

# Maturity and Responsibility

a newsletter for people who care about self-esteem

Issue 55 – Volume 10, Number 1 – January, February 1990

Dear Reader,

Does it ever seem to you that the young children you know are not as responsible about their personal and household tasks as they should be? Or does it seem to you that many young adults are acting more like teen-agers than grown men and women in their twenties?

Welcome to this 55th issue of WE where you are invited to compare your own observations and experiences with those of other people and with some current research findings.

**Pick Up Your Socks . . . and Other Skills Growing Children Need!** is Elizabeth Crary's new book. It includes the results of her queries of parents about when 663 children, 13 years or older, actually have mastered household tasks. It also includes a myriad of ideas about how to teach skills and responsibility.

I'm excited about offering these findings to you, and I'm excited about this whole book!

Betsy has agreed to:

- Describe what is in the **Pick Up Your Socks** book and how to use it
- Offer an overview of ways to help children develop responsible behaviors
- Share the Age - Household Jobs Participation Chart for us to reproduce and use with groups

I appreciate Betsy's *Parenting Press* with its continuous offering of books that are helpful to children and to adults who care about the welfare of children.

As for the young adults, the *New York Times* has given WE permission to reprint Daniel Goleman's article, "Some 'Teen-agers' Are Nearly 30" which reports Kathleen White's study of 84 young adults and their attitudes toward their parents. If these findings are typical, and if we link them with the reality that the onset of puberty is occurring at younger ages than in past generations, then we are

living with (or have created?) a very long adolescent stage indeed.

Remember, this is information, not a set of guidelines. It is important to think not only about the uniqueness of each person, but also that person's environment. Ask the question: How much are developmental stages determined by our genetic structure with its innate human growth patterns and how much by the circumstances in which we live?

When I travelled in the high plains of the Bolivian Andes a few years ago, I visited villages where a little girl carries a small load on her back from the day she pulls herself up to start walking. She will carry loads all of her life. No trucks or horses. At three she carries an infant part of the day. At four she learns full care of a small farm animal. At five she starts taking small animals to pasture, often two kilometers from the village. This she does daily, often alone, from mid morning till dusk until she is thirteen or fifteen years old, depending on her village. Then she starts school. At first I thought, from my American frame of reference, "This is awful! Think what these girls are missing developmentally!" Then I looked at the women. They were alive. These Aymara people farm at 17,000 feet. The soil is incredibly poor and the frost is a relentless enemy. But they survive, which is more than I would do.

It seems that we must look for normal development within a cultural context. The research quoted in this issue reports on American children and young people living in American settings. Developmentally, the behaviors are neither right nor wrong, they just are.

Thoughtfully,

*Jean Illsley Clarke*

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor



# Pick Up Your Socks

— By Elizabeth Crary  
Illustrated by Pati Casebolt



**Pick Up Your Socks... and other skills growing children need** is a book about encouraging responsibility. Jean Clarke asked me to share with you how this book came about and why I feel it is important.

The idea for this book began shortly after my first book — *Without Spanking or Spoiling: A Practical Approach to Toddler and Pre-*

*school Guidance* — was published. People began asking me for a book about school-aged children.

I began to talk with parents specifically about what they would like to know. Many parents had similar concerns — discipline, household chores, homework, and independent living skills.

**Why is *Pick Up Your Socks* important?** Because it addresses parents' concerns and offers them a variety of information. In particular it —

- *Distinguishes between responsibility and obedience.* It explains why *both* are necessary in different situations. Obedience depends on an external structure; responsibility depends on an internal structure.

- *Explains that responsibility is not an all-or-nothing situation.* Responsibility is a growth process. Children do a task first with help, then with supervision, and later without reminding. It is never too late to learn responsibility — and we can teach it.

- *Offers parents hope and reassurance.* Hope that they can teach their children responsibility; reassurance that they are good parents even though the process is slower than they would like.

*Pick Up Your Socks* gives parents concrete ways to encourage responsibility in children — and ways to adapt the information to individual family styles.

- *Includes exclusive information.* Parents often ask “When is it reasonable to expect children to do the dishes alone or make their bed, or take out the trash?” To answer that question I conducted a study of when kids actually do specific household tasks. (Copy of the results is inserted in this issue of WE.)

