



...the fact is we cannot escape the sea of messages that surround us.

4

Maintain Your Mental Balance

“A lie, turned topsy-turvy, can be prinked and tinselled out, decked in plumage new and fine, till none knows its lean old carcass.”

— Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*, Act I

One afternoon, four boys rent a video which has a detailed, realistic, and violent murder scene in it. They're at one of the boys' homes; neither of his parents is there. After watching the video, the youths leave the house in search of a victim. They find an elderly, defenceless pensioner, and kill him. Later on, they confess to the police that they got the idea for the killing from the video they had watched.

Shocking? Yes. Impossible? No. Incidents like this have happened recently. They illustrate the powerful effect the media can have. Besides violence, there are other themes which touch and influence people's lives. Day after day and in all kinds of ways, we are being “educated” about almost every conceivable subject.

There are newspapers, magazines, books, radio shows, television programmes, and films. There are billboards, posters, car stickers, and signs of every kind posted in every conceivable place. There are even angry, fevered protests — or simple, raw

obscenities — scrawled on subways and walls. Though sometimes we would like to, the fact is we cannot escape the sea of messages that surrounds us. Ours is certainly an “information society.”

There are all the official voices too — the teachers in our schools who are responsible for the formal education of our sons and daughters. And of course, our children are exposed to the opinions of their schoolmates.

Not everyone is telling the truth, either to us or to our children. Some people aren't malicious; they're just repeating the errors others have made . Because authentic success is built on truth, though, we must learn to separate truth from deception and teach our children how to do the same. Otherwise, we'll be diverted from our goals on detours and byways that are unproductive — possibly dangerous and life-threatening.

TOPICS

Admen, Supermen, and Centrefolds
 What's Going on in Today's Classrooms?
 Two and Two Make Five

FOCUS

This chapter will help you to:

- Understand how the media can shape your ideas of the world.
- Solve school-related problems.
- Know why you must analyze the ideas and information you receive.

ADMEN, SUPERMEN, AND CENTREFOLDS

Focal Point 1. *Avoid being manipulated by modern methods of communication.*

In recent years there has been an explosion of inventions that have affected the way we communicate. Each has its own particular style, its own special kind of power. Those who want to influence others are aware of this. What are their motives and techniques? How can their methods of communication affect us?

Persuasion by Design

Usually, those who manage to gain access to the biggest media megaphones want to sell us something—anything. Maybe it is a new car. Maybe it is an idea about ourselves. Maybe it is an opinion about how life should be lived or what ought to be done to set things right. But regardless of what they are wanting us to “buy,” one thing is certain. They are interested in some kind of response from us, or they would not spend their time and effort trying to get our attention.

Many of the messages are carefully arranged in order to have a certain effect. Just have a look at some perfume or cologne advertisements. Daub or spray on the right potion, they say (the more expensive it is, the more effective, of course!) and you will be totally irresistible. They’ll come after you in droves. And who doesn’t want to be sought after? To be thought attractive, even compelling?

There’s a negative side to this too. We’re made to feel inferior if we don’t look like the glowing men and women who advertise everything from laundry soap to new cars. Our legs are too fat, or too thin. We bulge, or maybe we’re flat, in all the wrong places. Some people spend vast sums of money on questionable plastic surgery. Their motto seems to be, “Get everything lifted that can be.” All for what? To look like the current crop of “beautiful people” — the Greek gods and goddesses of our time.



*Daub on the right potion... they'll
come after you in droves.*

But advertisements that tell us how we should think about ourselves and satisfy our needs are just part of the picture. There are other kinds of messages too. For instance, the way current events are reported can have a great deal to do with the kind of political opinions we choose to accept and the way we look at the world around us. Consider the following items of information:

- a) A separatist organization has killed a policeman.
- b) The policeman who was killed by the separatists was visiting a sick friend and leaves behind a wife and several children.
- c) A statement by an official of the government says that stronger measures should be taken against the separatist group.
- d) The separatist group states that the policeman made several arrests for which there was insufficient evidence.
- e) Pictures which show the policeman's wife and children.

Let us imagine that these items have been submitted to a TV station news desk. And let us say that the editor and the newscaster select and report them in the sequence a), b), e), c), which we'll label "TV-1":

- a) A separatist organization has killed a policeman.
- b) The policeman who was killed by the separatists was visiting a sick friend and leaves behind a wife and several children .
- c) Pictures which show the policeman's wife and children.
- d) A statement made by an official of the government says that stronger measures should be taken against the separatist group.

