

### 30. Children, Youth and Elders

U.S. culture seems to not value children, youth or elders much. We value those who make money now. Others are overhead, burdens or guilty afterthoughts, even if they are our future workforce and citizens we'll rely on tomorrow, and the past workforce that made what we rely on today.

Workplaces treat pregnancy like illness. We don't want to hire women, because they may get pregnant and then give less than 110% every moment. Rah! If we do, we pay them less, because we don't know if we can rely on them to always choose making the company money over the well-being of the children. If they do get pregnant, ugh, told you so, give 'em childbirth sick leave, like they're sick, but they aren't. We want 'em back at work producing as soon as they can walk again, and we issue threats to get them to do it. Women often brag about how few days it took to get back to work after having babies. We prefer men just check in on baby's delivery by phone from work desks, while keeping eyes on the ball.

According to our current knowledge and wisdom, the first 5-6 years of our lives have the most important influence on who and what we will become. That's when the greatest learning takes place, when we're most impressionable, when the basic structures of our brains are wired, when we best acquire language, when much of our values, character and integrity are implanted, when we imprint on our parents and siblings, and when we write to machine language the base code of our being, personalities and values.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, we cheat many of us in that period by outsourcing our raising and care to child care providers who do it for money, may not love or care for us personally, and almost certainly don't have all the same values or skin in the game as the parents. Costs for preschool approach those of housing,<sup>2</sup> which young parents often already struggle to pay, leaving us stressed and struggling to earn money for the costs and desperately seeking ways to earn more money to relieve the pressure. Both parents must work now to provide the lifestyle one working parent often could forty years ago,<sup>3</sup> an indicator of anti-progress.

People who provide the child care, though, like many public education teachers, are often underpaid, causing stress for many. That stress, and related bitterness, may be carried into relations with toddlers. Many who are capable and would love and be passionate about it don't work in preschools or schools, because the pay is low, and it would create too much hardship in personal lives. This setup ends with some raising kids for us being poor choices, or beleaguered or embittered, and not doing a great job.

Meanwhile, parents focus on work, to try to improve financial situations. That leaves little time for the children, who need and want nothing more than parents' love, attention and presence now, and it leaves parents, still problem-solving for work in our heads, exhausted when we're with our children, impaired in our abilities to be and do right by our children. To maintain personal sanity and keep couple relationships alive, parents have to carve some "date night" time out together, and we must pay dearly for babysitters then, because we typically live far from our parents and couldn't burden our friends.

Intuitively, we know this is all wrong, and we feel guilty and ashamed. We try to compensate by buying the children things, toys and gizmos, conditioning children to think buying and consuming things is how we retardedly show and try to feel love and care as a family and species. In the meantime, we struggle to keep our own personal spirits and relationships alive, and the only time we have for that is when we're off work and have the children, who need, want and demand presence and attention always, so we distract them with TVs and electro-gadgets, programming them to be passive consumers of outside programming. There comes more guilt and shame, but we have to do it to avoid falling apart ourselves.

Oh, and then there are school, after school and summer vacation problems. Society's education system is boring, disciplining, indoctrinating and programming kids to be corporate cogs, failing many of us.<sup>4</sup> Kids leave school long before parents leave work, and aren't in school for 3 months in the summer. So, we need to solve that. If we have money, we pay for after school sports, classes and summer camps, creating more financial stress, keeping us consumed by work, and Mom or somebody has to shuttle kids around to these things in cars, because that's how we set these things up, consuming time and energy. If we don't have money, kids get home on their own, to be on our own, lonely and isolated, maybe in a dicey neighborhood, exposed to risks and undesired influences that become parts of programming.

As teenagers, we're treated like criminals. Adults assume we're up to no good. Anywhere we gather, somebody calls the cops or sends us away. We just want to hang out together and have experiences. Forget about having a party, where we can gather and have fun. That's either not allowed or broken up. We play organized sports, consume things we pay for, like adults, get lost in entertainments or online, or we're trouble. So, we're conditioned we're not good enough to be trusted or allowed to be ourselves.

Teenagers can't really get jobs anymore, because we won't hire them or poor adults now have no choice but to take those low-end jobs, so we have free money from guilty parents if we're rich enough, or we have no money if we are not rich enough. Especially if we don't have any money, but even if we do, we're probably angry or resentful. We've been denied love, care, time, personal and work experiences, and we're treated poorly by most adults. School sucks. It's boring, meaningless and discipline focused. We have no idea why we're asked to learn the abstract and obscure stuff we're forced to sit through.

But, whew, then these increasingly inadequately loved, cared for, educated or experienced youths become adults and part of the workforce, then, employers use power to make us do what they want, while complaining new workers lack relevant experience, grit, drive, realistic expectations and maturity, making it harder for us to get and keep the decreasing good jobs, and therefore even harder for us to do right by our children as our turn for that comes up. (Not to mention, increasing higher education debt, growing unaffordability of housing, education, healthcare, and everything, increasingly depleted, ruined and unhealthy environments, and increasing wealth and income inequity.) A downward spiral.

Then, one day, finally, we retire from work. That's what we've been working toward and dreaming of for decades. Freedom, the U.S. ideal! It feels good for a while; but then we notice how society isolates and avoids us. Young people want nothing to do with us, treating us like we are scary dead in waiting. The rich and working complain about us as a burden on society. People have no interest in the deep knowledge, experience and wisdom we have accumulated over decades, so that gets foolishly lost. We're assumed to be doddering, feeble, babbling degenerates. Younger people have no time for us.

We funnel our old people into retirement and assisted living facilities, where we pay people to deal with them so we don't have to. Like preschool, it's (for many prohibitively) expensive to pay to be there, and workers there are poorly paid, so sometimes not the best, because many capable and passionate people do not choose to do that and those who do may be stressed or resentful, creating bad service and negative energies. We feel guilty and ashamed at how we treat our parents in these environments, so we carry that negative energy in our lives also. But that's the way the game is played, pant, pant.

We treat our children, youth and elders poorly, or, at the very least, we could definitely do much better. Our children and youth will inherit all we create and care about, and be responsible for taking care of everything, including us, when we retire. Don't we want our children to be even better than we are?

We're hard-wired to love, care for, raise and be with children. Why do we override that with a system that makes it so hard to do that well? We're neglecting the gardens where we grow our human beings.

Our elders are our best sources of past experiences and wisdom. Do we not want to interact with, learn and benefit from that? Shall we not have and show love, care, respect and appreciation for those who loved, worked to provide for, cared for and raised us as we were coming along?

We simply must value, love, care for, honor, respect, and spend adequate quality time with our children, youth and elders. It is harming us that we don't.

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<sup>1</sup> "Why The First 5 Years of Child Development Are So Important", All4Kids, September 25, 2018,

<https://www.all4kids.org/news/blog/why-the-first-5-years-of-child-development-are-so-important/>

<sup>2</sup> "Childcare Costs Almost As Much As Rent — Here's How Parents Feel About It", Ludmila Leiva, Refinery 29, September 6, 2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/childcare-housing-costs-parents>

<sup>3</sup> "The Rise in Dual Income Households", Pew Research Center, June 18, 2015, [https://www.pewresearch.org/ft\\_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/](https://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/)

<sup>4</sup> See *We Can Change Our Wicked Problems!* Chapter on Education, <https://www.wecanchange.us/education>