

FOR THE PARENT  
FOR THE PARENT'S CHILD



# TEACHING OUR CHILDREN

BY JOEL MACHT

# Teaching Our Children

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# Teaching Our Children

Nature gives to us her long-awaited production, placing him into the outstretched hands of the child makers. She gives her child to you, for you are THE CHILD MAKER. You are the representative of every human being, for all of us are makers. Each helps to mold, shape, strengthen, and weaken Nature's product, for whoever touches the child—be the touch warm and comforting or distant and restrained—affects the making.

*Joel Macht*

To

Randy, Jobi, Kim, David

Carole

Eunice and Milton

Manny and Martha

Phyllis

Jimmy

Charles

and . . . Bea

# Preface

This is a book for parents, parents to be, for children, and their teachers. Its sole purpose is to present ideas about how to teach children many types of behaviors. Its content will help you bring about some of the behaviors you believe appropriate for your children. Additionally, it will help your children to bring about some behaviors they desire from you.

It would be impossible to thank everyone connected with this book. So many people deserve more than my warmest recognition. I offer special appreciation to Drs. Lee Meyerson, Nancy Kerr, and Jack Michael, who helped me get my feet wet. I am grateful to Dr. R. Keith Van Wagenen for guiding me through a period that was not always pleasant for him. I thank Barbara Holzer and Don L. Wallin, who did much more than they will ever realize. And, the deepest of thanks to Kara, her parents, and again, Dr. Meyerson, all of whom gave me the opportunity to try to help.

*Joel Macht*

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# Introduction

Picture, for a brief moment, a friendly octopus. His arms are stretched in many directions. Each arm serves its purpose—providing substance for the body. So it is with psychology (not the most appetizing analogy, I suspect). We, too, have many arms or areas of interest. We investigate different ideas with the intent of providing the field of psychology with knowledge. Our arms, at times, disagree with one another. Some even try to deny the existence of others but, since we are attached to the same body, we all keep hanging around. Interestingly, we all, for the most part, have a common goal—that of helping.

This book will offer you ideas representative of one arm of our field. There are others, but I will confine myself to one because of my belief in it and my strong conviction of its effectiveness. I know that in a short while, you will see why I believe so strongly in it.

In the last 30 years or so, we have learned a great deal about human behavior. In my view, these last 30 years have been as productive as the preceding 100 years. One reason for the rapid growth of knowledge in the field of behavioral psychology is the way psychologists are now looking at human behavior. We have learned that under certain real-life situations, human behavior follows lawful patterns. This means that we are getting better at predicting when and why certain behaviors occur.

## 2 Introduction

We are obtaining a clearer picture of some of the determinants of behavior. Finally, we are learning how to deal effectively with many of these determinants, and we are able to literally change behavior.

Psychologists are in the process of developing a technology of behavior. It is this technology on which the present book is based. This technology is emerging as a result, in part, of the work of such eminent researchers and scholars as Drs. B. F. Skinner, Donald Baer, Mont Wolf, Lee Meyerson, Gerald Patterson, Ogden Lindsley, and many others. Their work has enabled so many parents, teachers, and hospital personnel to make life better for an equal number of other parents, teachers, and children. This last statement is at the heart of the technology. Without question, one of the basic goals of behavioral psychology is to help people enjoy life more fully. For many, this goal has been accomplished. I do not wish to leave the impression that all behavioral problems have been solved. One quick look in any daily newspaper would certainly suggest otherwise. I do, however, wish to share with you my own optimism. Hopefully, by the conclusion of this book, you will share it with me.

You will realize one very curious thing about this technology as soon as you begin reading the main content. Much of what you and I will talk about is not at all new. You will recognize many of the suggestions, and you will undoubtedly say, "I've been doing that for a long time." Rest assured, your statement is correct. In fact, much of the information in this book has been known for thousands of years, and many parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents have been using it successfully for at least that long.

You may not agree with everything that is suggested, and that's fine. Most of us have very strong opinions and feelings about teaching and bringing up children, so disagreement is not only expected, but healthy. It is from disagreement that many new things are learned. Quite honestly, however, I will try to sway some of your opinions. I will attempt to convince you to try some ideas that you have perhaps never tried before. I will omit, whenever possible, such words as "right" and "wrong." Instead, I will tell you what will happen to a particular behavior when you do A or B or C. This will put you in a better position to decide what you believe is best for you and your child.

Ultimately, the purposes to which you will use the information provided in this book is in your hands. This technology that we will talk about is powerful. That is not meant to be an overly dramatic

statement, but a realistic one. Personally, I have never set out to help parents change their children's behavior without first looking and discussing the potential long-range effects the program will have on the entire family. Please consider this last statement when you begin to develop a program for you and your children. Sometimes hastily thought out programs yield fruit that is not sweet. I will help you to avoid the lemon tree but, to do so, I will need your assistance and patience.

I have written this book with the hope of answering one question. Are there things you can do to make it easier to be a parent and more fun to be a child?



# It's What Comes After That Counts

Thank goodness for Momma! Those were my exact words. I was sitting in the kitchen with my 22-month-old daughter. I had just made her an egg, which she refused to eat. She wanted a cookie. My seven-month-old son had just awakened from a nap and was softly crying in his room. I left the kitchen to get my son—which did not please my daughter. She still wanted her cookie. “I’ll be right back,” I said to her, wondering out loud if she understood what I had just said. I brought David into the kitchen and placed him in his chair. He was still crying. One of my senses told me he needed changing. “What should I do first,” was the thought that came to mind. Where is the rightful king of the family? She was taking a shower. A door closed, and the sound brought a sigh of relief from me and the word “Momma” from my daughter. Thank goodness for Momma! It took about five seconds (seemed like five hours) for Momma to appear. During that brief period, my daughter once again reminded me of her desire for a cookie. I had forgotten. “Okay, stop your crying, I’ll give you a cookie.” It’s amazing how a cookie in the mouth puts a “stop” to crying. Now that Momma was in the kitchen, peace and quiet returned. Quite suddenly, I began to laugh. My wife asked me what was so funny. “Do you realize what I’ve just done? Here I am writing a book on how to bring up children and I have just done something my readers have been advised

against doing. I just gave Kim a cookie so she would stop her crying and all I did was to *tell* her to cry the next time she wants another one.”

What I have just described—and it happened—is an honest admission that even those of us who think we are authorities still make mistakes. We accidentally teach our children to behave in ways other than what we really want. But let's face it, when you are by yourself with two crying children, knowing what to do and doing it can be worlds apart.

Most parents have experienced the same thing. Fortunately, these mistakes are made only occasionally, but we still teach what is desired. As we will see, we must try to keep our slips to a minimum. Otherwise we make our jobs as parents doubly difficult. In the above example, the chance was increased that my daughter would cry the next time I failed to give her what she requested. I didn't mean for this to happen, but my intentions did not matter too much. What was important was the way I responded to Kim's behavior.

Our child's behavior is greatly influenced by the way we react to what he has done. Our reactions help to determine whether our child will repeat his behavior or whether he will do something different. This statement is a very important part of a principle of behavioral psychology. The principle states that a behavior is influenced or affected by how the environment—people, places, and things—immediately responds to the behavior. Perhaps without realizing it, you have used this principle many times. On the occasion when you told your child what a good boy he was after he cleaned up his room, you used the principle. When you sent your child to his room for fighting with his brother, you used the principle. When I gave Kim a cookie after she started to cry, I used the principle. In each of these examples, a particular behavior occurred first—cleaning up a room, fighting, and crying. In addition, there was a reaction to each behavior—the child was praised, sent to his room, or given a cookie. By these actions, we have influenced the previous behaviors and have helped to determine whether those behaviors will occur again in the future.

### *Cooperation Between Mike and Patty*

It seemed that Mike and Patty's playtime always ended up with Patty crying. It wasn't that they fought with one another, but whenever Mike started playing with a toy, his younger sister would grab for it. A tug-of-war usually developed with Mike being the winner. It was at that

point that Patty would begin to cry. Mother's reaction was to take the toy from Mike, explaining to her son that since he was older, he should let his sister have the toy. There was little cooperative play between the two children, and Mother felt that something had to be done before Mike's feelings toward his sister became worse. A decision was made by the parents to try to teach their children to play with one another and to decrease some of Patty's crying.

For the next two weeks, Mother made a special effort to watch the children very carefully when they were playing. At the first sign of any sharing of toys or mutual play with a toy, Mother would immediately go over to the children, give them both warm hugs while telling them how good they were being for playing together. Occasionally, she would give each of them a cookie while they were playing together, again telling her children how happy she was to see them having such a good time.

When a situation arose where Patty attempted to grab one of the toys Mike was playing with, Mother would immediately walk over to her daughter and calmly tell her that she would not be able to play with any toys if she continued to grab what Mike was playing with. Sometimes this statement was enough, and the children again began to play together. When this was observed, Mother would immediately praise both children. When Patty began to cry, she was quietly taken to her room—where there were very few toys—and had to remain there until her crying stopped for about two minutes. When the crying did stop, Mother returned Patty to the toys in the family room. At the first opportunity, Mother praised both children for playing together.

As soon as Patty realized that her crying would no longer bring her a toy, the crying almost completely stopped. She and her brother learned that it was much more fun to play together than to fight over a toy. Cooperative play occurred more often each day. The children learned that their mother would respond to them in a very pleasant way when they played together nicely.

Although Mother was not aware of it, she was using the principle all along. Unfortunately, she was not using it to the benefit of herself or her children. Initially, she reacted to Patty's crying by giving her the toy. Mother was unintentionally increasing her daughter's crying by reacting to it as she did. When Mother changed the way she responded to her daughter's behavior, her daughter's behavior changed. Now

cooperative play brought Patty what she wanted—the toys and a lot of praise and affection.

It appeared that the entire family benefited from the change. Certainly, Mother's job was made easier ("easier to be a parent . . ."). There was much less fussing between the children, and Mother had much more time to do what she needed to do. Additionally, the children were taught how to have more fun with each other (" . . . and more fun to be a child."). Interestingly, the children began to do many more things together—to the delight of their parents. For this family, the goal of this book was accomplished.

Change does not always occur as rapidly as it did with Mike and Patty. Quite honestly, sometimes change does not occur at all. Without the patience and cooperation of their parents, Mike and Patty would probably still be having their tugs-of-war. The parents, in one sentence, had to look at what they were doing. Dr. Donald Baer, in a foreword for a very fine textbook<sup>1</sup> for teachers, has written:

"To paraphrase a hero of our folk mythology, Pogo, 'We have met the causes of our behavior, and they is us.' We can (change) those causes and thereby change some behaviors." (Parentheses are mine.)

<sup>1</sup> Beth Sulzer and G. R. Mayer, *Behavior Modification for School Personnel*, Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, 1972, p. vi.



# Getting Prepared

Parents as teachers of a child's behavior is far from a new concept. The teaching role begins from the moment Nature gives us our children. All of us have taught and are presently teaching our children to do or not to do many things. What the very young child learns is almost exclusively what his parents teach him. As he grows older, others begin to take part in the teaching task. Sometimes what our child learns is exactly what we have intended to teach him. Other times, we are not so fortunate. Accidental or unintentional teaching is quite common and, in many cases, the sources of the accidental teaching are not the parents. But accidental teaching can be undone, as well as being avoided. Let's see how.

How well do you know your child? Silly question? I'm not certain. I think you might be quite surprised. Try this suggestion. Take a few hours over the next two or three days and just sit back and watch what your child is doing. You don't have to look for anything specific—just be an interested observer. Watch him during the early morning hours, midday, early afternoon, late afternoon, dinner time, and finally at bedtime. Develop the habit—if you don't already have it—of looking at what your child does. It is critical that you catch your child doing something good. In order to do this consistently and effectively you are going to have to know what he does—both good and not so good.