



Let's Discuss It!

A FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION

About The Film

This is the fourth film of the mental mechanism series. The other films were THE FEELING OF REJECTION, THE FEELING OF HOSTILITY and OVER-DEPENDENCY. It is black and white, and thirty-two minutes long.

The mental mechanism series was made by the National Film Board for the Mental Health Division of the Department of National Health and Welfare. The series was designed to be used by doctors to show groups of patients how some emotional problems begin.

Although the mental mechanism series was made for such special use they are now being shown more widely because it is obvious that parents and other people who have care of children can gain useful information from them. As may be seen in the films, the attitudes which lead to emotional trouble often start in childhood and might be avoided if parents were alive to the danger signals.

It is from the point of view of prevention of emotional illness that the films should be considered in general, non-specialist showings. What is shown of the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness is best left for discussion by experts.

Producing the mental mechanism series was a joint project between the National Film Board's production staff and the Department of National Health and Welfare's Mental Health Division. The chief consultant was Dr. Manuel Prados, of the Allan Memorial Institute of Psychiatry, Montreal. The film was made in Ottawa with a cast of amateurs chosen by the director, Stanley Jackson. The little boy who so ably acts the part of the central character was chosen from the classroom of an Ottawa school. He is Stephen Redfern, aged eight.

Stanley Jackson has made many films where children are principal actors. Some of the more recent were SUMMER IS FOR KIDS, WHO WILL TEACH YOUR CHILD? and OUR TOWN IS THE WORLD. Jackson once taught school in Toronto.

The Story Of The Film

FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION is the story of John Murray, a partner in an advertising agency, whose peace of mind is shattered by a growing feeling of depression. Routine troubles at the office are magnified into calamity, by John's despair. He feels that he is responsible for each business reverse although his partner tries to show him that the slump is general. At home he asks his wife, "I'm no good, why do you stay with me?"

To show how John Murray becomes so upset emotionally the film turns back to his childhood. We see him first as an only child, secure in the full warmth of his parents' affection. However, another child is born and John is obliged to share his possession. John feels neglected by his mother and resentful toward his younger brother. To John the new child is an interloper, a thief of his mother's affection. His mother's illness, death, and the coming of his aunt as housekeeper create further problems for John. As the children grow, events increase John's resentment until one day in anger he beats the younger child. Now John is punished by his father and again feels neglected and rejected. In later years his resentment shows in quarrels with his father.

After his father's death, John tries to make amends by assuming the stolid drudgery of the family business in order to provide for his brother. This is a genuine sacrifice, since John had to put aside his ambition to become an author for the relative security of an established, though dull, business.

Through the years while his brother is at school and college, John seems to have adjusted himself to the discipline of his self-enforced role but later when his brother happily announces his forthcoming marriage, the feeling of resentment again comes to the fore. John, too marries and for a little while is fairly happy again. But with every new accomplishment of his brother, as for example when he publishes a book, John feels upset.

John is ashamed of his jealousy and resentment. Because he feels guilty about his feelings toward his brother, self punishment and depression follows. Gradually the depression builds up until it shadows both his life at home and his interest in his business. His friends urge him to go to a doctor but in his condition he feels that offers little release. He feels he has reached a dead end in his life.

People like John Murray are really ill and require sympathy, understanding and encouragement from their families and friends, the film points out. Recovery is possible and may be hastened when through the growing resources of psychiatry, they begin to understand the background of their emotional trouble. The film was made to help people like John Murray to understand how such feelings of depression arise.

Introducing The Film

This film requires an introduction, in fact it is questionable whether it should be shown without one. Wherever possible the introduction should be made by someone with professional knowledge of the subject - a doctor, or health nurse, perhaps. Failing such help, you might stress that the film is unusual in that it was not made for general showing, but rather to be used by doctors in helping groups of patients to understand the nature of their emotional trouble. Then explain why it is being shown - to show parents how some adults become seriously disturbed because they cannot forget the frustrations of childhood. Concentrate on this aspect of the film; unless you have skilled help it is unwise to discuss the technical aspects of the story.

Introducing The Discussion

Suggest to the audience that in discussing this film they consider it from point of view of what parents may do to avoid the kind of situation it shows. For example you might ask one of the audience if he or she feels that the first child in the family requires extra understanding and support from his parents. From that point you might lead on to what kind of help and direction parents could give the child particularly before and after other children are born.

During the course of discussion it might be well to consider briefly the guidance parents might receive from the family doctor or a child guidance clinic in avoiding the situations which contribute to a child's emotional problems. The main emphasis in discussion should be on what parents can do to learn more about the needs of the child and how to meet them. Thus, if any in the audience should remark that John Murray's parents were at fault it would be wise to dwell on this point and to let the audience consider what might better have been done by them.

Some Questions For Discussion

1. The film shows how John came to resent his younger brother. How might this have been avoided by his parents? By his foster mother?
2. Do you think the first-born children are more likely to encounter emotional problems than the later ones?
3. The film stresses how much the child depends on the love, warmth and security of the home. Do you think quarrels between parents within hearing of the child are a major factor in destroying his sense of security? How else might it be destroyed? What about punishment - Can it do lasting harm to a child?

4. We see that John wants to help with the household tasks because in this way he feels closer to his mother. Do you think that farm children have a greater opportunity for sharing such activities than the city children?
5. Giving a child a share in the responsibilities of the home increases his feeling of "belonging". What else does it do?
6. Do you think that parents who give constant thought and effort to safeguarding the child's personality might tend to "spoil" him?
7. Do you think John acted wisely when he gave up his own ideals in order to provide for his brother? Was there any other way out or was this the only course open to a person like John?
8. It was said lately that the number of school children showing signs of emotional strain is increasing. Why is this; small families? poor housing? less family life? lurid films and radio programs?
9. Do you think that middle class families of the kind shown in these films are more prone to mental illness than farm families or the families of industrial workers?
10. What do you think every parent might do to ward off this kind of trouble in the family?

FURTHER INFORMATION

Books from Public Libraries

- "The Substance of Mental Health" - George Preston.
- "Discovering Ourselves" - Strecker and Appel.

Booklets

- "Up the Years - From One to Six - Department of Health, Welfare.
- "Toward Mental Health" - Public Affairs Pamphlets. Obtainable from
Canadian Forum, Charles St W., Toronto.
Price 25 cents.

Folders

- Child Training Series; - folders on "Obedience", and "Fears", produced by Department of National Health and Welfare, and available from provincial Departments of Health.

Films

(From The National Film Society, 172 Wellington Street, Ottawa)

FEELING OF REJECTION	FEELING OF HOSTILITY
EMOTIONAL HEALTH	CHILDREN GROWING UP WITH OTHER PEOPLE
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND	YOUR CHILDREN AND YOU
PROBLEM CHILD	PROBLEM CHILDREN
YOUR CHILDREN'S SLEEP	WHY WON'T TOMMY EAT?
KNOW YOUR BABY	LIFE WITH JUNIOR
MEETING EMOTIONAL NEEDS IN CHILDHOOD.	

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