

## What Can We Do With Sinners And Losers?

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Why so much crime, drugs, divorce, homelessness? There's one reason and we can fix them with a few changes to our education systems. Find Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

Every sin is an attempt to fly from emptiness.

- [Simone Weil](#), French philosopher, mystic, activist (1909-1943)

I have never met a person who, as a child, wanted to grow up to be a criminal, a drug addict, a gulper of prescribed drugs, a divorcee, a workaholic, a gambling addict, an alcoholic or a wife beater. Nor have I ever heard or read of one.

Yet somehow so many of us grow into these roles in life.

Are we a society of losers?

A recovered alcoholic, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, considers himself a lifelong addict. Does that mean we should consider him a lifelong loser and treat him as a social pariah, as human detritus?

If not, then how should we think of and treat such people? How, indeed, should we think of and treat those who still "suffer" daily with their affliction? Is it even possible to have our governments provide sufficient assistance to help a significant number of them recover? Many people believe it's not possible.

The subject of helping people to recover from their life problems is so enormous that most of us prefer to not think about it. "It would just cost us more taxes." Of course those people don't realize how much of their taxes already go into dealing with the social problems these people create, including the cost of health insurance and maintaining prisons and rehab facilities for them. Some estimate that figure as high as half our taxes today.

We don't want to face up to the fact that society has failed them. Especially because we have no clue about how we could have failed them. Fair enough. Let's worry about what we can fix.

Now return to my first sentence. We, as parents, as teachers, as relatives and neighbours, grow our own children from scratch. They learn what we teach them.

They learn what we teach them. They learn what we teach them. So let's teach them what they need before they need it. Before they break.

Too many of us believe that children should be kept in innocence for as long as possible. Such people are wrong and dangerous to society. The whole purpose of childhood is to learn how to cope with the rigors of adulthood. Not to turn childhood innocence into adult ignorance. A child that doesn't learn as early as possible about the pitfalls as problems of adults is doomed to fall victim to them and not have any defences at the ready.

We have long established traditions for teaching children what they need to know. One is called schools. The other is called parents. If that sounds patronizing, remember that these are the primary sources of education for children, all children. In a Canadian study of teens a few years ago, 89 percent of them claimed that most of what they learned about life came directly from their parents.

In general, schools are not allowed to teach what kids need so that they can cope with the rigors of the adult world they are growing into. Schools are directed, by curriculum and policy, to teach what kids will need to be employable, to be good employees. However, schools suffer from the lack of need satisfaction in the teens they teach through discipline problems. Students who can cope with their problems suffer from loss of classroom time when the troubled kids act out.

Most young parents know little or nothing more than what they learned about parenting from their own parents. Which is grossly insufficient. Which dooms their children to develop the kinds of problems mentioned at the start of this article.

New parents whose goal is to be better parents than their own parents were to them are lucky. They know they need to do something different. Unfortunately, they don't know what to do. They know what they want to be different for their kids, but not necessarily how to achieve it. They have no easily accessible source for that information.

Western societies are extremely lucky that they don't have more social problems than they do. They must be doing something right. After all, western societies have few problems with terrorism, war and other forms of rampant violence found in other parts of the world, parts that claim that parents do know what they should be teaching their children. Maybe not.

No matter where in the world you look, social problems abound.

Does that mean that social problems are unavoidable? No. It means that, in general, people in all parts of the world have no clear idea what to teach their children to help them cope with life in the 21st century.

Sadly, the last time our ancestors did have a good idea about what to teach their children to help them to cope with life, they all lived in tribes. In tribes, the social norm is that every adult bears some responsibility for teaching every child. As little changed from one year to the next, from one decade to the next, knowing what to teach children was adopted as social policy for the tribe. Everyone taught children the same things. Every child got the same message.

We don't do that today. If anything, parents go out of their way to make sure their kids don't grow up like other kids. That's a social norm. Everyone should be different, we believe.

Yet everyone is the same in many ways. We all have the same needs, for example, with few exceptions.

Schools address the needs of employers. Parents address the needs of their children so long as they know what those needs are. However, so many of the needs of children are unknown mysteries to many parents. Most parents learn parenting "on the job."

Many parents don't teach their children about drugs for fear that the kids will "experiment" with drugs. By the time the parents decide to teach the kids about drugs, the kids have already learned about drugs on the street, in the schoolyard, in the parks, virtually everywhere they go. Some kids already take drugs by the time their parents decide it's time to teach them about drugs.

How's that for timing, for knowing what kids need and when?

Why would a child, an adolescent, an adult need to turn to drugs? Simone Weil said it's an attempt to fly from emptiness. What's empty?

Better to say that human needs have gone unfulfilled. The need for fulfillment of needs is what is empty.

Does that sound like psychobabble? That's what many people would say, people who don't know what children need at all, let alone when they should learn stuff that will fulfill their needs. Ignorant people often have strong opinions against evidence that they are ignorant.

It's true that children are not small adults and should not be treated that way. If they were, we would have to punish them for offences they didn't know were offences. For misdeeds they did because they didn't have the words to explain to their parents and teachers what they needed. For bad stuff they did out of frustration because they needed something they couldn't talk about, but adults didn't know either so they ignored the needs of the children, thinking they were just misbehaving. Yet that is what most punishment of children is about.

A child needs to know how to deal with every social situation he experiences. We know that for adults, so we provide ways to teach them social skills, sort of. Few children receive any significant amount of instruction about social skills. They learn the hard way, by making mistakes. Or by watching what happens when other kids make mistakes.

But that is teaching what not to do in social situations, not what to do proactively, before the information is needed. We need to teach social skills to children, to address their social development when they need it most. They need the skills before they need to put the skills into practice. In teaching skills to children, especially social

and emotional skills, timing is critical.

We also need to address their emotional development. Huh? Why do so many adults experience heartbreak when a relationship with a mate who is incompatible with them breaks up? Why do more than half the couples who marry get divorced later? That number should be even greater except that many couples today skip the wedding part and simply live together until they separate later because one of them "failed" the other or they "grew apart."

Understanding emotional skills and knowledge is part of what we need to get along well with others. As a social species, we need to have social interactions with others. In most activities people do--either personal or work related--they need to interact with others.

Socially and emotionally well adapted and developed children and adolescents become socially and emotionally well adapted and developed adults. Moreover, socially and emotionally successful adults are not only well liked and appreciated, they do a great deal to help others in their families, their communities and their countries. They gain great public respect because they do things they seem to understand--almost intuitively--are right. Nobel Peace Prize winners, for an example.

Teaching to the social and emotional needs of children and adolescents is not hard. We simply have not put into place the mechanisms for doing it. The needs themselves are not secrets, they're public information. Unfortunately, most of that information is contained in psychologists who specialize in fixing broken people rather than in teaching everyone before they break. And in sociologists who manipulate us by advertising, religion and politics because we don't want to listen to what they know otherwise.

While we long for innocence, what we get is ignorance. There is nothing pretty or beneficial about ignorance.

We have schools, but we use them almost exclusively to train children to be successful employees, not successful adults. The change would be easy and cheap, but someone has to make the first move in every community.

Bill Allin

***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a guidebook for parents and teachers who want to grow socially and emotionally well developed and balanced children, not just intellectually well developed employees.

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