

Small Criminals Among Us

About six years ago I worked at a psychiatric facility for children and came across a fascinating book while browsing the shelves of a local "big chain" bookstore. The book was titled "Small Criminals Among Us" by Gad Czudner, PH.D. I couldn't resist picking it up. I paged through it and found myself struggling to set it down. This book seemed to describe most of the kids that I was working with at the time; manipulative, irresponsible, dishonest, self-centered, argumentative, disrespectful, superficial, and impulsive (to name a few). It didn't take long before I was scampering up to the check out desk with this wonderful book in hand.

The book discusses anti-social children - not non-social, but anti-social (or psychopathic) children. There are many more of them out there than you might think. For example, remember that child from class that just couldn't seem to get his act together? He was the one who bullied other children, infringed on their rights, lied, stole, defied authority, and manipulated his way through each and every day. Maybe he even abused a few animals or set a few fires along the way. He was sadistic, relentless, and always appeared to carry a grudge. Well this is precisely the child I am talking about.

Small Criminals Among Us is required reading for any parent facing the wrath of this type of child. Dr. Czudner presents many case studies but also discusses prevention, warning signs, and helpful hints for dealing with these personality types. He also talks about the mistakes that parents make and how they can contribute to the problem.

Rather than turning this article into a book review, I'd like to cover some of the important points that he makes, while adding some of my own insight and ideas. I'm going to try to make the points using more of an outline format rather than writing a narration.

Describing a psychopathic child.

Here are some of the qualities that Dr. Czudner lists in his book to describe anti-social children (in no particular order):

1. Self-Centeredness
2. Lying
3. Resentment of Authority
4. Cruelty
5. Low Frustration Tolerance
6. Lack of Empathy
7. Excitement (Seeking)
8. Distortion of Love
9. Lack of Responsibility and (Self) Discipline
10. Power and Control Seekers
11. Manipulative
12. (Constantly Making) Excuses

While I'm sure there are other characteristics that could be added, I think this is an excellent list. My personal opinion is that the most over-riding quality on this list is that of the need to exert power and control over others. In fact, many of the other characteristics on the list are actually ways of meeting that goal.

Prevention

Dr. Czudner discusses a few preventative measures that parents can take to minimize the likelihood of raising an anti-social child.

1. If there is a problem, then it must be *diagnosed* then *corrected* (rule out medical cause).
2. Parents should instill morals and values early on by teaching empathy, respect, and responsibility.
3. Social and emotional intelligence need to be addressed by parents.
4. Avoid common parenting mistakes (there is a whole chapter devoted to this).

Important Points:

According to Small Criminals Among Us, here are some of other important points that should be considered:

1. It does not help to deny that your child has a problem or to make up excuses for your child's behavior. The behavior should be dealt with.
2. The issues of power and control must be addressed and resolved early in a defiant child's life (p.55). Children can become addicted to power and control and it is imperative that parents do what they can to prevent this from happening.