

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

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*The Parents Book About Divorce*, Richard A. Gardner, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1977, 368 pp. \$11.50

Reviewed by:

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Parents and professionals alike have expressed concern about the ill effects that separation and divorce have on children. Although Gardner does not support the contention that separation or divorce *causes* psychological disturbances in children, he does admit that it increases the likelihood of their development.

In *The Parents Book About Divorce* Gardner argues that it is the unhealthy atmosphere preceding the time of the separation or divorce as well as the misguided attempts on behalf of the parents to prevent the child's suffering which contribute to the child's psychological difficulties rather than the acute trauma of the physical separation itself. For instance, Gardner shows how such pet phrases as "Be brave." or "You're the man of the house now." interfere with the child's healthy development. Furthermore, he points out that many of the strategies parents employ, i.e., asking the child's opinion about a divorce or not giving the child an explanation for the parent's departure because he is too young to understand, are really parental excuses for covering up partial cowardice, shame or guilt. The parents who apply these maneuvers are in effect

showing their lack of concern for the child's need to "work through" the separation.

Gardner strongly emphasizes that a child, regardless of his age, should be given information regarding the major issues which brought about the separation whether they be extramarital affairs, homosexuality, alcoholism, drug addiction or the like. The truth, albeit painful, provides the child with the security of knowing exactly what's going to happen and with the belief that his parents can be trusted. Gardner goes so far as to say that despite the negative effects that the departure of parental affection is known to have on a child, the latter must be confronted with the painful reality that one parent may in fact not care for him at all. Gardner does, however, show how one can transmit this information diplomatically.

Another major emphasis is, that only under conditions of brutal treatment or genuine mental cruelty should the child be prevented from being with the absent parent. Any other exposure that the custodial parent believes might be harmful to the child robs him of the other benefits he might receive. For Gardner, few parents are "totally worthless" or "totally incapable" of providing the child with some healthy experiences.

By stating that the child should be "encouraged" to visit the new home of the departed parent or be "encouraged" to telephone him/her, however, Gardner assumes that the couple has resolved its differences to the extent that vengeance is put aside for the sake of the child. Gardner asserts, and quite idealistically I might

add, that the child's very existence requires that both parents maintain some sort of relationship with one another. He presupposes that parents have communicated about what will happen to the children both before and after the separation. As many counsellors are aware, this is seldom the case.

In *The Parents Book About Divorce* Gardner shows, with case histories, how parental selfishness and resentment impede the healthy psychological development of the child. In addition, he warns how a therapist's application of psychological principles is often misguided and inappropriately influenced by a personal bias. Despite the fact that Gardner's own medical/psychiatric bias, idealistic viewpoints and repetitiveness interfere with the quality of the book, the messages conveyed surpass any of its weaknesses.

Gardner's message of honesty and altruism has been long in coming but unfortunately it may be too late for couples who have already divorced to help their child should they read the book now. Many of Gardner's recommendations and techniques must be applied immediately prior to and immediately following the separation. The book, therefore, could more appropriately be handed out with every marriage licence as opposed to attracting the already divorced populous.

For any parent who loves his/her child or for any therapist who works with families *The Parents Book About Divorce* is highly recommended.

*Fight it out, Work it out, Love it out*, Claire Pomeroy, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1977, 256 pp.

Reviewed by:

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What a welcome change this book brings to the counsellor who may feel overwhelmed by the innumerable "How to" books on therapy and counselling! "*Fight it out, Work it out, Love it out*" is not a technician's handbook for counsellors, nor a behaviour program for clients; it is the candid report of a family therapy by a participating member, a moving account of the slow and painful steps of growth through therapy.

A feeling that the family is in "depression" is what leads Claire Pomeroy and her husband Adam to seek family therapy. Throughout the first sessions most of the efforts centre around Glen, their seventeen year old son, whose difficulties have made him the family scapegoat. With time, the focus shifts to Claire and Adam themselves, as they realize that the core of many of

the family problems lie in themselves and in their relationship to each other.

Claire's account of the sessions, written as a personal journal throughout the therapy and her vivid description of her feelings and of family life during this period make the reading of this book as compelling as that of a fascinating novel. But it is more than a novel! This family is real and the fear, pain and joy they experience during the process of change are real! Clients going through the same process would probably benefit greatly from reading this book: apart from the relief at knowing that their struggles are not unique, they could also find hope of meaningful changes in their lives.

For the counsellor or therapist looking for cues to help him in his work, no method or technique is presented here. Peter, the therapist, emerges as a warm and sensitive human being with great expertise in the helping profession. His weaknesses make him all the more credible and real to counsellors and therapists honest enough to see their own mistakes and limitations. On one occasion Peter describes what therapy is to him (p. 226): "I think it's teaching people new strategies for achieving their ends, including the strategy of considering what their aims should be."

He also explains what he feels is the position of the therapist in the process (p. 226): "The good therapist knows exactly what he's doing almost all the time, how close and how far he is from the real people, and how absolutely real he is, and how much a therapist he is." He feels that therapies that operate "from within all the time" and those that operate "from without all the time" are both limited. In his theory, "the most effective therapy takes into account the regulation of emotional distance as part of the therapy."

Claire Pomeroy must be commended on her courage in writing this intimate account of her family's experience during therapy. It is unusual and quite revealing to see "the other side" of the picture: the client being the observer and reporter of the therapy process.

*The Children's Rights Movement*. Beatrice Gross and Ronald Gross (Eds.), Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977, 390 pp., \$11.50; paper \$4.50.

Reviewed by:

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Change is what *The Children's Rights Movement* is all about. Society can no longer think of itself as child-centered until it changes its laws, its institutions, its attitudes about children. If this