experience. A few nights ago we received a phone call from a Traveler's Aid worker in Boston. She said, "It's all right. We have your boy here." We hadn't even missed him! He'd slipped out of the house after supper and bought a half-fare bus ticket to Maine. During the stop in Boston, someone got suspicious at seeing a little boy alone at midnight with no luggage.

Now that he's back, I can't rest easy. He's quiet and sulky. He says he wants to run away because we don't understand him. My husband laughs it all off. He punished Phil severely and told him to stop the nonsense. As a joke, he said he'd help him pack next time he felt like leaving. But I'm sure Phil is serious about it and I'd like to know why.

Mr. G.N. - Every boy tries running away at least once. I know I did. You just want to see if anybody misses you. You want to see what happens. Well, Phil saw. We had to wire the money for his return fare. We had to cash in the rest of his ticket, the Maine part. He caused a lot of excitement and heartache. And it took a good beating to make him say, "Never again." That's how it ended for me. And that's how it ended for Phil. His mother can forget about the whole thing.

Instead of being so alarmed that the boy may try it again, my wife should joke with him about it, even buy him a travel case. All he wants is to get a rise out of her and she obliges him with her worry. If she really comes down to cases, why should Phil leave home? There isn't one thing he lacks here. When he's older, I'll bet he makes a bee-line for home no matter where he is.

The Council: There are only two forces that can move an object from one point to another, either the attraction of the second, or the repulsion of the first. In Philip's case, we'd say he left home because it wasn't a home. A home is a nest, a shelter, a mending place. Philip didn't feel sheltered there.

Running away always invites a big Why. And the answer will not leap forth from a beating, from threats, from ridicule. It awaits the patient probing of a child guidance expert. Sometimes the answer is easy. A little child may run away as in a game. It's all hide-and-go-seek to him. But an older child is announcing his distress. This is his "public-address system."

Both Mr. and Mrs. J. speak of the anguish Philip visited upon them by his escape. They do not evidence much understanding of his own searing pain, of the emotional beatings he must have been taking right along, with no one to comfort him, no one even to listen to him sympathetically. Perhaps one reason he had to leave home was to remind his parents that he was still around, still of some importance. He wanted to be missed, and sent back for.

This was a desperate gesture on Philip's part, a cry for help. It should not be laughed off. Mrs. N. should follow it up by tracking down, with outside help if necessary, the problems gnawing away at this child. Psychologists go so far as to pronounce running away "a mild form of suicide." Here is a boy who considers himself tragically misunderstood and can't carve a direct path of communication between himself and his parents. Maybe in the beckoning outside world, he reasons, there'll be a listening ear.

Out of this contretemps some conservative attitude may emerge. Most important, these parents must convince Philip that they understand his despair. We, "case," they want to help him solve his problems. We love him dearly. And, of course, we don't want him to run away to join the boys, as his mother thinks.

8-11 PM. The Family Council is a weekly program of the Medford Mail Tribune. It is a summary of family disagreements presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

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