

The Dissolute Children

By P. Donohue Shortridge

Age:

usually between six and twelve years old, but can be younger and/or older.

Where:

These children are seen everywhere; grocery stores, malls, gas stations, playgrounds, restaurants, movie theaters, airports, sporting events, in school, on public transportation, in tourist places and at the local pool and, in other people's homes as well as in their own home and neighborhoods.

Attire:

for girls:

fingernail polish; at least one trendy hair or body adornment; a purse; clothes such as seen worn on teenagers; footwear such as jellies, flimsy sandals or flop-flops none of which are conducive to running and playing.

for boys:

a tee-shirt with a logo of an action figure, a sports team or a corporation selling clothes; expensive sneakers; something in their hands like a Game Boy or some other distraction.

Demeanor and appearance:

These children are pasty and pale, not rosy cheeked; their eyes are unfocused and not clear and always scanning about the scene, seeking something outside of themselves and cannot look you in the eye when speaking to you; their voices are either whiny or rude and they engage with parents in antagonistic ways; they are not aware of immediate surroundings or people; they fidget; they seem older than they look; they appear battle weary from continual conflict of some kind; they do not seem congruent in their body, mind, emotion and spirit.

Parents:

The parents are usually somewhere in the vicinity of these children – they do not appear to be concerned or embarrassed, thus, one concludes this is typical appearance/behavior; the parents appear either disinterested, worn down or antagonistic; they often speak rudely to or tease these children; they frequently negotiate with their children that which is not negotiable;

they seem surprised or annoyed and often unprepared when child needs to use rest room, needs a drink of water, is low on blood sugar or needs a quick hug or clean up. In fact, the parents do not appear to be involved with these children very much, so even though they are in the same place, they do not seem to be together.

What they are doing:

These children are wanting and needing, and thus are often consuming. They relentlessly ask for something to be bought for them and act like they expect to get it. When they do get it, they become only momentarily sated, but never really satisfied.

They are simultaneously busy manipulating every situation, either by whining or by behaving obnoxiously; they speak rudely to parents; they grab things from others and off shelves; they can be destructive, hurting animals, laughing at other people, running in places not appropriate for running, breaking things or damaging

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merchandise; their games are mean spirited, jokes are cruel, they lie and cheat, they do not own up to mistakes, guilt or fault and do not seem to know what to do if they injure someone; conversely some of them appear to be shell shocked, overstimulated and thus shut down and passive.

For all of these children, their voices and behaviors are not the joyous sounds and sights of childhood, but rather are the wails of dissipation. And although it may seem that these children are the typical children, nevertheless, they are not the normal children.*

*See my essay, The Normal Children

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fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture