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Our Children: Recommendations from the White House Conference on Children and Youth

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Our Children

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE:
A GROUP WITH A PURPOSE

The White House Conference on Children and Youth has adjourned but uncounted roads of exploration and study remain. Decisions must be made and action initiated. The significance of what was said and done will grow only as individuals determine and act for family and community betterment. Never in our history has it been more important to strengthen our free society.

The purpose of the Conference was "To promote opportunities for children and youth to realize their full potential for a creative life in freedom and dignity." This goal dominated the minds of the working delegation. The group represented all walks of life and came from varied backgrounds of training and interest. These people, representatives of their communities, seriously considered what might be done to move closer to the stated purpose.

The 1,600 recommendations made by some 7,600 delegates working in 210 workshop groups were later combined and summarized into 700 recommendations. Even this number remains too large for action on all fronts. There are not enough available monies, institutions, information, or trained personnel to work in all of the recommended areas. Therefore, efforts can best be utilized on selected segments.

The Conference emphasized the institutions of our society that condition the development of children and youth—the family, the school, the community, the political structure, the welfare structure, the legal structure—and the rapid changes that these institutions are undergoing. The number and scope of ideas put forth is staggering. Previous conferences did not concern themselves with all problems of all children as this one did.

It was shown that all of society has a part in the growth and development of children, especially the family. Parents are generally becoming better educated in their roles. This should help all to do a better job with the development and education of youngsters.

The Conference stressed the importance of values in the present mode of living. It was evident that more thoughtful attention to values will make for better parenthood.

One question came up often: "Why does our country, which has shown great economic growth and large increases in real income, have so many children and families still living in suffering and want?" Some children are growing up in a world that is too easy to offer a challenge for normal development, while others are too poor to enjoy even a bare minimum of adequate care. Varied circumstances make opportunity unequal.

SOME HIGH PRIORITIES
FROM FUTURE CITIZENS

The young people worked competently at the Conference. Their suggestions on serious topics were well-stated. They think seriously about today's world and their own responsibility in it. Priorities drawn up by them include:

2. An emphasis on the family as the main force in democracy. Young people want better education for the roles of family members because they know they are the parents of tomorrow.
3. Better education for everyone at all levels. Better use of human resources through better training.
4. More participation in local, state, national, and international affairs. Youth believes in justice and understanding on a world-wide basis.
5. More responsible use of mass media. Youth want high quality books, music, cultural attractions, libraries, and radio and television programs.

In addition, youth pleaded for more real responsibility in their own family groups, for more time and activity with members of their family, more direction and guidance from parents and adults, and better examples shown to them by adults both in thinking and in action.

By Merle Gunsalus
Extension Family Life Specialist
THESE POINTS ARE EVIDENT

Living in the family is the most satisfactory way of life but it is difficult to achieve. Because we care how individuals feel, think, and grow, we look for better ways of enriching life. Everyone experiences situations similar to those of others at some time in the cycle of family living.

Communication is difficult between adults, between adults and children, and between children. Better ways of making oneself understood insure less frustration and more satisfaction in tackling mutual concerns.

Family life must be strengthened if we are to move ahead in the solution of many of our present social problems.

Youth needs the good example of adults in the growing-up process more than any other one thing.

Federal Government services alone can not bring about needed improvements and added facilities. People on local levels must look for the best courses of action and implement them. It is necessary to work out a fair share of costs involved between Federal and State agencies.

No institution or organization can upgrade a community single-handed. Individuals and groups must survey, study, plan, and work together on common goals to achieve continuous progress.

Problems exist in many areas—Discrimination, delinquency, individual rights, health, education, church, employment, early marriage, environment, mobility of families, care of children of working mothers, use of leisure time, recreation and facilities, laws and law enforcement, citizenship, military service, minority groups, mass media, welfare services, exceptional children—to name a few—are intricately inter-related.

Conference representatives agreed that the family is the concern of each group and that we cannot solve other ills found in society until we recognize the family as the basic social unit. One speaker said "too much time and effort go toward remedial measures in society when it seems more dividends would come from preventive and supportive things."

"We are guilty of community neglect when we do not provide the services to help neglectful parents assume responsibility for their children."
—Earl J. Beatt, Executive Director, Family and Children's Service, Minneapolis

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILY LIVING

Here are some of the recommendations made in relation to family and child welfare:

Family Is a Basic Unit

It should be recognized that the family, as the basic unit of our society, has the primary responsibility for developing values, freedom, initiative and self discipline in children.

The development of the child's potential is vitally affected by the nature and quality of family relationships.

The individuality of each family and each member of the family must be acknowledged and preserved.

It should also be recognized that in our complex society no family can be entirely responsible for its own destiny, and that marriage is a joint career requiring preparation to achieve success.

