

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Disagree. Argue. Fight. On to war! Since the beginning or recorded history it has ever been thus. Does it always have to be? It used to be that in our western world anyone with a non-white skin was considered inferior. We have and are overcoming that misconception. Why cannot we do the same for the ladder of belligerence? Racism is quite readily absent with small children who see everyone as different in one way or another and do not mark kinds or orders of difference. Racism is learned. So is belligerence. Have you as a parent ever felt a flash of resentment and the urge for retaliation ~~wh~~ when your child reports to having been pushed, hit, or whacked by another child? In reporting such an occurrence to you, your child is alert for your reaction and he will take his clue from you.

Do you show your anger at once? ("Ahhhhhh," says your child to himself or herself, "If I am hit I should be angry.") Do you say, "Well, if it happens again you hit him back. You have to learn to defend yourself." (Your child now has his instructions: hit back.) Do you say, "Don't be a sissy." ? The message for behavior is now clear. A sissy is one who doesn't fight and it is bad to be a sissy. Therefore it is good to fight.

Sad. Worse.

Schools set down rules for reasonable behavior that will lead to progress, not useless conflict. Parents scuttle these rules when they encourage their children in retaliatory behavior. We always try to catch a conflict before it reaches the physical stage and discuss involvement through amiable discourse. Most children are amenable to this and see that discussion or, if necessary, an appeal to higher

authority resolves problems quickly so that play may be resumed.

A child taught at home to "hit back" is in for chastisement, rejection, and isolation.

One very conscientious mother checked her child over every day after school for signs of physical aggression and when she found a scratch or bruise would call the school to report it. She could not believe her docile child could possibly have gathered these marks in friendly play or due to his aggression. She admitted she was continually instructing him to "hit back" and not let others bully him. It took polaroid pictures showing her child's hanging by a hell on the monkey bars and flinging himself on another child to prove that "love thy friend" was a far better maxim than "do unto others before they can do unto you again!"