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| http://www.naturalchild.org/images/spacer.gif | http://www.naturalchild.org/images/spacer.gif |
| http://www.naturalchild.org/images/spacer.gif | |  | | --- | | The Relationship Between Feelings and Behavior | | **by Sidney D. Craig, Ph.D.** | |

Feelings play a crucial role in determining human behavior. Our behavior toward other persons is determined by our feelings toward them. Obviously, we behave differently toward those we like than toward those we dislike.

Assuming that we have no reason to hide or disguise our feelings, if we like certain people, we are more likely to spend time with them, talk with them, confide in them, do nice things for them, and in general we strive to make them happy. On the other hand, if we dislike or are angry with certain other people, we are likely to avoid spending time with them, avoid talking with them, avoid doing nice things for them, and in general we do not strive to make them happy. If sufficiently angered, we may even do things to hurt the other person.

Consider for a moment the case of a young man who wants a certain young woman to marry him. His problem is to determine how he should act so as to produce a specific feeling in her. If he chooses his behavior carefully (i.e., taking the girl to nice places, flattering her, being considerate and attentive, etc.), at some point during the relationship the woman will say to herself: "Oh, I really love that man. I think I'll marry him." In response to the feeling the man induced in her, the woman behaved as he wished. There is an important principle revealed in this couple's interaction: *Loving feelings produce loving behavior.*

This principle acts also in the production of negative feelings. Suppose, for example, that after this couple marries, the husband becomes less sensitive to his wife's needs. He no longer says complimentary things to her. He ignores her birthday, Valentine's Day, and their anniversary, and he begins spending his evenings away from home in the company of his boyhood friends. Gradually, the feelings of love in the wife will be converted to anger. Reflecting this anger, her behavior toward the husband will change. She may begin to scold a great deal, to become less affectionate and less sexually responsive. If sufficiently angered, she may sever the relationship entirely by divorce. The behavior of this young couple from courtship through divorce illustrates the operation of a significant law that governs interpersonal relationships: *Loving feelings produce loving behavior. Angry feelings produce angry behavior.* This is a law of human nature as predictable and inevitable as any of the laws that govern the physical universe.

This law is highly significant for parents, because it operates in parent-child relationships as forcefully as in all others. If we want our children to spend time with us, to like us, to confide in us, to value some of the things we value, and to try to make us happy (for example, by refraining from the use of dangerous drugs), we must behave toward them in ways that create feelings of love toward us rather than feelings of dislike or anger. *We cannot reasonably expect to receive "good" behavior from our children unless we create "good" feelings in them.* *Parents cannot create angry feelings in a child over a period of many years and then expect that the child will show loving behavior in return.*

The key to understanding human behavior lies in understanding the feelings that underlie and produce the behavior. The key to guiding children's behavior into socially desirable channels consists in knowing how to create in the child those positive, loving feelings which will produce positive, loving, and, therefore, non-delinquent behavior. Or, conversely, the key lies in the parents' avoiding the production, cumulatively, of those angry feelings in the child which will produce angry, negativistic, delinquent behavior. Unfortunately, nature has introduced several factors into the parent-child relationship that make it extremely difficult for even the most sincere, well-meaning parent to convey to the child his/her true, loving feelings. The first of these is the complex nature of love itself.

Love is experienced in two different ways: (1) as an inner feeling or sensation and (2) as a series of overt actions. The person who is "in love" is aware of certain feelings or sensations taking place entirely within his own body. These feelings as such cannot be communicated to another person, except through some form of overt action. The person who is loved can know it or feel it only as he is the recipient of certain loving actions toward him on the part of the individual who is "in love." Unfortunately, in the human species there is no instinctive or otherwise inevitable connection or relationship between the inner feeling of love and the kinds of overt actions that demonstrate the love. This means that *it is entirely possible for a parent to love a child totally, inwardly, and yet to act toward that child in ways that do not reveal his love.*

It happens often that parents who are genuinely loving in their inner feelings for a child, have by a misguided selection of actions, conveyed to the child the message that he was *not* loved. Informing the child verbally of the parents' inner feelings and hugging and kissing him are usually insufficient to overcome the child's response to other long-term parental actions. Those parents with whom I have worked over the years have always been able to state honestly that they loved their children. Their children, however, had not experienced them as loving parents, because *the children were responding to the parental actions and not to the inner feelings or intent.*

Many parents, when they first come in for counseling regarding their children, are somewhat angry with psychologists and clergymen. They say things such as: "You have always told us that if we just loved them, they would be all right. Well, we do love them - and they're not all right. They even say they hate us. Why?" Their problem, of course, was not that they had failed to love their children, but that they had failed to choose correctly those forms of behavior by which their inner feelings of love could have been revealed to the child. Very often I have said to such parents, "You know that you love your child and I know it, but *he* doesn't know it." Counseling with such parents does not consist in urging the parents to love their own children. Rather, it consists in helping the parents to discover which forms of behavior may best reveal to the child what the parents have felt toward him from the beginning.