

Parenting Yesterday Today and Tomorrow

Sebastian Kraemer

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INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, spurred on by increasing anxiety about child abuse, violent crime, delinquency, and drug misuse, public debate about the contribution of parents has become more intense. It has always been tempting to blame parents for the bad behaviour of their children, but this is a more thoughtful discussion. Without blame, it is possible to see what effects different kinds of parenting have on the lives of children, even extending into their own adult lives in the next generation. An enormous number of books and articles, conferences and policy statements have appeared, to the extent that we can say there is a movement towards supporting parents in their task. It is only possible to do this now that we understand just how difficult and stressful the task is. Until recently there was little public or professional acknowledgement of the immensity of parental commitment, perhaps because much of it was carried out by women, mostly mothers, whose voices were not heard. Even now it is easy for busy adults to resist a serious exploration of children's needs, because to do so arouses poignant memories of one's own childhood, both happy and sad, nostalgic and painful.

In this chapter I outline a story of parenthood, from past to future, seen through the lens of attachment theory. Those working closely with families, such as health visitors, social workers, child carers and parent supporters in the voluntary sector need a coherent framework in which to understand family processes. They also need to know that their work cannot flourish in the absence of a coherent national policy on parenthood. The privatisation of children's care and needs is no longer an option.

WHAT IS NEW?

There is a paradox about parenting in that the core task does not change much, yet it is only in the past few decades that we have been able to spell out clearly what it is. Even thousands of years ago you might find children and parents doing similar things to what they do now. Babies are the same as they were then and so are

their needs. The first thing a baby needs is to be held, and most of us instinctively feel this, even with other people's babies. We are programmed to be interested in tiny children, and are all familiar with the way in which babies in prams can hypnotise us with their big eyes. Even hyperactive teenagers are calmed for a moment by the experience.

If you go back far enough into prehistory, you would find no humans at all but creatures resembling us in many ways. The higher primates of today, such as chimpanzees or gorillas probably represent something like our prehuman ancestors, and they look after their offspring in quite familiar ways. The popularity of zoos and nature programmes on TV has a lot to do with the fact that we can identify so readily with animals, particularly those that form attachments between adults and infants. The most obvious sign of this is the way the little one holds on to the adult, but of course you don't have to hold on to be attached. Any visit to the countryside in the spring will demonstrate the system at work. Lambs play around in the field, but as you approach they rush to the ewe and furiously suckle at her teat. (For some reason they also wag their tails vigorously.) It's important that each lamb knows which ewe to go to, and this depends on quite early postnatal contact between the two. Farmers say that it is possible to get lambs adopted by sheep that have not given birth to them, but this has to be skilfully managed. The sea mammals, with neither fur nor limbs, show how attachment is principally a matter of proximity. I am always impressed by the way that dolphins swim together in parallel with an invisible bond between them.

Parenting is not simply a social activity. It is an essential biological process, without which our infants would not survive. Newborn humans are particularly fragile because they still have a lot of developing to do. They are nowhere near ready for any kind of independence. All they can do with any skill is to suck at a nipple or teat. Of course they are also well equipped with voice boxes to ensure that everyone knows when they need looking after, and within a few weeks are able to entrance their caretakers with smiles. None of this is new. It has been like that for tens of thousands of years.

JOHN BOWLBY AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

The originator of attachment theory, John Bowlby, died in 1990 aged 82. He was the son of an eminent surgeon and brought up in Edwardian style (see Holmes, 1993). So what could such a man possibly understand about the intimacies of mother and child in the modern world? After the second world war the reconstruction of society included some quite new observations about children. It

