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H. A. ROBERTS

Overprotecting a child is asking for trouble—tantrums, maladjustment and behavior problems.

The Overprotective Mother

By Dr. Herman N. Bundesen
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WHEN his parents first came to me for help, Ronnie, who was then nine years old, showed every sign of being what we used to call a "spoiled brat." Little tyrant at home, selfish and demanding of his parents, he responded to any parental or disciplinary measure with an outburst of temper. He was aggressive and quarrelsome with other children, with the result that he had few friends and spent most of his afternoons at home, reading or talking to his mother, who was known as an unselfish, devoted parent, a model mother to her friends and neighbors. "She gives her whole life to that boy!" was a frequent observation made about Ronnie's mother. Ronnie had a good record at school. He was bright and interested in his studies, and his teachers had noted his tendency

to generalize that by no means all parents of psychologically difficult children are ignorant or unloving. In many cases the parent is as much a victim as the child. It is circumstances that are to blame. This is frequently the case with the over-solicitous or overprotective mother—a common cause of abnormal, antisocial behavior on the part of the child. In this drama the mother plays an unconscious role. Moved by forces of whose existence she is unaware, she responds by dominating or indulging her child to a point which can easily interfere with normal adjustment and development.

I didn't have to find out many of the details of Ronnie's case before I began to suspect this was the trouble here. The "model mother" reports were a tip-off; it is typical of the overprotective mother that she denies herself many normal interests and relationships in order to devote herself unstintingly to her child. The fact is that, unconsciously, she may be encouraging him to stay at home in order to avoid the hurts and hazards of normal play with children his own age.

Further study confirmed these early suspicions. Ronnie's mother made him so completely the center of the universe that he never had a chance to learn what children ought to know about the rights of others, or to do things for himself and thus develop as an independent personality. Long after it was natural for her to do so, for example, she had continued to bathe and dress Ronnie, and she still insisted on driving him to and from school.

Characteristic of the overprotective attitude was her unreasonable exaggeration of the dangers of letting him cross streets by himself, especially in the few suburban blocks between her home and the school, where not a single car was to be seen. She had

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