

WHAT I WOULD TELL A SON

Though he never married and had children of his own, the nation's No. 1 crime fighter offers this simple but inspiring credo for parents



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AS I PONDER the problems we find ourselves all but swamped by today, I cannot help thinking that the rules which prevailed in my youth would still work for boys and girls now.

The Hoovers, for example, were a close-knit family. My mother and father shared equally the pleasures and the responsibilities of one daughter and two sons. Our circumstances were modest; yet none of us ever wanted for any necessity of life—and those necessities were, then as now, affection and the security of a balanced home.

Our parents taught us to have a good time, but to do it without trampling on the rights or property of others. The boy who went astray in those days worried a lot more about the punishment he knew was waiting for him at home than about the treatment he might expect from the police, the courts, or other authority. How seldom is this true of "problem" youths today!

Make no mistake: my young friends and I were healthy, active boys. We had the same boundless energy and inquisitive nature that have marked young people since mankind began. Yet we kept out of trouble, and when we didn't, we were man enough to face the music.

Why? I feel there were two basic reasons: first, we came from well-disciplined homes where the same definition of right and wrong applied to all members of the family; and, second, we honored our mothers and fathers and respected their word because, by their unflinching example, they truly merited our honor and respect.

If I had a son, I believe I could help him most

by providing him with these five indispensables: a personal example to follow, an understanding of the importance of restraint and ideals, a sense of discipline, a pride in his heritage, and a challenge to meet.

Children certainly need an *example to follow*. I feel the most important lesson which my sister, my brother, and I received at home was the example set by our honest, hard-working parents. A plaque on our living-room wall summed up the whole thing. It read: "To command the respect of others, one must merit respect himself." Under this definition of responsibility, how many of today's parents can honestly claim the respect of their children? Certainly not those thousands who subscribe to the "do as I say, not as I do" philosophy!

As youngsters, we enjoyed life and the humorous give-and-take of healthy family relationships, but that was something far different from today's child-dominated "democracy," which all too often creates chaos in the home. Contradictions and inconsistencies never existed in our household because my parents took the long view: they felt that whatever "privileges" their adult years bestowed on them were inconsequential compared with the responsibilities of parenthood.

If I had a son, I'd think constantly about the part I had in helping him become a man. I would do my level best to understand him, to be a pal without being a pest, to encourage his boyish love of games and adventure, to direct him quietly to the right kind of friendships—those he would find, for example, in the Boy Scouts and the Police Athletic Leagues. I would not go out of my way to make life hard for him, but I would guide him to an awareness that life is not meant

to be easy and that the best rewards come from the hardest efforts.

We would not have a forest of rules to cramp our growing up together—this son of mine and I—but both of us would know the handful of expectations I had established because I loved him. And both of us would know I'd see to it that he fulfilled those expectations, or else.

To help him grasp that while life may be hard it is also rewarding, I would impose the gentle pressure of performing regular tasks well within his capacity at each age level. I would gradually increase my requirements and penalize him proportionately if he let them slide—until that welcome day when he would begin to put the pressure on himself.

Criminals Share a Common Fault

Above all, I would teach him to tell the truth—and I, in turn, would tell him the truth no matter how it hurt or embarrassed. Truth telling, I have found, is the key to responsible citizenship. The thousands of criminals I have seen in 40 years of law enforcement have had one thing in common: every single one was a liar.

In addition to setting a good personal example, I would also teach a son the importance of restraints and ideals.

Contradictions arise continually in the lives of teen-agers, for today our youth must cope with the specter of an adult world rife with inconsistency. To the youngster, adults often appear by their attitudes to be saying: "Ignore traffic regulations!" "Make your own rules!" "Cheat whenever you think you can get away with it!" To turn the screw harder still, there are the unreasoning demands of an often arrogant juve-