became clear that food and clothing were necessary for them to thrive, but not sufficient. Some who had been evacuated had suffered terribly because they were taken away from their loved ones. It was also noted that children in institutional care did not thrive, and some even died, in the absence of love. It didn't have to be parental love, but it did have to be close and intimate. Bowlby said that such attentiveness was as important as vitamins. But because of the conventional segregations of husbands and wives of the time, it seemed obvious to everyone, including him of course, that this was about the child's tie to the mother (actually the title of one of his early papers). He noted that children who became delinquents in adolescence had suffered deprivation, or actual losses, in parental care, by which he meant maternal care. Women heard of Bowlby's work and believed that they were being told that unless they spent every minute of the day and night with their infants they would damage them for ever. No doubt some mothers did not realise how much their children needed adult human company - it was quite a common practice, for example, to leave babies in the pram outside, to be 'aired', most of the day. But of course it was a terrible misunderstanding, not helped by prevailing custom and Bowlby's own limited social experience, to think that continuous care meant that only one person had to provide it.

The fact is, children need looking after. What this actually means is becoming clearer now that research based on Bowlby's original work is showing how even quite subtle mismatches between parents and babies can lead to later social and learning problems for these children. Clinicians and researchers (eg Murray, Cooper & Stein, 1991) are beginning to see that a whole range of problems, many of which obviously have serious social consequences, are dependent to a considerable extent upon the quality of attachment in early life. We now know that those who have had good attachments to their parents have a far greater chance of passing on this good fortune to their own children (Steele, Steele and Fonagy 1997). Without secure attachment, many of life's ordinary stresses become serious threats. The predictable hurdles of starting school, leaving home and becoming an adult with a sexual and (if lucky) a working life are all points of potential crisis. In addition, although most families still start off intact, as many as a half of all British children will experience the breakup of their parents' relationship (Clarke, 1992). Children and young people who are insecure are at greater risk of a whole host of problems provoked at times of change or loss, including delinquency and bullying, accidents, eating disorders, depression, chronic non-specific ill-health, addictions, and, of course, difficulties in intimate relationships. Secure children have greater confidence, are more generous and have greater capacity to deal with inevitable conflicts with peers. They are more curious

about the world and therefore keener to learn (Sroufe, 1989). Love is not enough, however. The greatest stress for parents is dealing with feelings of rage and hatred, both in themselves and in their children. When children see that we can tolerate and survive such powerful emotions, without resorting to verbal or physical violence, they can learn to do the same.

Attachment is often misunderstood as a kind of instant bond, like superglue, as if one needed to get stuck to the parent and hold on for ever. It is really the opposite, more like a flexible gravitational force. Just as in the most common experience of gravity, the attachment mechanism is most easily observed when one of the participants is big and the other small. From the infant's perspective, the parental figure, usually but not necessarily the mother, seems gigantic and attractive, especially when the little one is tired, hungry, frightened or in pain. Then the child needs to be close to his caregiver, for the sake of protection. Of course the original function of this process was to protect the infant from predators and other life threatening dangers. In humans such dangers are fewer, but the need for emotional protection is greater. A baby alone and in distress is subject to the most awful terrors, which we can barely imagine. (The threat of recalling such states from our own infancy or early childhood may even prevent us from taking the notion of attachment seriously).

Babies need adults to help them make sense of their own states of mind. The infant has very powerful feelings, both of pleasure and of pain, which are probably more embedded in the body than our adult experiences seem to be, but he can't yet think about them in a very organised way. So the adults who look after him, besides having to protect him from harm, (in fact, from dying) and cleaning, feeding, clothing him and putting him to sleep, have a fundamentally important task of helping him to understand his own mind. The notion of an infant having thoughts is quite novel, and arises out of early psychoanalytic work, including Bowlby's (see also Miller et al., 1989). Just because we forget our early experiences does not mean that they did not occur, nor that they were vague and meaningless as was often assumed in the not so distant past. But the capacity for thinking cannot develop in an emotional vacuum. Video studies of mother-infant interaction show how the two can get into a rhythm - like a dance - so that each is responding to the other's cues. This sort of thing is hard to talk about without putting some people off. It is rather like discussing sexual intercourse, in that the process is intimate, private, and rather disturbing to contemplate. They are, after all, lovers. What the mother-baby studies show is that when it goes well the baby gets looked after not only physically, but psychologically as well. The psychological health that

results means, amongst other things, being able to understand both your own and other peoples' feelings. It also gives you more confidence in your own point of view, and more curiosity about the world around you, including other peoples points of view. These are fundamental social skills, and most people have them in some degree.