Let us also suppose that the same items have been submitted to another TV station news desk . But this time, the editor and the newscaster select and report them in the sequence a), d), and c). We'll call this "TV-2:"

- a) A separatist organization has killed a policeman.
- d) The separatist group states that the policeman made several arrests for which there was insufficient evidence.
- c) A statement has been made by an official of the government that stronger measures should be taken against the separatist group.



1 Now let us imagine that both programmes are broadcast. We will call the people who watch “TV-1” Group 1 and the people who watch “TV-2” Group 2. Which group do you think would be more likely to have the *strongest* agreement with the statement made by the government official (item c)? GROUP 1 or GROUP 2?

It is not easy for news reporters to present information in an unbiased manner. Of course, there are those who do better than others, and a good number have earned a well-deserved reputation for fairness and impartiality. In societies which are more open to the expression of opposing opinions, people usually have a reasonable opportunity to look at all the information. However, some facts may still be left out either deliberately or by accident. What is omitted may be vital information.

The Iceberg Effect

In some ways, popular shows about family living express certain beliefs about life, though they are not actually stated. These dramas are like icebergs: the actual story, like the tip of the iceberg, is just part of the whole.

TV serial, “Neighbours and Friends.” Setting: Bob and Flora’s kitchen. Bob and Flora are a middle-aged couple having breakfast on a Saturday morning.

FLORA: (*Sipping some coffee.*) Bob, we need to start thinking about where Mother’s going to live.

BOB: (*Rattling the newspaper he’s reading.*) Huh? . . . oh no, they lost again!

FLORA: (*Irritated and a little louder.*) Bob, I said we need to start thinking about where Mother’s going to live. Since Dad died, she’s had a hard time managing alone.

BOB: (Looking up from the paper.) Oh yes, dear . . . is that so?

FLORA: Yes, it is. I just think she needs to move to a place like Golden Oaks where there's someone around.

BOB: Hmm. I suppose you're right. But wouldn't Maytime Manor be better? I hear that Golden Oaks is really expensive.

FLORA: Maybe so. But we need to help her decide on a place soon so she can get on the waiting list.



"Bob, we need to start thinking about where Mother's going to live."

Notice one of the things that has *not* been included in this discussion. Neither Bob nor Flora has mentioned the idea of asking Flora's mother if she wants to live with them. The assumption that elderly parents usually go to retirement homes has already been made, and the discussion simply revolves around which place to choose. We could say that in a subtle way,

the characters have “taught” us how elderly people should be treated in today’s society. Such a scene would probably never have been imagined a few generations ago. At that time, most older parents and relatives continued to be part of the family unit as long as they lived.

Recall for a moment the description of the structure of society that you considered in Chapter 1. That description showed that societies are based on values—shared beliefs about life. What we are saying at this point is that the beliefs about life underlying a story are there, beneath the surface as part of the package, but they are not made clear.

Another example of this would be the films, videos, books, and television programmes (including those made for children) in which sex and violence play such a large part. In the stories that feature violence, people solve their problems or express their frustrations by taking aggressive action against others. The heroes of these dramas are not morally superior to the villains. They’re just smarter, faster, and bolder. They fight fire with fire, kill their enemies, and at the end, they get the money and the girls (the most beautiful ones, of course, but not to marry, mind you — just to take to bed).

In other stories, all kinds of sexual behaviour are glamorized and regarded as permissible. Sexual intercourse has lost almost any connection with trust, commitment, and fidelity between one man and one woman. Instead, it has been cheapened and twisted almost beyond recognition. Rape, incest, and other forms of sexual violence, deviation, and exploitation are regularly paraded in front of the viewer. The shallow and destructive values these stories represent are constantly being advertised and “sold” in our society — not just to us, but also to our children.