Values Are Important

The absence of a strong sense of values in the individual, the home, and the community is a primary cause of many social problems that limit opportunities for children and youth. We must encourage the use of our resources to achieve long-term satisfactions to build stability into family life, and to assure our children and youth of their full share of security and opportunities in the best American tradition.

It should also be recognized that in our complex society no family can be entirely responsible for its own destiny, and that marriage is a joint career requiring preparation to achieve success.

Education Is Needed

It was also recommended that family life courses, including preparation for marriage and parenthood, be instituted as an integral and major part of public education from elementary school through high school.

Religious institutions and other community services, as well as the schools, should strengthen their family life education programs with materials suitable to each age level. Marriage-preparation courses are
needed at the junior high level. These programs should include counseling in personal relations, boy-girl relationships, problems and the sacred nature of marriage, and methods of nurturing in children, moral, spiritual and ethical values.

Trained social workers should be added to school staffs to provide counseling and guidance to families.

Schools must take the initiative in broadening general educational opportunities for adults to enable them to help children and youth more effectively.

Educational institutions and communities should also provide systematic training in the developmental changes and problems of early adolescence for all parents and future parents, as well as for physicians, teachers, and others who work with young people.

More Counsellors Necessary

Public and private marriage and family counseling services—such as those of social agencies, mental health clinics, clergymen, and physicians—should be instituted or expanded.

Counseling services for the solution of domestic relation problems are needed in the courts. Hearings, in such cases, should be held in court chambers.

Community Responsibility

Each community must create a body representing all professions, organizations and agencies concerned with family life to help—
—coordinate programs and services;
—survey family needs;
—insure adequate education for marriage, parenthood, and family life, including counseling;
—insure that counseling and guidance are available to all without regard to economic or social status;
—stimulate professional growth and cooperation; and
—develop a community atmosphere favorable to family life.

Important Role of the Church

It was further recommended that religious and community agencies give increasing emphasis to family recreation and that they study the role of recreation in developing moral and spiritual values in family life.

Families need to place greater emphasis on family worship and family participation in organized religious activity.

Some Other Areas of Need

High costs involved in the rehabilitation of chronic problem families must be recognized and interpreted to the public as an ultimate saving in human values.

Special measures need to be taken to remind adults continuously of their role in illustrating values for children.

It was recommended that all states work toward uniform marriage and divorce laws.

Family relations courts should be established in all states where they do not now exist.

Nursery schools should be increased in number and improved in quality. They should be available and accessible to all families needing them, regardless of race, creed, or socioeconomic status.

A nationwide personnel recruitment program should be instituted with adequate governmental and voluntary support, to meet the critical shortage of qualified personnel in health, social welfare, education, and recreation.

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

If the considerations of the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth are to move into being, it might be well to think about these points:

1. The quality of youth in America is being determined by adults. Parents—ordinary citizens who have something to give and are willing to make a contribution—are the most important single resource we have for raising the level and the quality of the youth of this nation.

2. Good intentions to improve ourselves, our families, and our communities never go far enough. Each person will need to observe, question, discuss, and work to build an overall accomplishment for a better environment for children's growth and for family strength.

3. Arthur Fleming, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, believes that headway will be made in all of the many areas if a spiritual guide to our direction is behind thought and action. He says, "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself."
Children Learn What They Live

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with fear, he learns to be apprehensive.
If a child lives with pity, he learns to feel sorry for himself.
When a child lives with jealousy, he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns how to be patient.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to be appreciative.
If a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love.
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns what justice is.
If a child lives with honesty, he learns what truth is.
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those about him.
If a child lives with friendliness, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live.

WITH WHAT IS YOUR CHILD LIVING?

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDING OF THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

Publications

The White House Conference on Children and Youth offers two library packets at the special price of $11.30 each ($10 plus postage and handling charge). Order complete libraries or separate books as you prefer. If you order books, add 12% for postage and handling charge.

Library Packet 1
The Nation's Children (3 volumes), $6 the set.
The States Report on Children and Youth, $1.25
Focus on Children and Youth, $1.50
Conference Proceedings, $2.25

Library Packet 2
Children in a Changing World, $1.25
The States Report on Children and Youth, $1.50
Focus on Children and Youth, $1.50
Conference Proceedings, $2.25
Reference Papers on Children and Youth, $1.50
Children and Youth in the 1960's (survey papers), $2.00

Recordings

Album of 6 double-face, 12 inch LP records, 331/2 r.p.m., recorded at the White House Conference, March 27-April 2, for use in post-Conference activities. The set, selling for $12.75 (handling charge included) features the Opening and Closing General Sessions with President Eisenhower and Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Arthur S. Flemming, plus 10 major addresses dealing with health, education, welfare, ideals and values, delinquency and mental health.

Send Order and Remittance to:
Publication Division,
White House Conference on Children and Youth,
330 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington 25, D. C.
