

# PRESSES

## AND ADOLESCENTS

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THE junior high youngster today faces many pressures. Probably the greatest pressure comes from his parents who wish the best for him. Even while they are anxious about what the future will bring to their children, parents understand that junior high school students also are often silly, moody and loud with many different reactions and behavior patterns. One can safely predict that they are unpredictable. Parents may fail to realize, however, that their children are growing up, facing special problems, and having individual needs. They may fail to understand that junior high students are experimenting with new situations in life rather than simply trying to rebel against their parents.

Another great pressure placed on the young adolescent is from the teachers. Many of the teachers may understand child growth and development but fail to use this knowledge to the best interest of the youngster. Frequently, teachers do not have a thorough understanding of the characteristics of the 12-, 13- or 14-year-old student, and, therefore, encounter difficulties with him. Teachers who understand what to expect from the early adolescent in all probability will be more effective in the classroom.<sup>1</sup>

Social pressures are too varied to list. The greatest pressure may be that which is exerted by the idea of conformity thus causing the youngsters to conform to the demands of the right crowd. In every junior high school, there is at least one leading group which exerts a powerful force in controlling the energies of the students. This group dictates the activities and interests of the young adolescent.

These social pressures may be in the form of wearing the right brand of shirt, or shoes, or it may be an extreme hair style similar to that of the Beatles. In many of the junior high groups, there are peer pressures to conform by drinking or smoking. The present-day youngster is exposed to many ideas and concepts which he cannot control because he may lack information and security.

The youngsters are searching for status and recognition in society. The social classes of the students and the cultural background of the family group play a

<sup>1</sup> See Joseph T. Klapper. *The Effects of Mass Communication*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960.

very significant part in the child's life. The child from a lower socioeconomic status may realize that children from the families of a higher income bracket seem to have a definite advantage. Research shows that middle and upper class families seek to instill in their children a greater motivation to achieve, which is an important factor in their growth. Often children from a lower socioeconomic group are sensitive because of their dress, speech or habits which may differ from some of their peers.

As a child grows, he has many conflicts in the family role and finds that he is expected to behave in contradictory ways. The role that he might play may be dictated by the demands of his parents. How the youngster resolves these problems depends on the background of the family, individual personalities, and a particular situation in which a young person may find himself.

Homework and grades add additional pressures. In the modern schools, increasing importance is placed on grades for the college-bound student. With the population explosion, colleges hold that they must be more selective. Therefore, teachers and parents preach continuously about grades and accumulating knowledge so that students can make high scores on the college entrance examinations. This pressure has moved from the senior high school down to the junior high school. With the concept of high grades, some teachers often emphasize quantity in assigning homework and, therefore, do not take into account the individual differences. In other situations, the accelerated classes are given so much homework the students do not have time to play and act their age. Since most junior high students are conscientious about completing their homework, they may actually endanger their health or start family squabbles by trying to complete all the assigned tasks.

Many people believe that murder, horror and gangster shows have devastating effects on the morale of children and young people. Programs with themes of crime, violence, brutality and sex can definitely influence the young mind.

### **What Should Be Done?**

#### *1. Teachers and teaching must be improved.*

In too many schools a junior high school teacher is not qualified for this area of specialization. Actually he may have been prepared to teach in a self-contained classroom in the elementary school or he may have had a specialty in subject matter which prepared him to teach at the senior high school level. A curriculum for the teachers in the junior high school must be developed which will place the teacher in situations where he can understand adolescent problems and the characteristics of the growth and development of the 12-, 13- or 14-year-old.

This teacher should be an educated person who has love and understanding for adolescent children and realizes that he can help these youngsters to solve their problems. It is also imperative that teachers and parents be sympathetic with this age group and help them find solutions for their many problems. Even though the problems may seem insignificant to adults they are monumental to these youngsters at this particular time.

Curriculum authorities have offered many suggestions for improving the junior high school course of study. Regardless of the educational jargon, the child must be taught at his basic level of ability. In the junior high school the youngsters should be kept with their peers and given an opportunity to succeed in whatever endeavor they pursue. In many of the modern junior high schools, the students are expected to perform impossible tasks. By scheduling blocks of time, the child could be successful at his basic level of ability.

*2. Problems of adolescents must be detected early and given attention by the guidance counselor.*

By the time a youngster arrives at the junior high school level, his potential and ability should be known. If he does not have the ability or desire for a program in college preparation, then another program must be offered to meet his individual needs. The guidance counselor may need to inform the parents that he believes their child does not have the ability to go to college.

In a good public relations program, information must be provided for the parents so that they may understand that college is not for all students and that individuals can be happy in other professions which do not require a college degree. In order to accomplish this objective, more guidance must be available at the intermediate level. Consistently educators have used the words, articulation, transition and exploration, but the curriculum may not offer the opportunities to meet these goals. The future programs must allow the youngster opportunities, under guidance, to explore all possibilities as he seeks excellence in his own way.

*3. Pressure of college preparation in accelerated programs should be balanced.*

Grouping and homework practices ought to be reexamined in schools so the youngster may be afforded an opportunity to live in a normal environment rather than in abnormally tense situations. If administrators decide that acceleration is a necessity, then it should be horizontal rather than vertical.

The teacher must assign homework in terms of individual differences. It is imperative that parents be given some idea as to the amount of time students should spend on their homework so that they can offer help if this is needed.

*4. It is mandatory that leadership and membership roles be studied, understood and practiced in the junior high school.*

Students must be able to recognize the effective and wholesome kinds of leaders. Leadership abilities should be sought and opportunities should be provided for students to perform as leaders. By giving an early teenager information about effective leadership, he will be able to determine the kind of leader he should follow in a democratic society.

As the curriculum is revised to meet the crisis at the junior high school level, it is not a matter of utilizing new ideas but rather of applying *immediately* basic principles of learning and teaching which will help to improve the program. With love and understanding, the adolescents *can* survive this period of "transition in chaos."

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