2 Think about the TV programmes and films you watch and the books or magazines you read. Are destructive or shallow values part of the package? Here are some samples. Mark the two or three ideas that you think are most frequently beneath the surface:

- o IT'S OK IF YOU DON'T GET CAUGHT
- o MIGHT IS RIGHT
- o MONEY IS EVERYTHING
- o BEAUTY IS EVERYTHING
- o POWER IS EVERYTHING
- o WINNING IS EVERYTHING
- o SEX IS EVERYTHING
- o WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON
- o REVENGE IS SWEET
- o THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS
- o LOVE THEM AND LEAVE THEM
- o MY WAY NO MATTER WHOM IT HURTS
- o LIVE FOR THE MOMENT

Or

The "Expert" Syndrome

Besides the ideas of those who deal in fiction and fabrication, there are the pronouncements of the experts — those who claim to know more about a given subject than ordinary folks do. Some of us are prone to depend quite heavily on these people because we feel at a disadvantage in today's complex society. We don't believe that we are capable of making judgements in areas where we do not have all the facts. As a result, we assign a great deal of authority and weight to the opinions of those who say that they have scientific support, evidence, research, and so on, to back them up.

We begin to think that because something *can* be done that it *should* be done. Science, though, is too important to be left

completely to the scientists. Who should make the decision whether a biologist should experiment with live human embryos? Does it make a difference if they were fertilized in a laboratory or a woman's body?

Sometimes it is a good idea to listen to the experts. On the other hand, they are not always right. Their research methods are subject to human error and bias. Certainly, many of them make a strong effort to remain objective. But they cannot completely escape the human need to interpret and evaluate, to see things in light of their beliefs about the world.

For example, consider the case of several football fans who have reacted with violence and rioting at the end of a match. In the aftermath of the outbreak, certain well-known sociologists and psychologists come forward. They tell us that the violence was caused by the high rate of unemployment in the area where the fans live. What are these experts really saying? Perhaps this: the behaviour of people is caused by their environment. If they don't have jobs or are otherwise under pressure, they will act in anti-social ways. According to the experts, then, people are simply victims of their circumstances. All evidence to the contrary is ignored, and the fans are excused somewhat for what they do. After all, they aren't completely to blame.

Another side to the "expert" syndrome is the "halo" effect. This effect occurs when a person who is well-known in one field says something about another. Here is Mr. So-and-so, a wealthy businessman who offers his solution to a foreign-relations problem, or there is Ms. What's-her-name, a famous and beautiful actress who reveals the diet that helps her keep in shape. He is not a politician, and she is not a nutritionist. But because both are successful in their own fields, their opinions on other subjects are respected also. Who says what is significant in communication — but so is how they say it.

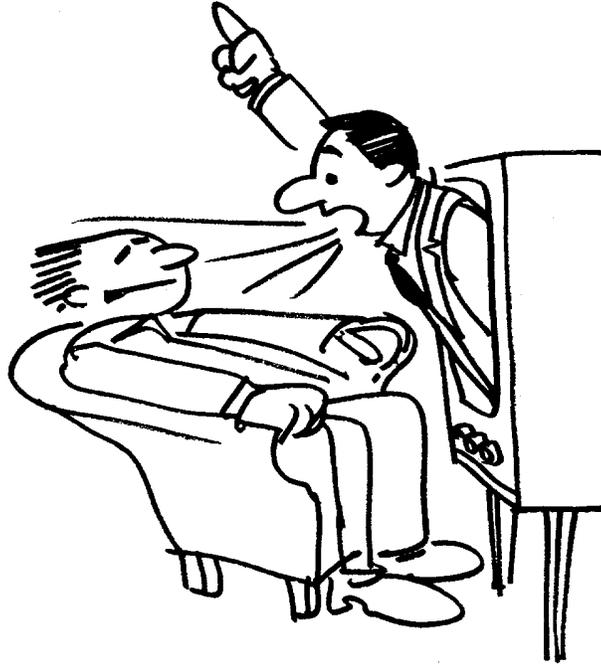
Bigger and Louder than Life

Several successive waves of technology have given us the printed page, the telephone, the radio, the motion picture, television, the electronic computer, and the global satellite

communications network. As each new medium has been introduced, it has motivated people to arrange the raw data of experience in certain ways to fit it. We live in a society where much of what we see and hear has already been processed before it gets to us.

We are consumers of pre-pack aged information and targets of advertising campaigns. In this respect, our lives are very different from those who lived before the modern era. Their days were filled with the sounds of human conversation with all of its hesitations, repetitions, and pauses, and with the slow-paced events and ordinary sights of home and village life. By contrast, we live in a knowledge-intensive environment. We are literally bombarded from every direction with information in many compact and condensed forms.