It is important to note here that the attachment process probably determines not only emotional and social development, but also the stability of physiological variables. There is strong evidence from animal studies to show that early separation from mother, for example, has profoundly disturbing effects on the maintenance of body systems such as the circulation and pressure of the blood, immunity from infection, hormone levels, temperature control and so on (Hofer 1995).

Even when they are past infancy small children cannot be left alone without an adult close by, but what is the point of this proximity? Is it just to prevent accidents? No, it is to be present, so that the child is conscious that there is someone there. You might not have to say anything at all, though there will be inevitable bursts of chatter, laughter or tears. And when you start school you can dress yourself and wipe your bottom, but still need someone to be available to manage all sorts of experiences, not just to help with doing up buttons. You need someone to look after you and somewhere familiar where this can take place. The important thing about being looked after is that it is done by someone who not only protects you from harm but also keeps you in mind, who thinks about you quite a lot of the time, even when you are not there, someone who is interested in you, who wants to know how you are, what you would like to eat, to play with, to take to bed when you go to sleep, someone who knows about how you began in life and, just as important as all the others, knows how to deal with you when you behave badly.

We can say similar things about teenagers, who also make enormous demands on the capacity of their parents to keep calm and not be swayed by powerful and contradictory emotions. But the point is simply that none of these requirements have changed significantly in thousands of years. What has changed is the knowledge we now have about it. Besides the brilliant research studies on infant attachment, there is also the intergenerational work that shows what many people intuitively knew, which is that your attachment to your parents has a profound influence on your capacity to look after your own children. There is a strong correlation between one generation and the next, but the influences of father and mother are not necessarily related. So you can acquire

different skills and different deficits from each parent. Although formal research has not yet got that far, clinical and casework experience shows how significant other close attachments can be, with grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, childminders, nannies, and so on.

A secure attachment is not a glue, then, more a invisible bond. When all is well it can stretch and the offspring can move away to explore the world around. It is a condition for learning and being curious about other relationships and other things. The anxiously attached child cannot feel free like this (Bowlby, 1988). He has to cling to his parent, in case she gets unhappy, or ill or even disappears. So the elastic is very tight, actually rather glue-like, and development is inhibited. If the parent is rejecting the bond may lose its elasticity and the child floats freely, apparently without needs, street wise and self reliant, but actually desperate to be looked after. But of course attachment is lifelong; it is not only for children. Only adolescents routinely deny this truth, as many have to, in order to escape the gravitational field of home. The rest of us know how important it is to have someone close, somewhere to live and to belong to and something to do that makes sense. All these are attachments.

Many, though not all, of the ideas I have summarised here have become what might be regarded as the *official* view on parenting. That is to say it is no longer possible to pretend that children can be treated badly and not suffer from it, even if they seem to forget about it. But we need to be careful now not to be too certain about what we think is right for children, as if there were no room for doubt. The truth is that there are no rules about childcare, but there are some principles that we can be fairly confident are universal. The most important of these is the primacy of protection - that is what attachment is about, and it means protection both from physical and emotional harm. Modern policy on families must be based on this primary goal, which is the promotion of secure attachments between parents and children.

