

# AMERICANS OF TOMORROW

December 2, 1934

Description: The Adolescent Child or "Education of Adolescent Youth"

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt

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## The Adolescent Child

If our children have had simple lives, good food, plenty of sleep and the proper kind of emotional direction, they will come to the age of adolescence with the best opportunity for growing up with as few physical and emotional disturbances as possible.

At this age both boys and girls are apt to be a little high strung. If possible, they should not be subjected between the years of thirteen and sixteen to any undue strain, but neither should they be given the impression that they are objects of particular interest or attention. It is so easy to consider oneself the center of the universe and if you a child<sup>1</sup> makes scenes and father and mother just look at each other and ~~makes~~ make excuses for you, the next scene will soon be forthcoming. Children at this age should not be allowed to get over tired, the simplicity of their lives should be continued with very little change but their school work should be done and proper exercise should be taken just as usual. It is at this age that both the home and the school become particularly conscious of one phase -- "so and so's mother lets her go to the movies during the week", "so and so's school has no rules on such and such a subject". [~~The school is more involved in this if it is a private school. Fortunately public schools all have more or less the same rules but the problem for the parents of children in public school is more complicated for the classes are larger and there are more children whose parents do not make wise rules and regulations.~~]

This is the age which is most difficult for the parents because the children have reached the age of reason. In their school work they can take up those studies which require reasoning power as well as memory. They are able to think things through if they will, but their experience is still very limited so while they must be allowed to exercise their reason, in some subtle way guidance must still be there. The temptation to end a discussion by telling Mary or John that whether they understand your reason or not, they are to do as you have told them to do, is a most difficult one to resist. The fact that automobiles are part of our daily lives and that in many states there is no law as to the age when children may drive automobiles, has added immeasurably to the difficulties of many parents. The school can do much by requiring a high standard of scholarship, by providing a number of extra curricular activities as well as requiring participation in sports if there is provision made in the school for a play ground.

It is often not recognized that these outside activities provided for children are a tax on the teachers and are almost always a labor of love for the teacher gets no pay for the time which [they] is<sup>2</sup> put/in<sup>3</sup> outside of school hours on such things as helping the boys or girls who are getting up a school show or those who are editing a school paper, or who are helping a Red Cross drive or undertaking some boy scout<sup>4</sup> or girl scout project. All these things can be aided greatly by the teachers but ~~she~~ they<sup>5</sup> will have to give ~~her own~~ their<sup>6</sup> time. ~~She~~ They<sup>7</sup> does this because ~~she~~ they<sup>8</sup> have<sup>9</sup> real interest in the development of the young people about ~~her~~ them, but parents should show their appreciation and cooperate in every way possible.<sup>10</sup>

This is the age above all others when I think parents and teachers should concentrate on providing healthy recreation. Group singing and dramatics are perhaps the best outlets at this age and if Friday and Saturday nights can in some way

through the co-operation of organizations interested in young people in the community, be made nights when this type of entertainment can be held, perhaps with some light refreshments, perhaps with some impromptu dancing, I believe many a community could save its young people from too early attendance

at dance halls and beer parlors and prevent the formation of many boy's gangs<sup>11</sup> which get into trouble through a lack of good leadership. [~~A report was given at the last prison conference on the Los Angeles County plan for the prevention of juvenile delinquency and a very interesting article for one of the women's magazines. It seems to me that all educational institutions and parents should think over this plan most carefully as I know a few communities which would not profit by the coordination of all existing organizations with the aim of making the lives of all adolescent children easier and pleasanter.~~]

A careful study of our high schools today in many towns and cities would disclose some appalling situations amongst our young people. There is one thing which I think both teachers and parents must face, namely, it is better to recognize the fact that young people are doing certain things today as a matter of course in many communities which twenty years ago would have been considered not only bad taste but entirely out of the question for any "nice" girl or boy to do.

I think we must all make up our minds to keep our standards as high as possible where essentials are concerned but not to make crimes out of things which may be distasteful to us as parents or as teachers but which the [y] young people see no real harm in. We may feel our children would perhaps be better off physically and mentally if they did not do certain things, but [in] themselves, if they are not morally wrong, we had better laugh at them instead of frowning.

Sometimes it is possible by stating one's own feeling and by taking what the young boy or girl considers a reasonable attitude to make them see that they are somewhat foolish, and the desire which was great to do something which seemed daring and mildly wicked will dwindle before the knowledge that their parents and teachers consider it perhaps a little comic, somewhat foolish, but on the whole not important enough to be really censured.

In any home where religion enters into the daily life as actual practice the temptations of these adolescent years will be far easier to cope with, but the trouble in many places has been that religion instead of being not only a doctrine but a way of living, has become purely a doctrine and young people have little use for doctrines. In this adolescent period there is one thing which we must not do, we must not try to fool our children. They have reached the reasoning age. If a teacher or a parent tells them that life must be lived according to certain standards, they are bound to weight those standards according to the way they see life going on about them. The more serious conditions which govern them later on, may not touch them as yet but hypocrites can do nothing helpful for young people. Sincerity is the basis of all control and guidance at this age and I think the basis of all success in education.

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Transcribed from a script held in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

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<sup>1</sup> This is a typed interlineation.

<sup>2</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>3</sup> This is a typed interlineation.

<sup>4</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>5</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>6</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>7</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>8</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>9</sup> "ve" is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>10</sup> "them" through "possible" is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>11</sup> "n" is a handwritten interlineation.