As each new medium has been introduced, it has also carried with it a certain air of authority. The printed page is a good example of this phenomenon. The first books to be printed included scientific and religious content. They were regarded with a great deal of respect. Even today many people still have a tendency to believe that anything that has found its way into a textbook, newspaper, or magazine must somehow be true. Now that television has made its appearance, the same kind of



The fact that someone has said something on television...somehow makes his statement more important.

phenomenon has repeated itself. The fact that someone has said something on television, for instance, somehow makes his statement more important. If your neighbour or mine had said the same thing, we would probably pay little attention to it.

Besides this megaphone effect, television also has a way of creating the illusion that we are seeing life as it is. It gives us the feeling that we have opened up a window on the world. The result is that we are inclined to think that the programmes we see are like the original events almost exactly as they happened. Those who work behind the cameras and in the editing rooms know this isn't true.

As we have already pointed out, news stories and items must be arranged for broadcasting. Someone must decide what will be shown and what will not be shown. Even when an event is covered live at the time it is taking place, there are certain limitations. It isn't possible to show the happening from every angle or record everything that goes on. Groups of people can look larger or smaller, the police can appear to be more or less aggressive, and other impressions can be given, all depending on the way the cameras and microphones are placed and used.



3 You and your family live in a particular kind of information environment. Take a few moments to estimate how much your opinions and beliefs have been influenced by the factors that have been described. Use this key:

1 = very little or none, **2** = some, **3** = a moderate amount,
4 = quite a lot, **5** = very much.

	Yourself	Your Children
a Persuasion by Design	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
b The Iceberg Effect	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
c The "Expert" Syndrome	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
d Bigger and Louder than Life	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Totals:

The point of all this is that we must not allow ourselves to be unduly influenced by the mass media. The pressure to conform to unhealthy attitudes around us is strong. We need to evaluate carefully all the ideas that come to us through the modern channels of communication and reject those that would lead us away from the goals we have chosen. We must teach

our children to be discerning viewers, readers, and listeners also.

Now that we've looked at our general information environment, let's look at the more formal side of it. Are today's schools giving our children the kind of education they need?

WHAT'S GOING ON IN TODAY'S CLASSROOMS?

Focal Point 2. *Develop strategies for dealing with school problems.*

Besides those who use television, radio, and newspapers to inform us, there are the "official" teachers, paid by the government with our taxes. They are supposed to help our children learn what our society has decided they need to know to become responsible, useful citizens. This task isn't as easy as it used to be, though. Quite a number of schools are having serious problems today. What are these problems and what kind of impact can they have on us and our children? First, let's look at the overall picture.

In many respects, the problems in today's schools are direct results of the conditions that exist in today's society. They are related to social factors such as economic pressures, rapid urbanization, stressful family relationships, conflicts in values, and changing social conditions. The Johnsons — a typical family — illustrate some of the ways these factors have affected education.

Case Study: The Johnsons

Donald and Susan Johnson have two children: Mary, who is eleven years old, and Robert, who is seven. Both children attend a large comprehensive school. In her science classes, Mary has been studying the history of the discovery and use of nuclear energy. Her teacher has pointed out the dangers of using it as a power source, and they have discussed some of the accidents that have happened at nuclear power plants. Mary's teacher says that such stations should be outlawed and has asked the class to write

a paper on the subject. Mary feels upset and confused about the assignment because her father works in a nuclear power plant. That evening, she talks to him about what has happened. She tells him that he should quit his job right away and that the station should be shut down. How should Mary's father respond? He is convinced that her teacher has exaggerated the dangers.

One afternoon, Susan notices that Robert seems unusually quiet after coming home from school. She asks him to tell her what happened that day. After listening to him, Susan concludes that there seem to be several problem children in Robert's class who make it hard for him to concentrate on his lessons. Susan then asks Robert how his teacher acts towards those children. Robert says that she often shouts at them to sit down and tells them they are bad children. Robert says that he doesn't like going to school and that he would rather stay at home. What should Susan do?