- *Provides guidelines.* In addition to the job chart, it offers a way to determine the best language to use in communicating with your child. Criteria for developing effective consequences are listed.

## **How was *Pick Up Your Socks* developed?**

Information for the book came from many sources. Some came from my own observation and research. Some information was adapted from other professionals. Much

of the information also came from parents themselves.

*Pick Up Your Socks* was field-tested and revised several times. It was field-tested with individual parents, parenting classes and professionals. As a result, text and exercises were revised, and a chapter on developing parental teamwork was added.

**Who is *Pick Up Your Socks* for?** *Anyone who wants to learn more about responsibility.* It was originally designed for parents of school-aged children. However, during field-testing I found it had a much wider appeal.

Parents of pre-school children and teenagers find the tools and ideas useful. One woman even remarked, “This is great! It even works with husbands.”

Further, *Pick Up Your Socks* has been extremely helpful to people raised in co-dependent families. One woman reported “I felt as if a light had suddenly illuminated a stairway leading out of a dark place . . . Coming from a dysfunctional home, my greatest fear was that I would repeat patterns from my childhood. I found that responsibility is not some vague virtue you were born with — like brown eyes or blue eyes — but a skill you can learn with practice. Now I have direction and choices in the complex area of responsibility.”

**How can *Pick Up Your Socks* be used?** It can be used to gain insights about your present family, the family of your childhood, or to teach a parenting class. Examples follow:

Mary Paananen shared an insight with her children. “After reviewing the Household Jobs Chart I said to myself ‘Oh, being able to do a job once is different (by several years) from doing it independently.’ I was expecting independence in doing chores after they had been done only a few times.

Now I plan my time and energy into the chore expectations. I say to my children ‘Ask me when you need help,’ or ‘You start, and call me when you need help.’ Now I see my children developing independence and competence.”

Ellen Hokanson reported understanding her mother better. “Now I realize that she is a very visual learner. For years I claimed that my mother never taught me how to cook! She would show me the recipe and let me watch what she was doing. I wanted to *hear* explanations of every step, and I was always frustrated because she wouldn’t (or couldn’t) tell me what to do.”

*Pick Up Your Socks* can also be used for parenting classes. One parent wrote “What I liked about this book is that it’s very practical. I am particularly impressed with the ‘life skills’ section — what you want your child to be able to do when he or she leaves home. *Pick Up Your Socks* encouraged me to ask ‘What is really important to me?’”

*Pick Up Your Socks* looks at encouraging responsibility. It is a skill people develop over time, not a trait they are born with. The process of becoming responsible is a lifelong journey. With some people the journey is light and breezy, with others it takes more planning and follow through.

You are a valuable person regardless of the style with which your child chooses to travel. I hope the information you receive from *Pick Up Your Socks* will make your journey, and your children’s, more enjoyable.



## Suggested Activity: You Are Old Enough To Do That!

These activities can be done individually at home or in a group with a sharing of answers and learning after each activity.

Following is a list of 18 things a child can learn to do that will make him a contributing member of the family. They are also skills he will need in adult life.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

TASK	
Dress self	Vacuum floors
Brush teeth	Clean sink
Bathe self	Take out trash
Pick up belongings	Care for pet
Dirty clothes away	Do laundry
Hang up	Set table
clean clothes	Wash dishes
Make bed	Fix snack
Tidy room	Cook meal
Wipe Spills	

### 1. Set priorities

- Think of a specific child — a son, niece, neighbor or friend who is at least two years old.
- Write the child's name and age at the top of the list.
- Star the five tasks you think that child should be learning to do.
- Write **H** beside the task if the child needs help doing the task. Write **R** if the child does the task when reminded or with supervision. Write **A** if the child already does the task when needed without reminders or supervision.

### 2. Check expectations

- Look at the Household Jobs Participation Chart inserted in this issue.
- Locate the age of your child on the top line and then transfer the **H**, **R** or **A** designations for the five tasks you starred onto the chart under his age.
- Compare the task level of your child to the children in the survey.

**Remember:** The **H**, **R**, and **A** on the charts are AVERAGE ages at which children accomplished these tasks. Roughly half of the children were earlier, half were later.