In the past there were no policies at all. Children were loved, hated, abused, abandoned and killed. But the single most obvious difference between past and present is the fact that, until the twentieth century, children often died before their parents, indeed before their first birthdays (Kessen, 1965), and if they did not die they were often abandoned. The Paris hospice in the eighteenth century had a revolving door, rather like the device used in banks for taking and delivering cash, except without the window, so no one would see who had left the child. In London, Thomas Coram built the foundling hospital in 1740. You can still see in their little

museum the pathetic trinkets left with the babies so that they could be identified by their parents, just in case they were able to retrieve them at a later date. It would be convenient to think that in such circumstances people would not get so attached to their children, to make it easier to lose them. There is little evidence for this view. Epitaphs for children who have died often demonstrate the agony of parental grief, even if it is tempered by the expectation that the child will be better off in heaven. Indeed this may be so since the quality of childcare in past ages was probably on average far poorer than it is today. It's important to distinguish the love that parents have for children, with the actual care they provide. They are not strictly correlated. (This, incidentally, is particularly true of fathers, including modern ones.) It is quite possible to be devastated by the death of a child whom one has loved and at the same time treated quite cruelly.

Lloyd de Mause's shocking text, *The Evolution of Childhood* begins with the memorable words "the history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken" (1976, p1). He outlines a series of stages in child rearing which suggest indeed that in ancient times the death of children was not only expected, but often willed. There were economic reasons for infanticide - it was the only reliable form of family planning in those days - but de Mause's thesis is that children are also the recipients of all sorts of projections put on them by parents. You can see how this might arise. A baby is a captive in your home who, however much he or she is loved, will tend to persecute you with the inevitable demands of a helpless person. The infant cannot wait, he is greedy and selfish. If seen this way it is not surprising that children have so often been identified as essentially evil beings. (Do you need to be reminded of the fact that your own can seem like angels one minute, and devils the next?) Even in the not very distant past of, say, two hundred years ago children were often quite cruelly neglected before they were able to walk and talk, and then, if they managed to survive, they were likely to be faced with quite active measures on the part of their caretakers to control their movements. The swaddling of babies with bandages was meant to prevent them from doing terrible things to themselves, as well as to limit their freedom. It was thought that crawling was bad for them because it is similar to the way animals get about. (And of course in those days it was an offence to human dignity to think that we could have anything to do with animals. Look at the trouble Charles Darwin had when he said that we are descended from wild creatures.) Except when they needed cleaning, small children were wrapped up for several months, and would be left lying around, or even hanging up, like articles of clothing or luggage. This was a widespread practice in Europe until the nineteenth century. We can

be shocked by this now, because we have far better appreciation of children's actual needs. To the parents of past times such behaviour was not at all negligent. And it limited the demands of small children, though presumably not the noise they could make. A silent child was preferable. "...expressions of tenderness towards children occur most often when the child is non-demanding, especially when the child is either asleep or dead." (de Mause, 1991, p17)

Here is Susanna Wesley writing to her son John, the founder of Methodism, in the eighteenth century: "I insist on conquering the wills of children..... the parent who studies to subdue self-will in his children, works together with God in the saving of a soul: the parent who indulges it does the devil's work...break their wills betimes.. let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly.... at all events from that age make him do as he is bid if you whip him ten times running to effect it. Let none persuade you that it is cruelty to do this; it is cruelty not to" (cited by Newson and Newson, 1974). The pressure to produce obedient children was justified by the fear that if they were to die untamed they would not go to heaven, but it's clear that there is an element of the projection that de Mause speaks of, and with which we are all familiar even now. And it is worth noting that the parent who is expected to enforce God's will is the father. It is also likely that the privilege of sexual abuse of his children was assumed by the same father, justified by all sorts of excuses such as the need to prepare his daughters for marriage. I do not dwell on adults' sexual contact with children in this chapter, but it should be clear that the extent of all child abuse was far greater in the past than it is now. The difference is that in the past it was either taken for granted, or just ignored.