These two situations illustrate the impact of several forces on traditional forms of education. In Mary's case, there is an apparent conflict between the ideas of her teacher and her father. Her teacher is against the use of nuclear energy; her father evidently sees no serious problems with it. There can be other kinds of differences between the ideas and values of parents and teachers. In today's society, people of many different backgrounds live side by side and their children attend the same schools. Besides this, teachers have their own opinions. While most make an effort not to impose these on their students, it is impossible for them to be completely objective about everything they teach. Conflicts, sometimes even serious ones, can arise because not all share the same beliefs.

Many schools have become increasingly involved in sex education. This topic was formerly left to the parents to deal with at home. The fact that it is being explored in the classroom raises many questions. Should it be taught at all? If so, what aspects of it should teachers cover? Should they deal with only the biological and medical facts, leaving the social and ethical issues to the parents? If teachers discuss social and ethical issues, what if their values are opposed to those of the parents? What about topics like homosexuality, birth control, and abortion? And what

about diseases such as AIDS which are transmitted by certain kinds of sexual contact?

The teaching of religion — or lack of teaching — is another area in which there is a conflict of values. In Europe, there has been a historic connection between religion and education. There was a time when churchmen were the educated class and practically all education was provided by the church. The religious establishment exercised a great deal of control at all levels of instruction. There are still many schools in Europe which have ties to the state church (or what was formerly the state church) and where classes in religion are required subjects. Today there are strong moves to modify the place of religion in school. Some want to omit it altogether, while others want children to study all religions.

As more people have moved to the large cities, many small, village schools have been replaced by large, consolidated ones. This change by itself would not necessarily have created difficulties. But homes have changed too. A higher proportion of them are unstable and troubled due to divorce, alcoholism, and other problems. As a result, fewer children have consistent discipline at home, which means that more of them have problems at school. In these circumstances, classroom control becomes a serious issue. Should teachers be allowed to use any means — including physical punishment — in order to maintain at least some kind of order?

Besides the kinds of factors that have affected the Johnsons, there are others at work too. The quality of education in many communities is being affected by economic difficulties. Many school systems simply do not have enough money to operate well. Low pay for teachers means that the teaching profession does not attract or hold enough of the bright, creative, dedicated people that it needs. Lack of funds also creates problems for students. Many who are otherwise qualified cannot continue their studies because government grants and subsidies are in short supply.

A further area of challenge for schools today is to know how to prepare students for the future they will face. Educators and

administrators can find themselves being pulled in opposite directions. Some parents can demand that schools provide students with all the latest equipment and offer them a wide variety of choices. At the same time, others can insist that schools concentrate on the basic learning skills and omit the “nonessentials.”



...more often than not, schools are followers, not leaders of social change.

All of them want to prepare children to live and work in the world they will face as adults. Yet at the same time, no one

knows what kind of situation today's children will actually encounter. Who is right about what should be done?

It is a fact that some of today's schools are obsolete. They were structured to meet the needs of an industrial society rather than the information society which we are becoming. When the industrial wave overtook the more simple, agricultural society, specialized "educational factories" — schools — made their appearance. The function of such schools has been to turn out the necessary numbers of electricians, factory workers, mechanics, and typists, as well as the right quotas of lawyers, doctors, and scientists. But most of us who live in the developed nations are now absorbing changes and features of the information age.

A history of education shows that more often than not, schools are followers, not leaders, of social change. They exist to pass on what has been, not to explore what will be. When there is rapid change, they are often the last institutions to adjust to it. Today's educators — like the rest of us — are having to cope with the many dislocations which the information age is producing. It is no wonder that there are problems. We could wish for schools and teachers that had all the answers. But there aren't any. The total effect of these problems has been to distort the positive role that education ought to have. Yet if we are committed to the goal of training our children to be responsible adults, we can find workable solutions for them.

Moving Toward Solutions

You and your family may live in a relatively quiet, peaceful town or community — or a busy, congested city. But don't make any assumptions about the kind of education your children are receiving. A placid, tranquil school may be failing to prepare them for the kind of world they will live in as adults. Whatever their particular situation may be, there are three general guidelines you can follow to help them profit the most from it.

1. *Form a dear idea of what you want the school to do for your child.* Before you try to deal with the specific strengths and weaknesses of your child's school, you must know what you want it to do for him or her. As a parent, the responsibility you have for your child is all-inclusive. We may say that healthy development involves four areas: mental, physical, moral, and social. We need to provide, as much as we are able, what our children require in order to become mature in all of these areas. None should be ignored .