**Remember:** These ages are not scientific assessments or theoretical speculations as to when children **should** learn these 18 tasks — they are records of when 663 children in the state of Washington, U.S.A., **did** accomplish them.

### 3. Consider reversals

For most tasks children need **Help** and then supervision or **Reminding**, before they reach the independent **Ability** level. Vacuum floors, clean sink, and take out trash, show a different pattern.

Think about or discuss the following questions:

- Why does this reversal occur at about the beginning of puberty?
- Why these particular tasks?
- Can you think of another task a child you know had the ability to do and then seemed to "lose it" at about 12 or 13 years of age?
- How should an adult respond to this "forgetting?" Remember that as children enter puberty they are preoccupied with changes in their internal chemistry and with recycling earlier decisions such as "Is it OK for me to be, to be here, to be who I am? And it is OK that I am having these sexual changes, feelings and urges? Is it safe for me to become an adult, sexual person?"

Make two lists of responses:

One **not helpful** to the child, including teasing, criticism and ridicule. The second **helpful** to the child including offers to help, acceptance of the child, reminders that this forgetting stage will not last forever.

### 4. Consider your role in task development.

- Does your child's level of achievement seem reasonable for your child? If she is way ahead of the Washington average, is there a special reason for that? Extra bright? Extra pressure? If she is way behind the Washington average, is there a special reason for that? Learning disability? Stress? Low parental expectations? Lack of parental consistency? Need for more teaching or support at each level?
- Are you or is someone providing the teaching and support needed at the **Helping** and the **Reminder** levels and the appreciation and affirmation (not being taken for granted) at the **Ability** level?
- Make a plan for your own behavior in support of your child for the coming week. Pick one behavior to appreciate and/or support and teach about. Look ahead at page 4 if you want more help.

by Jean Clarke

## In Honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

by Colleen Shaskin

All children everywhere  
 Deserve a life  
 Free from violence  
 Free from prejudice  
 Free from hunger  
 Free from drugs  
 Free from put-downs and hatred  
 All children everywhere  
 Deserve a life  
 Filled with nurturing touch  
 Filled with nutritious abundant food  
 Clean water and clean air  
 Filled with laughter, joy and love  
 Filled with gentle acceptance and  
 Available protective caring adults  
 All children everywhere deserve  
 Freedom to grow up healthy  
 And able to realize their dreams and potential —  
 As creative caring human beings  
 in our Global village — Earth.



# Overview of responsibility. From Pick Up Your Socks

by Elizabeth Crary

Illustrated by Pati Casebolt

Responsibility is a skill people develop over time, not a trait they are born with. Five steps to encouraging responsibility are presented below.

## Clarify the task.

1. *Define the task.* Decide what you want done and when. How will you know when the task is complete? Check that the task is appropriate for the child's age, temperament and experience.

2. *Look at values.* Why is it important for the child to do the task? For example, to develop needed skills, to reduce parent's work load, to participate in the family, etc. The reason you want a child to do a task may give you an idea about how to approach teaching the task and identifying suitable rewards in the beginning.

3. *Break the task up into small steps.* It is often simpler and quicker to teach a series of small steps than the whole job at one time.

## Provide skills to do the job.

1. *List the skills* a person needs to do the task. Include both skills to do the task itself and skills to organize and motivate oneself.

2. *Check what skills the child has.*

3. *Teach needed skills.* This will be easier if you match the child's learning style.

## Clarify task with the child.

1. *Check the understanding of the task.* Does the child know how to do what is *needed* (how to make the bed), the *standards* (how smooth the covers need to be), and the *deadline* (when the task must be completed)?

2. *Establish motivation.* It is easier to learn a new task if there is a reward. Initially, the reward can be provided by either the parent or child. The selection of rewards is discussed briefly under 'establish a system.'

3. *Determine the level of commitment accepted.* Is the child willing to *help with the task*, will she *need reminding* or can she *do the task alone*? Remember that there is a big gap between being able to do a task with help and being responsible for the task.

## Establish a system.

1. *Select a reminder.* A reminder can be visual — a chart, *auditory* — a sound (alarm) or a verbal cue, or *kinesthetic* — an activity you do (brushing your teeth).

2. *Establish a reward.* An effective reward is something a child wants or needs. The reward can be tangible (token, money, or sticker) or intangible (smile, proud feeling, or praise). Praise is most effective when it is specific, immediate and sincere.

Initially, rewards may be developed and implemented by an adult; however, as the child gains experience, this should change to internal gratification.

3. *Develop consequences.* The purpose of consequences is learning, not punishment. Effective consequences are clear, age-appropriate, related to the offense, esteem reinforcing, and they are enforceable.

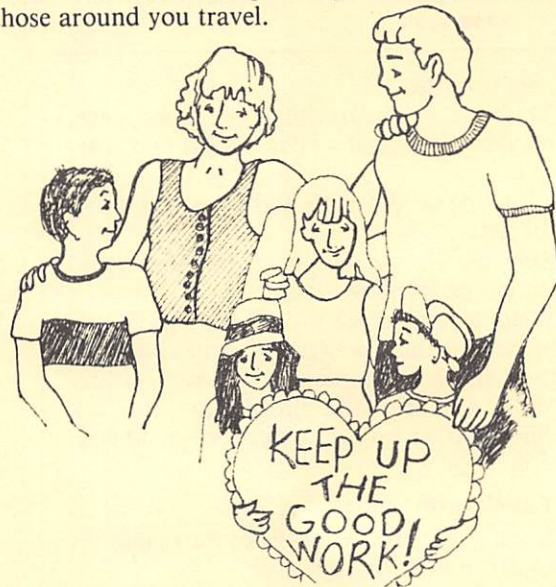
Before you establish a consequence, consider whether you are willing to enforce it.

## Follow through.

Parental follow through teaches responsibility. Following through models how to keep a contract or do a task. When you develop a system, make sure it is one you will support. Otherwise you teach the child to disregard you.

If you find you are not providing the needed follow through, look at what is interfering with your follow through. Get support so you can give the needed feedback, change your part to one you can support, or back out entirely without blaming your child.

The process of becoming responsible is a lifelong journey. Some people do it easily, for some it is more difficult. You are a competent person regardless of how those around you travel.



## Pick Up Your Socks covers . . .

**Obedience vs. responsibility . . .** what's the difference, why both are important, see Chapter 1.

**Building skills . . .** memory, motivation, and words to avoid that discourage responsibility, see Chapter 2.

**Child guidance . . .** set reasonable limits, develop effective consequences, utilize humor, Chapter 3.

**Household jobs . . .** find out at what ages children do 18 common tasks, see Chapter 4.

**Schoolwork . . .** ways to help with homework, Chapter 5.

**Independent living skills . . .** ways kids can respond to peer pressure, dealing with anger, see Chapter 6.

**Putting it all together . . .** developing a plan, resolving differences with your spouse, see Chapter 7.

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## Household Jobs Participation Chart