The notion of parenting is a new one. In the past there were mothers and fathers, but also many others who took different roles in relation to children. Older siblings, particularly in large families would have had some duties with younger ones, and the so-called extended family was more in evidence than now. I say so-called because there is a tendency nowadays to idealise this arrangement, as if it were in all ways better for children. We might imagine a peaceful rural scene in which all the uncles and aunts, grandparents and even great grandparents somehow live together, so that no one is ever alone, and no child is without somebody to care for him or her. There is some truth in this. People travelled far less than they do now in almost all past societies, so that surviving relatives were more likely to live nearby if not in the same house. Domestic architecture, furthermore, even in quite grand houses, which were often built without corridors, tended to allow little privacy. This is hardly ideal, however. Is it really so wonderful to have a crowd of

people on top of you all the time? Moments of intimacy, whether between adults or between adults and children were probably rather rare. The exclusive relationship which all children crave from their parents will have been virtually unobtainable. Even in large modern families it is hard for any individual child to spend much time alone with one parent. We now know that the sort of relationships that lead to secure attachments will be few in number and all the attachment figures will be well known to the child. So the extended family, particularly when it is large, might well have diluted these intimate bonds. A little child could be cared for by up to a dozen different people in the day, or by none of them at all, since any one of them might reasonably assume that someone else was responsible. If a child wandered off from the household, who would check that he or she was gone? In this arrangement, parents were not necessarily the closest to their children, though they would most likely still feel the strongest interest in them over the child's lifespan. Even today fathers can have this kind of extended family link to their children. The children may not see him for days, or even weeks. He may not be a caretaker at all. Support for parents, the principal theme of this book, must not be organised in such a way as to obscure the answer to this simple question: *who at this moment is primarily responsible for the care and protection of this child?*

In the past fifty years fashions in advice to mothers have changed very rapidly. The old idea of the child as a kind of enemy still survives but is no longer the official view. But even up to the time of the second world war, the standard method of childrearing was built on this assumption. Something had changed, however. It was now thought that the early years of a child's life were indeed formative ones, and that it was therefore a public matter how children were brought up. "The neglected toddler in everyone's way is the material which becomes the disgruntled agitator, while the happy contented child is the pillar of the state" said Gwen St Aubyn in a parenting manual published in 1935 (cited by Humphreys and Gordon 1993). All this was in the context of enormous losses of men in the Great War and in South Africa, and an explicit concern that we needed to replenish stocks of obedient fighting men in case there was another war. It is important to note how parenthood is related to the prevailing moral code. In earlier times God's will was the driving force, but by the early twentieth century it was the survival of the nation that mattered most. The most influential expert of those days was Dr Frederick Truby King, originally based in New Zealand, who launched a successful movement to convert mothers to breast feeding. Besides this laudable aim, almost everything else he preached was quite horrific. The key to the Truby King method was to feed your baby by the clock every four hours

and never at night. If you gave in to him he would become spoiled and spineless and, by implication, no use as a soldier when he grew up. To toughen them up, babies were to spend much of the day on their own outside in the fresh air, and should not be cuddled or comforted even when in distress. Mothers were not encouraged to play with babies, because it would excite them too much. Toilet training began in the first year. Masturbation was a dangerous pastime that would lead to unmentionable problems later in life. Various devices, hardly different from the swaddles and splints of earlier times, were recommended to prevent it. Thumbsucking was almost as bad. Fathers had no role except earning money. Middle class mothers were particularly taken by this method, in the expectation that they could produce perfect children, but it was heartbreaking. Only a decade later, but with a world war in between, Benjamin Spock published the first edition of *Baby and Child Care*. It was a breakthrough for parents, and sold millions of copies. He said you can trust your own judgement about what the child, particularly the baby, needs. He didn't say that you could let children do anything that they like. He said that you should know what the baby wants, which is not necessarily the same as doing what the baby wants. "Children are proud to think that they can be truly useful and will rise to the challenge. This can begin very young. a baby of 9 months shouldn't be allowed to get the impression that it's alright to pull mother's hair or bite her cheek but that he owes her respect...." (Spock, 1968).