How much of this total responsibility should we entrust to the school? Most of us would probably agree that schools should have a major role in helping our children develop mentally. As a general rule, we expect that most of the school day should be given to helping them develop the intellectual skills they will need to live in our society.

At the same time, we know that children grow in all ways at once and respond to life as a whole. They need to develop social skills and healthy personalities too. They also need to develop a sense of moral values and responsibility. To some extent, we expect the school to help them along these lines. But we must be careful that we do not depend upon our children's teachers to do everything. There is a limit to what they can do. They simply do not have the time or energy to give all their pupils the kind of personal attention that parents can. We need to do our part at home.



4 Here is a list of general educational goals. Are your children making progress in all these areas? Mark the one or ones that need more attention.

- o Preparation for future trade or profession
- o Formation of moral character
- o Development of intellectual skills
- o Development of social skills
- o Development of physical abilities

2. *Become informed.* Recall the Johnson family that was mentioned earlier. Mary is the one who shares feelings openly and spontaneously. Robert needs help in expressing them. But for both of them it is vitally important to know that their parents are interested in what they are learning and thinking.

There is no substitute for your active, informed concern. Find out how well your school is doing the job you expect of it. Encourage your children to describe their experiences during the day and listen carefully to what they tell you. Make an effort to get acquainted with their teachers and the others who work with them. If your children know that you are interested in their ideas and feelings, they will be more likely to share them with you. This does not mean you should ask them dozens of questions and expect them to give you detailed answers. But you do need to be sensitive to how they are responding and what their reactions tell you.



5 Rate your school system by indicating your response to the following statements. Use this key:

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree for the most part, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

(Note: if you have more than one child and if your children are in situations which are quite different from each other, rate each child's situation separately. Use another sheet of paper to make note of your reactions.)

- a** My child is being given adequate help in developing basic learning skills such as reading and writing. **1 2 3 4 5**
- b** In general, the atmosphere in my child's **1 2 3 4 5**

- school is wholesome and discipline problems are solved fairly.
- c My child's school is keeping up with new developments in technology in an appropriate way. **1 2 3 4 5**
 - d There is enough money to provide good facilities for my child and an adequate salary for his/her teachers. **1 2 3 4 5**
 - e Subjects are taught to my child in ways that support healthy values and moral guidelines for life. **1 2 3 4 5**
 - f The relationship between my child and his/her teacher is positive and constructive. **1 2 3 4 5**
 - g The school system is preparing my child to live in and contribute to society as a responsible adult. **1 2 3 4 5**

3. **Take action.** One of the serious problems in modern Society is that many of us have been conditioned into seeing ourselves as spectators and consumers. If things aren't going in the direction we want, often we just Sit back and say, "*Why don't they do something about it?*"

But this passive attitude won't solve anything. As a parent, your position with respect to your child's teachers and school officials is a strong one.

If the school has a major financial problem, there may not be much you can do. But there are other sorts of situations you *can* do something about. Your opinions and reactions probably carry much more weight than you think. You also have a powerful position in the lives of your children. Don't abdicate it. They will hear many voices as they grow up, and they will experience pressures from many directions. Use your influence while you can.



6 Review your ratings in interaction 5. If there are some serious imbalances or deficiencies in your child's school, why not decide now to get involved in finding solutions? Look at the following list and check the actions you could take right away that would make a difference:

- o *Pay closer attention to your children when they talk about school.*
- o *Have an informal discussion with your child's teacher or teachers.*
- o *Talk with other parents about working together to solve problems.*
- o *Find ways of helping your child learn what the school isn't teaching.*
- o *Contact people who are in a position to make the kinds of changes you think are needed.*

7 Remember Mary in the Johnson case study? Mary's father might insist that she make up her own mind. But that probably wouldn't help Mary very much. What approach would be the most constructive?

8 Let's suppose now that you're Robert's parent. What would you say to help him deal with the problem? What else should you do?

We've looked at our information society from two points of view: the media and the way it "educates" us, and our schools and the way they affect our children. Now let's think about some of the ideas that surround us. Why is it so important to evaluate them?

TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE

Focal Point 3. *Sharpen your ability to separate truth from deception.*

Scene: Somewhere out in the Wild West, Slim and Jake, a couple of unshaven and ragged-looking prospectors, are wearily panning for gold. It's high noon, and they've been at it since early morning. Jake is somewhat of a newcomer; Slim is an old

hand. The stream is quietly rippling, and a soft breeze is blowing. Suddenly, the silence is shattered by a piercing yell.

