



If your philosophy is "everything for the kids," you're hurting them and cheating yourself, says this noted psychologist

By ROBERT D. WEITZ, Ph.D.

Consulting psychologist in private practice; former Chief Psychologist, U. S. Public Health Service, Midwestern Medical Center, St. Louis

as told to Lester and Irene David

left three Boy Scout troops because he felt "discriminated" against. He is a chronic complainer, heartily disliked by all the kids.

He may eventually rebel against his parents, with serious consequences.

A pathetic, but extremely revealing, incident occurred recently in a Midwestern courtroom. A 19-year-old youth stood before a judge and heard himself sentenced to a 10-year prison term for robbing a house of \$7,000 in furs and jewels. After the sentencing, the father asked the boy's lawyer: "But why? I gave my whole life for him. He didn't need money—why did he steal?"

A psychologist might have told him the boy's criminal behavior probably had its roots in his parents' very unselfishness. They did so much for him that he never learned to do much for himself; thus, feelings of inadequacy developed, which intensified as the years went on.

This feeling seethed within him and ultimately he took his revenge in a way he felt would hurt his parents most—by stealing. Of course, the youth was unaware of this reasoning, which took place in his subconscious mind. Psychologists call this "acting out" inner feelings.

Why do parents feel they must sacrifice themselves for their children?

One reason is that they feel it's "expected" of them. Society today approves of the couple who rearrange their entire lives to center around the youngsters in the family, and most parents are anxious to win this approbation.

Another reason is that a large group of parents, possessing more material goods than their own parents had, insist upon giving children what they themselves missed. "I want my child to have everything I couldn't have," they say.

Finally, a parent may act this way because his

or her own life is so barren, with few outside interests. So a life is built around the children.

But now the important question arises: What is the right kind of parental selfishness?

Parents must offer a youngster security from the outset in the form of *love*. But they have another obligation—to give a child separation at the same time. In other words, they must build two kinds of security simultaneously—the feeling of being wanted and the strength that comes from being able to act independently.

Therefore, I urge parents to keep these five things in mind:

Give your child independence from birth and the freedom called for by his age and experience.

As an infant, place him in a playpen or carriage outdoors, but alone. As a toddler, don't keep him locked in the yard constantly. Offer him freedom of movement, bearing safety factors in mind. The child who is closed in comes to feel security in the gate and will find it difficult to venture away. Later, he may not want to leave home for camp, college, or anywhere else.

Take vacations away from your children.

As a hard-working parent, you have your own need for rest and change. Satisfy it. Get over the notion that you must take the children with you *all* the time. Occasionally, yes—always, no! If you can leave them in competent hands, do so. The separation is also a conditioning process that will help the youngsters in later years.

Allow your child to feel deprived.

In later years, the world isn't going to gratify his every wish, so don't bring him up expecting it. It's amazing how many parents fail to real-

ize this simple law of life. How often, for example, have you done something like this: When Mark, aged 11, needs new shoes, mother buys him a pair and takes Robert, his younger brother, along. He, too, gets a new pair even though his are perfectly good. Mother, however, doesn't want Robert to feel bad. Robert should get shoes because he needs them, not because somebody else gets a pair.

Of course, an extra now and then doesn't hurt. I know that children want to have what "everybody else" has, so an occasional generosity is fine. But don't splurge on the unnecessary.

Do not give up your hobbies or outside interests.

Many parents put aside cherished leisure-time activities after children arrive because they feel they no longer have time for them. It's a grave mistake. Obviously, you won't have as much free time as before, but the interests should be kept up. Later, when the youngsters don't require so much attention, you will be grateful you did.

Keep yourself in mind, too, when there's extra money for luxuries.

In many homes, every dollar over and above necessities is earmarked for the children. The money may go into a college fund, savings for a wedding or dowry, clothing for the children, furniture for their rooms.

Save for the children, of course. But give your own needs at least as much weight. You've worked hard and you deserve them.

I cannot stress too strongly that the parent who gives his children everything actually fails to give them the most important thing of all—a deep-set strength to face the world as a confident human being.