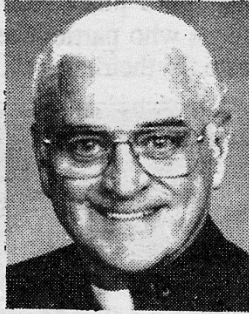


Listening to our Problem Children

It is a sign of our times that more and more children with behavioral problems are being given drugs to calm them down. If a teacher has a serious problem with a child, the school nurse asks the parents for permission to administer a drug like Ritalin. A stressed-out parent finds it difficult to refuse.



What was once called daydreaming is now an attention deficit disorder. A child once referred to as a high-energy toddler is now called hyperactive. Can we be so sure of these labels? Maybe the child takes in too much sugar.

I was an incessant talker in grammar school. In today's world I would probably be labeled a child with a speech control deficit. My mother had to make several trips to the principal's office in an attempt to discipline me. Thank God the good Sisters never suggested I be given a drug.

Dr. Peter Breggen, in his book "Toxic

Drugs," warns us, about the widespread use of legal drugs as a way of controlling children's behavior. Millions of children are being given drugs every day in the United States.

Drugs only deal with the symptoms, but the deeper problem will still be there waiting to leap out at you when you least expect it. It's better to deal with the underlying problem sooner, rather than later.

I have a suggestion.

With all the pressure that parents are under, there is less and less time given to listening to the fears and hurts of children. Sometimes just listening can calm a child's anxieties.

My heart goes out to parents and teachers who are trying to cope with a wild child. I understand that medication can be helpful in some cases, and I don't want to lay a guilt trip on those who have done their best in a difficult situation. But I do want to encourage you to learn the art of listening.

I know a working mother who puts a sofa in her kitchen. In the evening while
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she makes dinner her child often flops on it and talks endlessly.

The mother knows enough to be quiet. She just asks questions like: What are you going to do about that? Do you think it will work? How do you feel about that? What would happen if you decided to be happy in spite of it all? Why let this person rob you of your joy?

We can teach our children to choose to be happy. I think it's a lot better than giving them drugs. Victor Frankl in his book, "Man's Search for Meaning," put it this way: "The most important freedom one has is the freedom to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Don't be discouraged if you're having a tough time parenting. You'll get through it. There is always grace, and you have enough love in you to work wonders.