Jake: WHOOPEE!!! (He throws his hat in the air.)
YAHOO!! Lookee here, Slim! (Holding up a large nugget) Lookee here! Gold, I tell yer! **Gold!** Look at this here chunk! I niver **seed** one this big! I'm going to be RICH, I tell yer, Slim, **RICH!!** (He dances around in the stream, kicking up sprays of water.) Here I come and I'm a-gonna have all the whiskey and wimmin I want! Yesirree! Jes' a-look at 'er, all sparkalatin' in the sun. HA, HA! Gold! Gold! **Gold!**

Slim: (Comes over, puts his hand on Jake's shoulder.) Now hold on thar jes' a minute, Jake. Lemme git a closer look. (Jake finally slows down, shows the nugget to Slim. Slim turns it over in his hand.) Yep, jes' as I figgered. That ain't gold, Jake, you ninny. (He hands it back to him.) That thar's fool's gold. How many times do I have to tell yer? Cain't you strike *nothin'?*

Obviously, Jake's problem is every fool's problem. He has put two and two together and come up with five. And he will remain a fool and arrive at the wrong conclusion again and again unless he learns how to make an accurate interpretation of what he sees. But Jake's plight isn't quite as hopeless as it might appear. *At least he has a friend who tells him the truth.*



*That ain't gold, Jake, you ninny.
That thar's fool's gold!*

Like Jake, we can be fooled by what is on the surface. Printing presses, video cameras, computers, recorders, all of these mean that people can print, tape, or film just about anything. They can tell the truth. They can also tell deliberate lies. Common sense tells us that the messages we receive are no more or less reliable than the people who send them. We don't need to be suspicious and skeptical all the time, of course. But we must learn how to interpret correctly what we see and hear.

Why? Because we cannot simply take in everything that comes along if we want to reach our goals in life. According to the objectives we have chosen, we must accept some things and reject others. We are like architects who want to build buildings that are safe and useful. We must select our materials carefully, and we must follow realistic, logical plans. Otherwise, we will end up with piles of rubble.

In 1978, the world was shocked to learn of the suicide deaths of 912 followers of the Rev. Jim Jones, the founder of a "church" in the United States called People's Temple. The victims included men, women, young people, children, and infants. Only a handful of survivors escaped Jonestown, Guyana, where the horrible event occurred, to give their chilling, eyewitness accounts.

The Rev. Jim Jones started the first People's Temple in 1955. At his meetings, he performed "miracles" of healing and prophesied future events. Gradually, he gained a following across a broad spectrum of society—whites, blacks, Hispanics, the middle-class as well as the poor. He promised his disciples a new world of peace, equality, and racial harmony, with himself as its ruler. He championed their cause among politicians and civic leaders. In exchange, he assumed complete control over their lives. He persuaded many of them to sign over their property and money to him and his noble programme of social justice. As his power grew, he became more and more demanding. He refused to tolerate any opposition or dissension. When eight members defected in 1973, he staged the first of his suicide drills to test the loyalty of those who remained.

In 1977, the press began to investigate more closely some of the strange things that were taking place in connection with the

People's Temple Jones had built in California. As the pressures intensified, Jones began to warn his followers. All was not well, he told them. They were being viciously persecuted, and they might have to die for their beliefs. During that year he moved to Guyana, South America, along with over 1,000 of the faithful. There he established Jonestown, which was to be the model community of the new order. He was allowed to talk about his project on Guyana National Radio. After seeing Jonestown, the minister of foreign affairs of Guyana called it "peace and love in action." But the placid exterior the commune presented to visitors was a deceptive facade. It concealed a ruthless, one-man dictatorship of intimidation, sexual exploitation, brutal punishment, and deception — a pattern which Jones had already set years earlier.

In Jonestown, news from the outside world was cut off. False reports of trouble in the United States were circulated. Jones became increasingly obsessed with the idea that there was a conspiracy against him. He told his disciples that they were being attacked, and they pledged again to die with him rather than give in. More suicide drills were practised. In November of 1978, a team of investigators, including United States' congressman Leo Ryan, came to Guyana to find out the truth. They visited Jonestown, but when they returned to the airport to make their trip home along with some 16 commune members who had decided to leave Guyana, they were ambushed by gunmen from the commune and shot. Five people in Ryan's party were killed, including congressman Ryan. Guyanese government troops were moved into Port Kaituma, the place where the massacre had occurred.