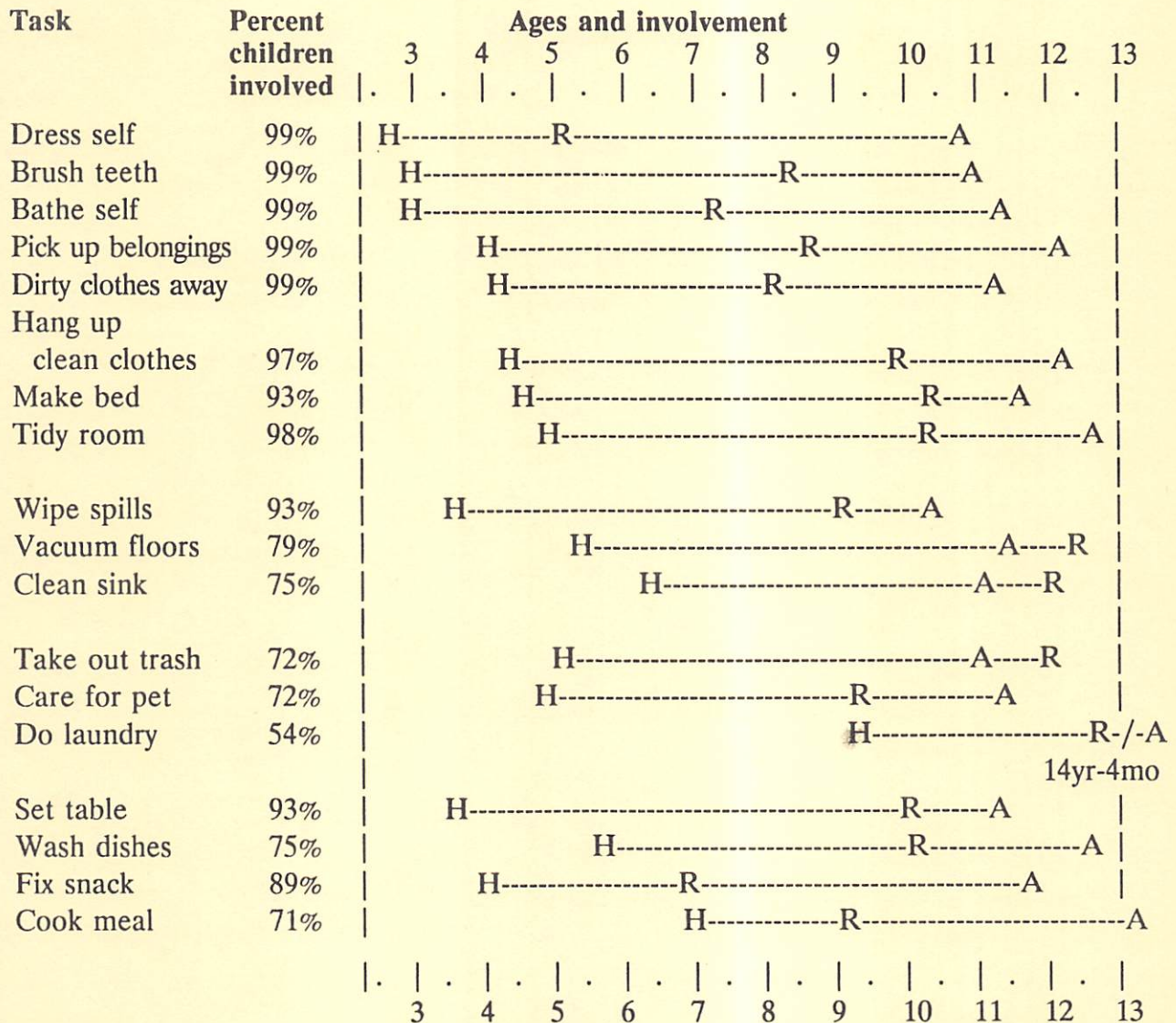
The chart lists common household tasks, the percentage of children involved with the task, and the average age of children at different levels of involvement.

### Symbols:

**H** means the child needs help with the task,

**R** means the child needs reminding or supervision, and

**A** means the child does a task as needed without reminding or supervision.



Data from a study of Washington state families by Elizabeth Crary, 1989. Report on 663 children.



# Activities

**Pick Up Your Socks** has many exercises to help readers understand and remember the principles presented. After you have read the Overview of Responsibility on Page 4, you may try out three exercises from the book. They are from the section on **establishing a system**.

## EXERCISE 2-2: Shifting Motivation

Instructions: Each of these sentences relies on external motivation. Rewrite them so they also encourage the child to value himself or herself.

1. Ilana, I'm proud of you. You scored three goals today.

---

2. Harry, you cleaned your room all by yourself. I am delighted.

---

3. Jennifer, you got four A's. I am very pleased.

---

## EXERCISE 2-3: Identifying Effective Goals

Instructions: Read each goal. Mark it with a C, if the goal is clear and complete. Mark it with an I, if it is incomplete; then identify the error and suggest a change.

1. To reduce my freestyle time for swim team.

---

2. To earn \$250 to buy a new bike.

---

3. To put my clothes away each night before I go to bed for one week, ending Sunday, April 24th.

---

4. To make the baseball team next spring.

---

5. To earn enough money to buy a computer by March 10.

---

Think about your child and write two sentences of praise about three different tasks. Write the first sentences using motivation. Write the second in ways that encourage the child to value self.

Task

1.

2.

Task

1.

2.

Task

1.

2.

by Elizabeth Crary



# Some 'TEEN-AGERS' Are Nearly 30

## MATURITY: Study of 84 young adults assessed attitudes toward parents

By Daniel Goleman/New York Times

New York, N.Y.

