

young familiesNo. 71
January — February 1986**Finding Help for Problems**

Families can often work through everyday problems using their own knowledge, skills, and resources. But sometimes problems are not easy to solve and you may need to turn to others for professional assistance.

Community services and agencies can help in several ways. Some provide educational programs to help you acquire information and skills that you can apply to your specific problem; others offer more direct and immediate help.

Educational Programs

Agencies like your county extension service have professional staff, printed materials, and media and classroom programs to help you work through a problem. Extension provides a comprehensive, statewide information resource service called "Answer U." Your county agent can tell you how to use this service.

Other agencies that can help you develop the skills needed to work through your problem include schools, local human service departments, hospitals, vocational-technical schools, colleges, universities, community service clubs, adult and youth volunteer organizations, and mutual help groups.

Immediate Assistance

Some situations require immediate assistance, such as financial or medical aid. Most public assistance programs are run by state and county departments of human services. If your financial resources are limited, you may be eligible for food stamps, aid to families with dependent children (AFDC), or housing assistance.

Counseling services are available to help stressed adults and children in dealing with personal problems. Disease prevention and control programs can assist your family to fight against tuberculosis and other diseases. Advocacy groups such as the State Council for the Handicapped listen to issues of handicapped parents and children and present their needs to government and service providers.

Some problems require both immediate assistance and educational programs. For example, if your child has a severe medical problem, you may need to apply for government assistance and also take part in a hospital or self-help group to strengthen the psychological skills needed to take care of the child and yourself.

Where to Find Help

Begin by thinking about your past experiences. Perhaps an agency you have used before can help you or direct you to another agency that can meet your current needs. Family and friends, some of whom may have had similar problems, may be able to help you locate appropriate community services.

Your local telephone book is a useful resource for finding community services and agencies. Typical listings include day care, job service, legal assistance, transportation, utilities, and women's issues.

Also look under the telephone listings for local, county, and state government offices. Many agencies include the name of the state, county, or city in their titles, even if they are not directly part of the government. Private agencies may be listed by their name or in the yellow pages according to the service they provide.

The library is also a resource for finding agencies. Most libraries have a publication listing local community services and agencies. The Minnesota Guidebook to State Agency Services and the Minnesota Mutual Help Directory are also available at most libraries. If you live near a vocational-technical school, college, or university, consider using their libraries for information.

Daily or weekly newspapers often provide readers with information about community services and agencies, such as announcements of religious, community, and mutual help group meetings. These groups may have contacts with other helping agencies that can further assist you. Occasionally newspapers run a feature article about a helping agency. Some agencies advertise in the paper.

If your problem relates to school-age children, consider asking school teachers, principals, and other school staff for help. They may have the means within the district or school building to assist you.

With so many community services and agencies available to help families, you should not have much trouble in finding one that can offer you the knowledge, skills, or resources you need to address your problems.

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Sled Safety

More than 50,000 people are injured each year in sled, toboggan, or snow disk accidents. Protect your child by taking the following precautions:

- Choose sleds with easy steering, secure handholds, and a protective bumper over the front bar. Look for splinters, jagged edges, protruding rivets, or other sharp surfaces. Make sure the ropes on the vehicle will not become entangled in the runners.
- Check the sliding area. Make sure it is not near a street or traffic intersection. Look for hidden rocks or stumps.
- Closely supervise young children.
- Show your child how to stop the sled and how to roll off sideways to lessen the chance of injury in a collision.
- Teach your child not to push, shove, or otherwise roughhouse while sliding.

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Independence

It is in every child's best interest to become increasingly independent and self-reliant from an early age. Our concerns about our children too often result in the very opposite of what we set out to do; we inhibit rather than enhance their well-being.

Young children are eager to become masters of themselves and their world just as quickly as they can. When they are thwarted in their attempts to get up and go, to do and be, they may throw tantrums or become pesky and obstinate. This type of behavior might never appear if we encouraged young children to take on more independence and responsibility.

Allow your young child to help with tasks, but don't make them too difficult. If the task causes frustration and crying, break it down into smaller parts, so your child can derive satisfaction from achieving some success. As you encourage independent performance in young children you are also doing yourself a favor: the time you spend teaching them now will free you for your own independent activities later on.

Helping with real tasks develops skills that will be needed later on in school and throughout life. Suppose your four-year-old is helping you put away canned fruits and vegetables. If you tell him to put the larger ones on the bottom, you give him the opportunity to perceive and analyze differences in size, shape, and weight. Similarly, if your young daughter is helping you sort the laundry, matching socks and so on, she is learning to discriminate size and color and to understand what a pair is.

Encourage your child's sense of personal responsibility as early as possible. Gradually but thoroughly teach your child to keep his or her room neat by hanging up clothes, putting away shoes, and keeping toys in a particular storage place. Some household chores such as watering plants and straightening magazines are simple enough for even young children to perform. Children soon realize that household tasks are something everyone — both boys and girls — can and should do.

It's important to set limits, but as young children become more independent, parents in turn must gradually increase their children's freedom to try out new ideas, to explore the environment, and to select their own activities, toys, and snacks. If you show your children that you trust them, they will feel good about themselves and will be ready for more responsibility.

Parents of preschoolers should be on the alert for signs that their child is ready to take on responsibility. When a young child wants to "do it myself," it's probably wise to let him or her try. Just because a child hasn't done it before, doesn't mean it can't be done. Children watch and learn from other children, and sometimes develop skills "behind your back," as it were.

If you encourage responsibility, make realistic demands, and praise gains, you and your child will benefit from your youngster's increasing independence.

Ronald L. Pitzer
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Concern for Others

Children under age six are often thought to be too self-centered to understand anyone else's point of view or to show genuine concern for others. But studies have shown that children as young as one year of age can feel compassion and empathy for others.

One researcher cited the example of a toddler of 18 months who, seeing her grandmother lying down to rest, grabbed a blanket from her crib and covered her grandmother with it. This type of behavior is called altruism — an action designed to help someone in distress.

Altruistic tendencies in children — and cooperative behavior in general — are greatly influenced by the attitudes and actions of parents.

Altruism

You can encourage altruism in your children by beginning early to give forceful and clear explanations about not hurting others. Instead of just saying "Stop that!" when a child is hurting someone, explain why that particular behavior is unacceptable.

Another way of teaching altruistic behavior is by showing altruism to your own children by hugging, kissing, and comforting them when they are hurt or otherwise in distress.

Cooperation

Similarly, you can promote cooperative behavior in children by setting an example yourself. Children are quick to pick up and imitate the opinions, attitudes, behavior, and prejudices of adults. They also absorb the general atmosphere of their home — be it friendly and cooperative or hostile and antagonistic.

When your children are being cooperative, make it a point to show your pleasure and appreciation. Explain to your child the positive effects of cooperation and why you consider it desirable.

If we are cooperative and compassionate to our children and toward others, our children will also gradually learn to respect the rights and feelings of others.

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This Issue

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