When Jones received word of what had happened, he called on his followers to make the ultimate sacrifice. The "communion" of cyanide poisoning was prepared. "Everyone has to die," he told them. Some drank willingly; others were forced. Then, while they lay dying around him, Jones shot himself. Among the dead were Carol Ann Kerns and Ellen Louise Kerns, the sister and mother of Phil Kerns, a former cult member who left it in 1970. In his book about the Jones' cult, *People's Temple-People's Tomb*, Kerns unmasks the techniques Jones had used.

The so-called “miracles” and prophecies of Jones had all been staged. Several unexplained murders had occurred. There had been brutal beatings and sexual debauchery, yet the cult had continued to grow. Kerns himself finds it difficult to explain the control Jones was able to exert over others. *Even when people knew he was deceiving them, they continued to follow him.* And when he told them to do it, hundreds of men and women killed themselves and their children. Why?

Kerns believes that when Jones issued his last command, his followers had already passed the point of no return. “Many, perhaps most by [then],” he wrote, “had no personality, no life apart from People’s Temple.” Little by little, they had already surrendered themselves to Jones and his twisted view of the world. Like a malevolent, voracious parasite, he had drained them of their ability to think, to act, to be anything other than what he wanted.

We shudder at the macabre spectacle of Jonestown. In fact, it is so bizarre that we want to dismiss it as a weird exception, one which has no connection with us. But Jones is not the only one of his kind. History has seen its share of ambitious, power-hungry men who see a “new world” with themselves in control. The lesson of these examples is something we all need to learn, even if we feel we are well-insulated against such men.

At one point, many of Jones’ followers must have realized the web of deception that was being spun around them. But they did nothing. *Why were they vulnerable?* They weren’t complete fools, not to begin with. Most of them were just ordinary people. They simply wanted something to believe in and live for. Perhaps they were searching for a sense of belonging, a feeling of security, someone to tell them they were important. Like the rest of us, they had a need that couldn’t be fully satisfied by material things. When someone came along who promised them more, they followed. Jim Jones offered them himself and his vision. Tragically, the promises were cruel delusions.

The Jones example, of course, is one of the most extreme. Yet the search looks familiar. What is this “something,” this extra factor people try to find? What is this vacuum, this sense

of emptiness we all feel, no matter how successful or happy we may look on the outside? That's the subject of our next chapter.



SOME FEEDBACK TO THE INTERACTIONS...

- 1** Probably Group TV1. Items b) and e) would be likely to have the effect of “softening” the viewers. That is, the viewers would tend to see the policeman in a more favourable light after those items were given. As a result, they would be inclined to agree more strongly with statement c) than the other viewers.
- 2** Your answer.
- 3** Your estimates. If your totals are more than 15 for each set, you probably need to take steps to reduce the amount of exposure that you and your family have to these factors.
- 4** Your priority.
- 5** Your ratings. A total of less than 25 probably means that the school system is inadequate in several important areas. Ratings of less than 3 in any one category are especially significant .
- 6** Your replies. Low ratings, of course, can help you decide which problems to work on first. How you go about finding solutions is important. When you approach teachers and school officials-either on your own or along with other parents who share your concerns-have a positive, constructive attitude. Ask them to tell you what *you* can do to help solve the problem .
- 7** Mary’s father needs to approach the situation carefully. Though he may not agree with Mary’s teacher, he shouldn’t leave it there. He would probably help Mary the most if he would show her the other side of the picture by explaining the safety procedures and precautions that are followed. In this way, she could present all the relevant information. If Mary’s father did this, Mary would learn more than just the

facts. She would also learn that 1) both her teacher and her father have a right to their opinions on the subject, and 2) all sides of any given issue need to be examined.

- 8** Let Robert know you understand the problem he faces. Don't allow him to avoid it. Instead, guide him to find ways of responding constructively. You might try to encourage him to see it as chance to develop an ability to concentrate in spite of distractions. You should probably also meet with Robert's teacher to discuss the situation. If this doesn't bring results, take your complaint to the teacher's supervisor.
-
-