PARENTING TODAY

The revolution in social life that has occurred in the past twenty years will probably never be reversed. Women's work is no longer confined to the home. Furthermore, the nature of paid work has changed for both men and women, with women gaining and men losing. Most new jobs now go to women, and are part time. These are not always well paid, but they may be convenient. But for both sexes there is no security in work. You don't get a job 'for life' any more. The institution of marriage has changed in parallel with this. If present trends continue, a third or more of the next generation won't get a husband or wife, or a partner, for life any more, either. This has its impact on children. Whereas in Victorian times children would, if they survived, gain step parents through the death of biological ones, now the process is driven by separation and divorce. There is an enormous amount of panic about all this. The arguments about single parents have been painfully polarised, and readily hijacked by the media and politicians with their own agendas. The fact is that about three quarters of families in Britain still have both the original parents in them, and that many step and single parents manage to bring up their children well enough. In spite of the mental pain caused by family breakdown, and by the

years of conflict that may precede it, it is often poverty that is the greatest enemy of single parents. But we do know from research that the greatest emotional damage comes from continued battles over the children between separated or divorced parents (Amato and Keith, 1991).

Another subject for ill informed panic is the extent of child abuse. It was only in the nineteen sixties that paediatricians realized that the strange patterns of fractures they were seeing on the X-rays of small sick babies were in fact multiple injuries. The term 'battered baby' came into use then. Over a decade later, a similar revelation dawned on child health professionals and social workers, which was that the disclosures by children of sexual abuse done to them in secret by adults were not lies. By now we are familiar with the sickening truth, which is that children are statistically at far greater danger from their parents and caregivers than from anyone else. We know that parenthood is incredibly stressful, but that it is less likely to be abusive if the parents have been supported. The best support you can have is that provided by your own parents a generation earlier. But if you haven't had that, then it is even more important to get it from elsewhere. This is not something that can be left to chance. There are scattered signs that it is being recognised by those making or influencing policies in education, health and social services. But the way government departments are organised goes against any co-ordinated effort to promote secure attachments for the next generation. Simply advising social workers to give more support to families at risk is unlikely to make much difference, for example.

PARENTING TOMORROW

We have a choice. The nightmare or a better world. The nightmare is easy to describe - more homelessness, more hopeless adolescents getting caught up in drugs and prostitution, or having babies before they are ready to be parents. No future for young people, not even for graduates, who can't get jobs either. Lawless groups roam the streets. Some say we are returning to the Middle Ages, with the multinational companies taking the place of powerful and rivalrous City States, where the lucky few enjoy the privileges of wealth and happiness locked away in fortresses with armed guards. The vision of a better world is harder to picture, partly because after twenty years of decline, we are demoralised and defeated. It's not worth planning for change, we just have to plan for survival. We can do better than that, but it does require a leap of the imagination. We need a national policy that promotes parenthood and will put money into it.

When a baby is just born he or she needs looking after by a very close circle of people. No one can do this task alone. Often grandmothers, friends or childminders will help, mostly women. In my view, fathers and stepfathers must be there too. There is considerable pressure from the European Commission to introduce proper levels of parental leave throughout the EU. Sweden, only recently a member, leads the way. Both parents have the right to paid leave from work intermittently over several years of the child's early life. This is just the first step in promoting parenthood, and it is important both for children to be looked after by both men and women. Little children see women being effective both as parents and workers. Unless fathers are included in looking after children, how are the children going to see what men are like, and how can men find out what children are like? You may say that men should not be allowed near children, in case they abuse them sexually. Possibly, but the evidence from systematic research is that men will rarely abuse their own children if they are involved in caring for them from the very start (Parker and Parker, 1986). Fathers are just as capable of devoted parental care as mothers, and there is no need to discriminate against their taking an equal share in the task, if they are available to do it. They are not needed just to punish children, they are needed to look after them, just as mothers do, which includes being both loving and firm as the occasion demands (Kraemer 1995a). There has been an enormous change in the prevailing view of fatherhood, in that many men are now proud to say how much they do for their children, even if it is sometimes an exaggeration. In the past - less than fifty years ago - most men would have been puzzled by the very idea of participant fatherhood, but would have been keen to show that they provided for the mother and children by earning money. Being the breadwinner is no longer a male prerogative, however, and it's time that notion was put to rest. The non-domestic world may still seem to be dominated by male values, but the fact is that men are increasingly marginalized. Without the opportunity to be useful parents, men will slide further into meaninglessness, as we are beginning to see in the suicide statistics.

