

No Disposable Kids

This month we would like to preview another book available in our Substance Abuse Council library. Titled *No Disposable Kids* by Larry K. Brendtro, Arlin Ness and Martin Mitchell, this book is certainly a timely writing. In a society that values children, there can be 'no disposable kids.' This book confronts the most pressing challenge facing every family, school, and community - raising respectful children in a toxic world. The pages of this book offer hope and optimism with practical solutions for all who care about our young people. However, before the authors get to the solutions, they take us on a journey that will be enlightening, saddening, and sometimes painful. We encounter children in trouble and discover why traditional education, treatment, and discipline often fail. The authors then offer fresh approaches to turn conflicts into opportunities and create environments where all children can thrive and flourish.

In simpler societies, raising children was a shared task of the whole community, as adults and youth worked in harmony and mutual respect. Today, humans are the only species in creation living out of balance. We covet our position as masters instead of servants of one another. We have forgotten that service to others is the rent we pay for our room here on earth.

Unfortunately, many who have privileges become self-indulgent and ignore those who are in need. The guardians of our laws are not always just. Courts lock away the children who we have abused in order to 'protect the public'. In a world that worships power and wealth, children whose families have neither are little valued. They are considered disposable in a highly cultured and technologically advanced society. Not only discarded children are in deep trouble. Many concerned parents are so busy making sure their children achieve success that they neglect to teach them to care for others less fortunate. Striving to make the grade, we neglect to nourish the child. The result is that our most successful young people today mimic their materialistic elders.

We must never look down to those who look up to us. Young people need to have some adult to turn to in the most difficult of times. Each of us is the hero some young person needs. But those youth who most deeply hunger for love often back away. They need adults who can conquer fear and rejection with love.

In the introduction to this book, the authors have started with some very strong statements. "Neglected by adults, our youth seek acceptance from other castoff peers. Fighting authority, they struggle in schools that are not structured to tap their potential. Longing for purpose, young people are wounded by racism. Yet in spite of their troubles, these are our children, and they are all valuable to us. In a society that values children, there can be no disposable kids."

Chapter one "Rebel with a Cause" begins with an anecdote. "The day began like any other. As children left their homes for school, parents bade them goodbye. Most families were secure in the satisfaction that their youngsters were enrolled in a safe school, protected from the violence of less privileged neighborhoods. Students entered their school building where laughter echoed

through the halls. Nobody was aware that a troubled boy and his alter ego would soon unleash a deadly inferno. Before the day was out, many died and hundreds more were scarred for the rest of their lives. The most destructive school violence in history occurred on December 1, 1958 in Chicago. Ninety-two students and three teachers died in a fire thought to be intentionally set by a student."

We can see in this that youth violence and unrest is not an isolated condition of today. Often, what seems a random, unexplained act has a beginning in a breakdown in communication. One writer quotes "Early in the path toward delinquency there is a breakdown in the connections to home, school, and family.

The book continues with actual problems and recommended solutions. Often repeated in the book is the idea of 'discovering potentials beneath the problems'. The authors have done extensive research and validate their findings with easy to understand explanations. Though this is clearly a research book, it is easy to read and comprehend, and has many insightful recommendations. One such thought for all to remember is "if you succeed in gaining their love...it will be in your power to direct them into almost any path you choose."