

Parents for Peace

As parents, we abhor the threat to humanity posed by the increasing likelihood of nuclear war and mass destruction. The simple fact of having children reflects our commitment to the continuum of life on earth. We are connected to our past through ancestors and to our future through descendants — the children of today and tomorrow. We cannot underestimate the damage we do to children in their present lives by allowing the possibility of nuclear extermination to cloud their future with doubts. The future belongs to all of us. Each of us is a guardian of the future and must take responsibility for what could happen to our children who are the continuity of the human species.

Parents for Peace is a group of Toronto parents concerned about the growth of our children in the environment of fear and insecurity caused by the nuclear age. We are concerned about the total threat to our children's future posed by the increasing likelihood of nuclear war and other forms of mass destruction. The nuclear arms race is the life and death issue for all of us on this planet.

We know our concerns are widely shared. In the November 1982 Toronto municipal elections, 79 per cent of voters said "YES" to disarmament in the following referendum question: "Do you support the goal of general disarmament and mandate your government to negotiate and implement, with other governments, balanced steps that would lead to the earliest possible achievement of this goal?"

The challenge now is to make disarmament a reality, to make the world a safe place for our children to live and grow.

Recognizing that disarmament is an educational issue, we, as parents, consider it a prime responsibility to ensure that our taxes are used for education and not for weapons.

OUR CONTRIBUTION

- **Information:** We will help parents to educate parents on the nuclear armaments issue. We will draw upon and make known to others the resources, such as films and books, that are available which provide background information for understanding the seriousness of the nuclear disarmament question. These resources will be encouraged for use in school community meetings.

- **Action:** We will create and encourage participation in activities, both cultural and educational, for families which support our common aspirations for peace.

- **Networking:** We will share resources and information available from disarmament referendum groups in Toronto and other Ontario communities with local school community organizations.

- **Promoting educational activities in the classroom:** Through working with local schools, boards of education, teachers, students and on provincial guidelines, we propose to: promote in-service training to assist teachers in dealing with issues of nuclear war and disarmament as part of class activity across the curriculum; introduce the issue into schools through activities such as art and poetry contests and educational exhibits; encourage the development and use of suitable materials in school curricula.

HOW TO START THE DISCUSSION IN YOUR SCHOOL: HELPFUL POINTERS IN ORGANIZING A MEETING

Start Where You Feel Most Comfortable:

- **With Parents:** Find another parent or parents who are interested in asking questions about the threat of nuclear war, its effects on children, and possible solutions such as nuclear disarmament. (The people who you talk to may or may not be members of your Home and School-Community Organization.) It's always best to proceed with the understanding

that there are many points of view on this issue. What you want to do is to support others in asking the questions which allow them to express their concern. The Parents for Peace pamphlet may help you to introduce the issue.

- **With Teachers:** See if there are teachers who are also concerned about this issue. They may be able to support you at a later date. It's usually helpful to make people feel included in the initial discussion of the idea so



Children's Nuclear Fears: Myth and Reality

by Susan Goldberg, Parents for Peace Coordinating Committee

Those who oppose peace education wrongly assume that its purpose is to tell children about nuclear war. Peace educators take a much broader view, considering an understanding of the causes of war only one part of a more extensive subject. However, the purpose of this fact sheet is to demonstrate that *even if we take the narrow view of our opponents*, children are less likely to be "psychologically damaged" by information about nuclear war than opponents insist. All information that follows comes from systematic research studies of Canadian children.

MYTH: Children Only Think Of Nuclear War If Adults Raise The Issue.

FACT: In interviews with 60 grade school children in Toronto where no mention of war or peace was made, 20% of children in Grade 2, 50% in Grade 4, and 85% in Grade 6 spontaneously mentioned war or nuclear war. The question that elicited the most such mentions was: If you were in charge of the world and had three wishes to change anything you wanted, what would you wish for?¹

MYTH: Peace Education In School Would Be Children's Main Source of Information About Nuclear War.

FACT: Every existing survey, including two Canadian studies, shows that children themselves report that their main source of information about nuclear war is television. In Burnaby, B.C. 85% of children in grades 5-9 thought they should be learning about nuclear issues in school.²

MYTH: Children Only Worry About Nuclear War If Their Parents Are Peace Activists.

FACT: Worried youngsters outnumber

peace activist parents. In the Canadian national survey, 50-60% of 12-18 year olds mentioned nuclear war as one of their three main worries about the future. Only 8-11% said their parents had done anything to prevent nuclear war.³

MYTH: Only Middle Class Children Worry About Nuclear War.

