

UNDERSTANDING TEEN-AGERS

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本篇係陳銘德先生在 Taipei Toastmasters Club International 所作演講稿，因其內容精闢，供同學參考之處良多，特轉錄於此以饗讀者。

It often pointed out that teen-agers are trouble-makers. They make trouble in the home, in the school and in the community. Juvenile delinquency is now a major social problem here as well as in many other parts of the world. Middle school students are considered to be the most difficult to deal with. Parents with teen-agers at home are annoyed with endless headaches. And one of the most common complaints about teen-agers is disobedience. They not only disobey, but they also are highly critical and some times rebellious.

Once when I was teaching at a middle school, a student's mother came to see me. She said, "My son was a very good boy when he was in elementary school. But since he entered middle school he has changed. He will no longer listen to me. He often talks back to me and even calls me mean." The poor mother was practically in tears when she was making this complaint. I felt sorry for her, but all that I could do was tell the boy to be nicer to his mother.

Time passes quickly! The boy has now finished medical school and is a hopeful young doctor. One day when I reminded him of this incident, he said, "Oh, I was terrible to my mother those days. I didn't know what was the matter with me. I know I ought not to have been so harsh to her, but I just couldn't help it. It was heartbreaking for me too." I believe the young man was in earnest,

and he is not the only teen-ager who has had a similar experience. How should we interpret such behavior and what should we do about it? Just to tell them to be more obedient or to be nicer doesn't seem to be of much help. They know that themselves, but just can't help behaving the way they do. I would like to take a few minutes tonight to probe into the problem in the hope that we can understand teen-agers better.

One day not long ago my 15-year-old daughter went to a movie near my home with her friend. It was a small theater, where children could get in at half-price. But when they were entering the theater, a man at the gate stopped them, saying in Taiwanese, "Eh, gin-a gin-a! Lin tloh boe toalang phio." In English it would be, "Hey, you children! You've got to buy adult tickets." My daughter said back to him, "You called us children, and how can you expect us to buy tickets for adults?" The man couldn't say anything and let them pass. We all laughed at the contradictory statement. But when one stops to think about it, the man was right in a way. He was unwittingly pointing out what teen-agers are like. They are partly adult and partly children. As a matter of fact, my 15-year-old daughter has grown taller than my wife. But when you look at her face she really is a child. No wonder the man called her a child. She does look like a child

though she surely occupies an adult seat.

Many teen-agers are physiologically grown, but are still immature intellectually and emotionally. This discrepancy in growth presents many problems to them. Here I just want to point out that teen-agers are often treated unfairly, because of this and feel unhappy and indignant. One day I heard my wife saying to our daughter, "You shouldn't quarrel with your little sister over such a plaything; you are no longer a child.", But on the next day when our daughter wanted to go to a certain movie, my wife said, "That's a movie for adults, not for you children." Our daughter just did not know where she belonged. She said, "Mother, you're being unreasonable. Didn't you say yesterday that I was no longer a child?" Teen-agers are particularly sensitive about anything unfair and strongly resent it, and their resentment is not only limited to injustice imposed upon them. They can not stand any injustice directed toward anybody.

Just a few days ago I was reading a book, which is actually a collection of letters between a Japanese mother and her 15-year-old son. They lived in the same house, but made it a practice to write to each other because they found it easier for them to express themselves more freely and fully in letters. One of the letters ran like this: "Mother, I feel very sorry for you these days. I think Father is really mean. He spends most of his time at home reading, while you are working busily all day long. And please stop preparing special dishes for Father and me. It's just not right! I felt so bad this evening at dinner. I left you a piece of fish from my portion as I knew you had left very little for yourself. Then Father said, 'Don't you like it?' and ate it up before I could say anything. Tell me, Mother, why did you get married to such a selfish man like Father?" The boy was very indignant over the injustice in his home, and you can't expect him to be very nice to his father. But does the fault lie with this boy? Isn't it the inconsiderate father, or rather the community which permits such injustice? Incidentally, these letters were

written during world War II. The Japanese family pattern must have changed considerably after the war.

Teen-agers are idealists, and their goal is very high. They aim at the absolute; they want to be absolutely honest, absolutely unselfish, absolutely pure, and absolutely loving. With this strict yardstick no parent, no teacher, and no human can stand their scrutiny. Lacking the hard experience of the complex adult life, they cannot recognize the need to compromise. In addition, they have not acquired the art of speech so as not to hurt others' feeling in speaking. Yet from an irresistible urge to speak out what they feel and think in their struggle toward the ideal, they often express themselves in a way which is arrogant, impolite or even cruel. Thus one of my best students whose teens hurt his beloved mother and do many other teen-agers.

It is only natural that parents expect their children to be obedient. But is obedience always the supreme virtue? In early childhood it may be so. In order to live and learn, helpless children have to listen to others and obey. All that they have to do is to listen to adults and do what they are told to. Thus they are given their daily need, and are taught things they need to know. But they can't be like that throughout life. In their adult life they have to do their own thinking, make their own decisions and take responsibility for their actions.

This shift from childhood to adulthood cannot be achieved overnight. In this transitory period, they tend to doubt everything, resist every authority in an attempt to establish their own way of thinking and set their own moral code. This transition is sometimes referred to as the second birth, or second weaning, and certain pains are unavoidable. Isn't it rather a good sign to see teen-agers growing up to criticize and make their own judgment and stand on their own feet? With better understanding, my wife and I hope that we will be able to enjoy watching our teenage children grow into adulthood more pleasantly and successfully without them hurting themselves and those around them too much.