While adolescence by common reckoning ends with the teen years, psychologists now are finding it continues until the end of the 20s, when young people are finally able to establish a fully mature relationship with their parents.

Clinical lore has long suggested that adolescence lingered into the 20s, but only now are scientific studies showing just how true that is. One new study has discovered a dramatic shift in psychological maturity that seems to occur in most young adults between the ages of 24 and 28.

Before the shift, the men and women studied said, they usually relied on their parents to make important choices in life and felt unable to cope with life's difficulties without some help from them. After the change they felt comfortable making choices based on their own values and felt confident in their abilities to live on their own.

Such findings are leading developmental psychologists to set back the timetable for the end of adolescence. That phenomenon may be a product of this century, when, for the first time, most young people have remained dependent on their parents for their support through the teen years and beyond.

"The emotional ties that bind children to their parents continue well after they leave home and enter the adult world. There's an astonishing difference between those in their early and late 20s in doing things without leaning on their parents," said Susan J. Frank, a psychologist at Michigan State University.

Kathleen White, a psychologist at Boston University who has conducted much of the research on maturation in young adults, said the shift also entails a changing view of parents. "By their mid-20s," she said, "most young people are not ready to appreciate their parents as separate individuals, as having needs and strengths and weaknesses in their own right, apart from being parents."

"They still see their parents in egocentric fashion: were they good or bad parents, did they love me or not, were they too restrictive or demanding, and so on."

In a study of 84 adults between the ages of 22 and 29, White assessed several aspects of maturity, particularly their ability to form intimate relationships and to see their parents independent of their role as parents.

Those in their later 20s had "far more perspective on their parents" than those in their early 20s, White said. She said, "They are psychologically distinct from their parents and have a much better understanding of them as people, not just parents."

During their 20s people go through gradual shifts in their sense of independence from parents and in their relationships with them, according to the work of Frank and other researchers.

For instance, in terms of autonomy, less mature young adults not only tend to rely on their parents to help with decisions, but they also are often overwhelmed by intense feelings of rage or dependency. At worst those feelings can lead them to lash out at their parents, even when the parents are trying to be helpful. These young adults also seek to avoid their parents' disapproval or anger, and the parents are involved with the minute details of their lives.

Often the less mature adults are emotionally estranged from their parents or have only superficial exchanges with them. They also tend to have little interest in their parents' welfare and little understanding of the complexities of their parents' lives and personalities. Finally, the less mature adults reject their parents as role models.

By contrast, more mature young adults tend to have strong confidence in their abilities to make decisions on their own and feel in control of their emotions toward their parents. They also see themselves, rather than their parents, as the best judges of their own worth and so can risk parental disapproval by expressing values that may clash with those of their parents. And the more mature young adults draw a clear line between their own lives and those of their parents.

They tend to have strong emotional ties to their parents and are able to talk with them about feelings and concerns of importance to them, while feeling free to disagree. They also are concerned about their parents' well-being and are able to understand the complexities of their parents' lives, rather than painting them in black-and-white terms. The more mature tend to acknowledge or feel proud of their parents as role models, and, often want to emulate their parents' strengths.

"In the 20s it's not just that you achieve separateness from your parents, but also that you feel connected to them as an adult," White said. "That includes empathy for them, and seeing things from their points of view. Most young adults don't have this perspective until their late 20s."

Using scales that measure those changes, Frank and her colleagues assessed the development of 150 men and women in their 20s on their relationships with their parents. All those studied were from middle-class suburbs and lived within a two-hour drive from their parents.

There were, she said, several major patterns of maturation among the young adults she studied, with significant differences between men and women.

Women most often fell into a pattern of "competent and connected" relationships with their parents. Those people — the pattern fit 40 percent of women and 6 percent of men — had a strong sense of independence and often held views that differed radically from their parents.

But even so, they felt more empathy for them, particularly for their mothers, for whom they were often confidants. Among the women, mothers often were seen as



demanding and critical, but since they understood their mothers' shortcomings they were able to keep conflicts from getting out of hand.