FACT: In the Canadian national surveys, answers to 9 questions about nuclear war were analysed to see whether either mother's or father's occupation was related to the pattern of replies. 17 of 18 such analyses showed no effect of social class. The one pattern of association showed that the lowest social class (by father's occupation) reported the most discussion of nuclear issues in the home.⁴

MYTH: More Information About Nuclear War Will Make Children More Fearful.

FACT: Youngsters who report more discussion about nuclear issues at home, at school or with friends do report that they worry more frequently than others about the nuclear threat, but they are also more optimistic that they and others can do something to stop it.⁵

MYTH: Worry About Nuclear War Is Damaging To Children's Mental Health.

FACT: In surveys conducted in Toronto and Hamilton, 12-18 year olds who worried about nuclear war most often were a) most likely to feel they and others could do something to stop it; b) more involved than other students in their personal/job/career plans. Those who said they had not worried about nuclear war at all in the last month expressed the most helplessness and lack of interest in their personal fu-

ture.⁶

REALITY: Our children from grade 5 onward want and need information and opportunities to discuss nuclear issues. If our schools do not do the job, our children will continue to learn mainly from television, from inappropriate material, and without sensitive and caring adults to help them.

¹S. Goldberg *et al*, *Report to the Toronto Board of Education* (1987).

²S. Hargreaves. Master's thesis in Education, Simon Fraser University, 1984; S. Goldberg *et al*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (October 1985). This issue of the journal also includes a survey comparing U.S. and Soviet children's attitudes and knowledge about the threat of nuclear war; and K.R. Parker *et al*, Canadian Children's Concerns About their Future. Preliminary Report of the national survey. Faculty of Medicine, McMaster University, 1986.

³Parker.

⁴Parker.

⁵Goldberg, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*.

⁶Goldberg, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*.

Also of interest for an overview of the international studies on this topic: a review in the Appendix of *GROWING UP SCARED?*, Gould, Moon & Van Hoorn (eds.), (Berkeley, CA: Open Books, 1986).

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that they will come to "own" whatever action plans you decide upon.

• **With the Principal:** Tell the principal that you've been speaking with a number of people who would like the School-Community organization to sponsor an educational discussion for all parents on the issue. His/her support is very important to a good discussion in the school.

• **With the School/Community Organization:** Before raising the suggestion at a parent/school meeting, make sure you have talked individually with executive members to inform them so they have thought about the idea before it comes up at the meeting. They may even want to put forward your proposal as a recommendation from the executive. (If it appears there is opposition to talking about the issue in your school, or that Council meetings are overbooked, don't give up. Read *You Can Get It If You Really Want*. If that doesn't work, Parents for Peace may be able to help: P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2Y4.)

Once you've established your right to have a discussion in your school, you should decide who you want to reach and what you hope to accomplish. This is called goal-setting. It's important to have some general goals first because they may influence the make-up of your planning committee. Set up a planning committee to see that your general goals become a reality. It will develop a plan of action and a sharing of tasks so the end result will represent the collective effort of different people. In addition to parents, your committee could include the principal, a teacher, or an interested high-school student if you're working with a highschool community.

When the planning committee gets together, it's a good idea to discuss your goals in more depth so that everyone in the group fully understands and supports the implementation of the goals. You might want to try and refine your goals or agree to re-evaluate them after the event. Examples of goals might include having only one event in the school to provide people with introductory information on the issue; having a series of information-oriented events; setting up an ongoing committee to deal with the issue on a regular basis; or having people join Parents for Peace, Educators for Nuclear

Disarmament, or the Youth Coalition for Peace and report back to Council meetings when appropriate. Being clear about goals is important to developing a sense of accomplishment once you're done.

Now you can talk about format for the event. Some possibilities include films, speakers, panel discussions, workshops and cultural presentations (i.e. drama, art, poetry, music, storytelling, etc. by students, teachers, artists). Since you're introducing the audience to the issue, it's essential to allow for discussion as part of your format. People generally need to have the opportunity to express themselves and ask questions in order to learn, and you need to hear from them in order to assess where you go in the future. Because watching a film is such a passive activity, discussion is especially important after the showing of a film. Whatever you decide, don't forget that you're preparing the event for an audience. It's best to be sensitive to its particular needs. In a group of more than 30 people, it's often a good idea to divide into small groups where people feel less intimidated with talking for part of your discussion. This is also useful when there is more than one language being spoken at your meeting. Making sure interpreters are available for non-English speaking parents will help them to participate more equally in the discussion. The principal or school-community relations worker should be able to assist you in obtaining interpreters. Remember in planning that moving from a large group into small groups and back will take time.

Once you've agreed on your format, you'll have to take care of arrangements. Confirm your date, time and place with speakers, the film distribution company, performers, the chairperson, etc. Get a permit for the school through your principal or by calling 598-4931 and asking for 'community use of schools.' Have someone be responsible for arranging to use the coffee urn, getting refreshments, the projector, the flip chart or name tags if you want to use them. Planning some time for informal discussion with refreshments always helps to put people at their ease. And a book or information table encourages them to take their learning home and pursue it there.