The second step is a revolution in childcare, including support for parents who are not employed. New family centres, offering childcare facilities, are being set up which encourage participation of both mothers and fathers, and are used by families across the social spectrum. Yet these are pioneers in a virtual desert. At present there is little in the way of organised quality childcare in Britain. This also costs money, but possibly not as much as it would seem. If employers were to contribute to childcare costs, for example, they might well save on retraining new staff to replace those that have to leave. Some parents want to take longer breaks from work

to be with their babies, others are keen to return. Either way they will need help. The future of parenthood depends on the task being shared with others. Whatever arrangements are made for non-parental childcare the people doing it have to be properly trained, and properly paid. It is not sufficient to leave these costs to the parents themselves. The privatisation of family life has been the policy of both the political left and right up to now, and it will not do. Because children's needs are now known to be so much greater, it is inconceivable that one or two people can successfully carry out the task unaided. If it is shared between skilled people, there is far less chance of neglect and abuse. Of course if the caretakers are not valued nor skilled, they may well abuse the most vulnerable children, as we have seen in numerous local authority scandals. Rather than talk of children's centres or nurseries, Penelope Leach in her most recent book *Children First* (1993) talks of 'child-places' where all sorts of child related activities might take place, both formal and informal, both with and without parental involvement. There is a role for child and adolescent mental health professionals in such a place. They used to be collectively known as 'child guidance', which is easier to say but now rather an out of date concept. The newer model of work involves assessment and therapy with children, young people and families as before (see for example, Daws, 1989) but there are far too many children with serious problems to leave it at that. Health visitors, teachers, social workers, childcarers and others are in daily contact with children who are clearly disturbed or at risk of abuse and neglect. Calling a case conference may be necessary, as may a referral for specialist help, but often it is not clear quite what should be done, and mental health specialists are increasingly being asked to give informal advice to front-line workers. Sometimes a brief consultation can be surprisingly helpful. Often it is possible to point out that the children in question are in far greater trouble than the worker thought, which helps to set in motion more appropriate action (Kraemer, 1995b).

The revolution has to go further than that. People need homes and jobs. We have seen the disastrous effects of high rise housing. It's better to build neighbourhoods where children can play without being run over. (Although the total of road deaths in Britain is going down, the number of children injured or killed in the streets is going up). Nobody expects full time life-long employment but the welfare and taxation systems are still locked into the idea that you either work or you don't. You can do both and, if you are a parent, some of the time that you are not working can be devoted to you children.

Finally, education. If parenthood were taken seriously it would be put on the National Curriculum from primary school onwards. Teachers would need to be specially trained to do this kind of work, which is different from didactic instruction. After leaving school there are opportunities to learn about caretaking. There is much talk nowadays about voluntary service for young people. Some, such as Michael Young (1995), even say it should be compulsory! This could include supervised experience in looking after the elderly, people with disabilities, toddlers and infants. It could introduce in a way no other programme could the realities of attachment and dependency to young people just becoming adults. It may even put them off parenthood for a while, which is no bad thing. Preparation for parenthood is obviously most in demand when the baby is on the way, or when he or she is just born. Besides antenatal classes and parent support groups there is also a wide literature for parents to read, including the authoritative series from the Tavistock Clinic *Understanding your Child**, published in separate books for each year of life from babyhood to the teens, and including a special edition for parents of disabled children.

CONCLUSION

Modern practice in enhancing parenthood must be based on a clear vision of the goal - secure attachment. Other contributions in this book will show some of the many approaches that can be adopted to achieve it. My intention here has been outline a historical sequence to put the reader in context. The dawning recognition both of the importance and the burden of parenting is just one of the strands in the movement bringing the lives - the needs and rights - of children into the open. The care of young children particularly has remained until very recently largely a hidden activity, carried out informally, in cash or in kind, by women doing their best, with little public support or recognition.

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