Another pattern more common among the women than the men was to be dependent or emotionally enmeshed, most often with their mothers. Although troubled by their inability to handle life without their parents' help, those young people felt trapped by the relationship. Some saw their parents as overbearing and judgmental, others as emotionally detached. Childish power struggles with parents were common in this group.

The largest number of men, however, had "individuated" relationships in which they felt respected by their parents and prepared to meet the challenges of life on their own. Thirty-six percent of the men and 6 percent of the women fell into this group. While they felt a clear boundary between their own lives and those of their parents, they also felt free to seek advice and assistance. Although they enjoyed their parents' company, there was an emotional distance. Their relationships generally were lacking both in discussions of very personal matters and conflicts.

Another pattern more common in men than women was a false autonomy, in which the young adults feigned an indifference to clear conflicts with their parents, which they handled by avoiding confrontations. With their fathers the main complaint was of mutual disinterest; with their mothers it was the need to hold an intrusive parent at bay. Those people resented their parents' offers of help, and often held them in contempt. They also harbored resentment at their parents' inability to accept them as they were.

Frank's findings are consistent with the work of Bertram Cohler, a psychologist at the University of Chicago. Cohler has proposed that when youths make the transition into adulthood, they become more interdependent with their parents, rather than more independent of them.

"They reconnect with their parents after separating in adolescence," Frank said.

Frank found that over the course of their 20s, those in her study tended to move in the more mature direction. Although most had made the shift by 29, some still remained in an emotional adolescence.

Gould said, "There are some eternal adolescents, who never achieve a sense of their own maturity in these ways."

While many influential theories of adult development hold that marriage is a key turning point in emotional maturation. Frank did not find this to be the case. She found that being married, apart from age, made no difference in people's psychological growth.

White found young adults more mature in relation to their spouses than to their parents. "The clinical literature says that the degree to which you've worked through your emotional relationship with your parents determines your ability to develop a close relationship with your spouse," she said.

"But that's not what I've found," she added. "People tend to be more mature in their relationships with their spouses than with their parents, if they are mature in either."

"People are more compelled to work out their marital conflicts than they are to work out their relationships with their parents," she said. "Your parents are your parents forever."

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## ACTIVITIES: Individual Journey

This activity may be done individually or in a group.

Kathleen White's research on 150 people in their 20s reported in "Some 'Teen-agers' Are Nearly 30" describes many aspects of and differences in styles of maturing. Choose five aspects that are interesting to you.

### Example list:

- Did I lean on my parents?
- Did I feel rageful or overly dependent?
- Did I judge my parents as all good or all bad?
- Did I feel free to seek advice or assistance and still feel confident of my own worth and free to express values different from my parents?
- If I married, was I more mature in my relationship with my spouse than with my parents?

Remembering that some young adults go through all of these stages, ask:

1. Does this describe me?
2. If yes, at what age?
3. If no, what did I do instead?
4. Does this describe a young adult I know?
5. How can this information help me interact with this young adult?

### Cultural Customs

In a group:

- Share knowledge of young adulthood in other cultures. State whether your information comes from personal experience, from reading, from TV or radio, or from stories told by other people. Or have each person choose another culture to find out about before the next meeting.
- Does the information shared match the research reported here?
- What are your guesses about how much young adult stages are a function of culture? Of individual family life?

By Jean Clarke

**Omissions:** Barbara Kobe's name was omitted from page 6, Issue 53, Vol. 9, No. 5, November 1989. These *Examples of Lunch Bag Goodie Notes* may be reproduced for non-commercial and educational purposes. Please write the name, Barbara Kobe, at the bottom of the page before you reproduce it.

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## Opening Activity

Hand out name tags.

Ask each person to:

- Choose a partner.
- Make a name tag for him and ask him to tell you about a task he learned to do as a youngster or as a young adult. Ask him how he felt when he acquired the ability to do his chore without supervision and without reminding. Ask him how adults rewarded him for having reached that level of responsibility.
- Introduce your partner and tell the group how he was rewarded if he is willing for you to share that information.

## Closing Activity

At the end of the meeting:

- Briefly review the activities of the meeting.
- Ask three people to share any changes they plan to make in the way they teach children or encourage young adults to be skillful at their tasks.
- Ask for resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask each person to share one appreciation that she has for her own skills.

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TASKS

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