Make sure your timing allows for sufficient advertising of the event. You'll be sorry if people don't come because they

haven't been given enough warning. In addition to a separate flyer that can go home with all the children, see about having a note put in the school newsletter. This information could be translated for the non-English speaking parents in the school. The school-community relations department may be able to assist you in getting these things done. Personal contact through phone-calls also encourages a good attendance at meetings. And you may want to consider advertising your event in the local media which often have free space for community groups. This depends of course, on whether you want your meeting to be open to the wider community.

At the meeting, it's useful to collect each person's name, address, phone number and child's room number in case you want to get in touch in the future. Choose your chairperson carefully. At the beginning of the event, have them explain why people have been called together, who has been involved in planning the event, why you consider this to be an educational issue and what you hope to accomplish from the effort. The audience should be welcomed and acknowledged for showing enough interest in the issue to attend. Because there are many diverse views about the arms race, it is extremely important that your chairperson be able to encourage discussion, be impartial, and keep it on topic. Impartiality in this situation means that the chair should not let any one person monopolize the discussion. As many different people as possible should participate. From time to time, the chairperson may need to assess what has been said and redirect the discussion toward a planned objective. This might include an action goal such as writing a letter on behalf of all those present, having another meeting, setting up a group, etc. Whatever the case, the chairperson should assist the group in finding a point of common agreement on which the meeting can end. The chairperson should indicate what the group has concluded from the experience, and concrete possibilities for following up. There's nothing more frustrating for people than to go away feeling that they've wasted their time with something that's going nowhere. They should be thanked for having contributed, and re-inforced in the sense that they have accomplished something.

If there are only a few parents who are

interested in having a meeting to discuss the nuclear arms race, you can make it happen outside the regular meeting schedule of your group. If you decide to follow this route, it is best to do so in the spirit of cooperation with the main parent organization in the school. This could happen by indicating your respect for the decision of the group, with your intention to proceed with the project. You might invite Council members to participate in the planning of the discussion with you. Remember, as parents, you are entitled to use school space and some School Board resources at no charge.

Resources: Films Suitable For Use With Children And Adults

1. *The big if*. 1981. 9 min. col.
An animated film on the social consequences of the arms race. Speculates what life would be like if money was channeled into life-enhancing projects. Suitable for elementary and above.
2. *Bombs will make the rainbow break*. 18 min. col.
The voices and artwork of children who are part of the Children's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Elementary and above.
3. *Children of War*. 1986.
A new film and video resource for grade 7 and up from the National Film Board.
4. *Doctor in the Sky*. 1984. 8 min. Col.
The doctor in the sky has diagnosed Earth as being a very sick planet. Only a large dose of disarmament will cure the patient. Animated. Elementary and above.
5. *Ferdinand the Bull*. 1938. 8 min. col.
The classic children's story about Ferdinand, the gentle bull, who hated fighting and preferred to sit smelling flowers all day. Suitable for elementary school.
6. *The flutterbye*. 1970. 9 min. Col.
A fable about a mythical creature who once brought peace, happiness, music and color to the world. People were careless about the flutterbye and it disappeared, but it could come back. Music and drawings by children, 8 to 11 years old, narrated by children as well.

Useable with primary - adults.

7. *The hat: Is this war necessary?* 1964. 18 min. Col.
An animated film about the absurdity of war. Two soldiers patrol a border and get into a delightful discussion about people getting along with each other when the hat of one of the soldiers falls onto the other's side. Probably suitable for about 8 and up, also good for adults as a short.
8. *Fable-safe*. 1971. 10 min. Col.
Drawings and animation are used to accompany Tom Glazer's satirical song about nuclear paranoia as "us" tries to second guess "them." Suitable for 12 and older.
9. *The Hold*. 1962. 15 min. Col.
An animated cartoon fantasy involving moles, missiles and mankind, in which two construction workers discuss their own attitudes to industrial or nuclear accidents. Suitable for about 12 and up.
10. *Judgment*. 1974. 7 min. Col.
An extremely moving treatment of the futility and destruction of war. With music and paintings of war scenes through the ages, and photos in the modern age, the viewer is overwhelmed with a sense of sorrow at the human situation. Suitable 12 and over.
11. *Neighbours*. 1952. 8 min.
Relates a parable about two neighbours who fight over the possession of a flower that grows on the line where their properties meet. Here Norman McLaren uses a "pixillated" animated technique with live actors. A film at first funny, then sobering in its effect. Useful for older elementary-school children and above.
12. *Shipwreck*. 1973. Col.
An animated cartoon that shows how the competition among certain countries in the arms race results in their self destruction by telling a story about survivors of a shipwreck who envy each other. For older elem. and above.
13. *Toys*. 1966. 8 min. col.
Examines the possible effects of modern war toys on children in a fantasy about a deadly battle fought by war

toys in a Christmas store window.

14. *Voyage to Next*. 1974. 10 min. Col.
Using animation shows the figures of Mother Earth and Father Time discussing the tendency of humans to defensively make walls and boxes around their groups, and the necessity for humanity to work towards universal cooperation for a better world. 12 and older.

Resources: Books for Children

Grades K-3

- Baker, Betty. *The Pig War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. An I CAN READ history book about the rivalry between two groups, each of whom thinks an island belongs to them.
- Carlsson-Paige, Nancy & Diane E. Levine. *Helping Young Children Understand Peace, War, and the Nuclear Threat*. NAEYC, 1986. So far as we know this is the only book which focuses specifically on working with children under 6.
- Emberly, Barbara. *Drummer Hoff*. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967. A simple attractive verse with colorful pictures about the building of a cannon.
- Larche, Doug. *Father Gander's Nursery Rhymes*. Advocacy Press, 1985. Father Gander is a beautifully illustrated book of traditional Mother Goose nursery rhymes rewritten for today's child.
- Leaf, Monro. *The Story of Ferdinand*. Illustrated by Robert Lawson. Viking Press, 1938. Classic story of the bull who didn't want to fight.
- Lobel, Anita. *Potatoes, Potatoes*. USA: Bowmar/Noble Publishers, 1967. A story about a mother's attempt to shield her two sons from war, their eventual involvement in it, and the final resolving of the war.
- Ringi, Kjell. *The Stranger*. New York: Random House, 1968. A fable that tells the story of people who in fear bring out their cannon against a giant-stranger but when they finally get to know him he is invited to stay in their country.

Udry, Janice May. *Let's Be Enemies*. Illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Scholastic Books (originally Harper & Row hardback). About two little boys. The theme: power struggle. A delightful, humorous treatment depicting real child problems which reflect similar adult ones.

We Can Do It! — A Kids' Peace Book. (Namchi United Enterprises, Box 33852 Station D, Vancouver B.C. V6J 4L6, \$1.00) (1985). A short little book which works its way through the alphabet with positive images of peace. Some work book activities and suggestions for action.

Zarambouka, Sofia. *Irene*. Washington, DC: Tee Loftin Publishers. Available from Educators for Social Responsibility, 639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge MA 02139. A beautifully illustrated fable about peace, including a play for young children to perform with sketches for simple scenery and costumes, tunes, and lyrics.

Zolotow, Charlotte. *The Hating Book*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. The childhood problem of hating one's friend and being devastated by this feeling is presented in this book.

Zolotow, Charlotte. *The Quarreling Book*. New York: Harper & Ross, 1963.

A story about people taking out frustrations on each other by picking on the next smaller person.

Reading lists for older children can be obtained from Parents for Peace.

Resources: Models for Teaching Peace in the Classroom

1. *Teaching for Peace*. A second draft of this document was compiled in February 1985 by the curriculum committee of Parents for Peace (Nancy Barker, Linda Guebert, Magda Lewis, and Shelly Seligman). It includes units on the organization of the classroom as a peaceful environment and conflict resolution, teaching suggestions for the primary and junior level, as well as resource lists of films, books, curriculum materials and guides for teachers. For further information write to Parents for Peace, Box 611, Station P, Toronto M5J 2Y4.

2. *Under the Tree*, by Elizabeth and David Morley (Pueblito Canada, 1987), is described as a "package of Christmas materials" that aims to encourage "understanding of other cultures and respect for simple traditions."

There are three main study units, the first of which is entitled "Peace on Earth." It is broken down into six lesson plans about peace: Handle With Care; Wanted; Peacemakers; Toys Are For Fun; Price of Peace; Peace Cranes; Peaceful Greetings. As the authors point out, the materials are designed for a 'cafeteria' approach for teachers, which means they may use as much or as little as they choose. For further information write to Pueblito Canada, 69 Sherbourne Street, Suite 523, Toronto M5A 3X7.

3. *A Manual on Nonviolence and Children*, edited by Stephanie Judson for the 1977 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends — Peace Committee. Copies can be obtained from: Nonviolence and Children, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102, USA.

4. *Perspectives: A Teaching Guide to Concepts of Peace*, put out by Educators for Social Responsibility, 1983, and available from: Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, USA.

5. *Dialogue: A Teaching Guide to Nuclear Issues*, put out in 1982 by Educators for Social Responsibility [above].



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