

# Children Need Love and Consistent Discipline

by Lodie Fuller

*In my continuing experience with young people who are being detained because of a crime in which they have participated, I cannot help wondering about the circumstances that have led each of them to a penal institution.*

These incarcerated youngsters differ in age, appearance, attitudes, and backgrounds. But they have the unusual common bond of being in trouble and facing undetermined consequences for their behavior.

Some are accused of stealing, injuring, molesting, even killing; a few are being held only temporarily until their parents can be reached. Looking at their scrubbed faces, displaying various emotional expressions, it's difficult to comprehend the offenses they have perpetrated. They seem incapable, at this point, of any wrongdoing.

Some are repentant, moving in the mode of a scolded one waiting for Dad to come home. It may be a first offense and the entire process of confinement and lost freedom causes near panic in thumping hearts. Their vision would be of going home, finding forgiveness and getting on with their lives—vowing never again to consider an illegal path.

Another will swagger around the facility, hoping that an arrogant behavior and insolent attitude will hide any hint of insecurity, hoping he or she will seem tough enough to withstand any questioning or court determinations. Some detainees really are tough—tough and angry at the system. They do not say that they are through offending.

Other young inmates are getting even for injustices, real or imagined, and the very shell that they create to protect themselves from the pain repels attempts to counsel and/or identify helpful alternatives to their lifestyles. Frustration abounds for all who are involved in the effort to see that these troubled youth find their way safely out of this unfortunate situation and move on to maturity and happiness.

I find that nearly every child in these traumatizing positions, comes from a partially or totally dysfunctional home life, from a family structure that is less than stable, more than troubled. Some do not wish to return home, even though it would mean release from detention. Others long to be with their families, regardless of any drawback in that environment.

Most of us would rather not consider the possibility of ever finding our child or children in such circumstances. Have we contributed to the inappropriate behavior?

The most reasonable concept that emerges from collected data is that for children to grow up safely, with a high degree of respect for themselves and others, they must experience from infancy, a sense of unconditional love and consistent discipline. They must begin life without fear of abandonment, combined with knowledge and understanding that there are limits and guidelines to abide by, in order to make their lives comfortable. A sound set of values gives

children a sense of worth and security that remains with them through each year of their growth and transformation.

How quickly toddlers learn the meaning of hot! Though they will continue to approach taboos, they find great joy when they remember the rules, comply and share pleasure with those who established the boundaries. Small examples accumulate and form a pattern of positive responses from parent and child, creating an atmosphere of acceptance and stability for both.

As long as all discipline is accompanied by love and respect, a child grows and matures with an inner sense of self-esteem, a belief in order rather than confusion and chaos. With that mindset, growing pains are less severe and the evolving young person can usually set realistic goals, envisioning the joy of the future while aspiring to meet those goals.

When peer pressures, temptations, and forceful emotional drives come into play, they can be dealt with more easily by a secure adolescent who has healthy self-esteem, confidence, and tolerance for the negativities that will inevitably cross his or her path.

When a young mind decide that it's time to experiment, test and question the parents' roles in his or her upbringing, that loving guardian has the opportunity to mold and guide a young person toward a successful, productive, and rewarding lifetime. It's a sober but joyous responsibility.

Lodie Fuller, a free-lance writer and relaxation therapist, is an ongoing student of child/parent psychology. She has volunteered as Skipworth Detention Center for more than 10 years, working with troubled youth.

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