Preface   
ALL OUR CHILDREN

Creation of the Carnegie Council on Children in 1972 by Carnegie Corporation of New York was not a hasty step taken in response to a suddenly perceived social crisis, as is the case with many national commissions.

The foundation had moved from a general interest in research on learning to a more specialized focus on the cognitive development of the very young to a concern with preschool education for all chil­dren, especially for those with disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet could the inquiry end there? Increasingly, we found ourselves asking whether the ability of children to learn was not linked to many other facets of child development, and whether child development itself was not heavily influenced by its social context.

We decided to explore these questions by commissioning a spe­cial group to examine the way children grow up in America, concen­trating on the time span from conception to about age nine-or, as we put it, from minus nine to plus nine. To lead this new enterprise we enlisted the services of Kenneth Keniston, a person who combines significant scholarly achievement with a deep appreciation of public policy issues, a man who is not a specialist in early childhood but who cares deeply about young people. The selection of such a non­specialist was a quite deliberate preference on our part since he would come to the subject fresh, without preconceived ideas. For the mem­bership of the Council, we worked with Professor Keniston to put together a group of men and women with a wide range of experience, interests, and talents, individuals who could bring a realistic, prac­tical outlook to the work but who were nonetheless imbued with a sense of compassion toward children and of optimism toward the chances of improving their lot.

To this body we put some extremely difficult questions. What, we asked the Council's members, is the relationship between the na­ture of contemporary American society and child development? What do children need? What do their parents need? What has hap­pened and is happening to the American family? Is it still viable?

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What attitudes do Americans really have toward children? What is the status of children in our national life? Who "owns" and is re­sponsible for children? Their families? Society at large? What rights do children have? Who is responsible for protecting those rights?

We had no illusion that our charge to the group was easy. We were not asking just how services for children could be improved (important as that is) but how the nation could develop a wholly new attitude toward children. Those terms of reference, we under­stood, would probably take the Council into areas of social policy not normally considered to be the province of child development, realms likely to be fraught with controversy.

The task did prove to be long and arduous, with periods of strain and discouragement and sharp clashes of philosophy. But there were also moments of joy, humor, and satisfaction of shared accomplishment. It is our earnest hope that this report and the Council's other studies will be widely read and debated and that the debate will move us decisively toward the formulation of new na­tional policies affecting the status of children in American life.

I wish on behalf of the foundation-but, more important, on behalf of millions of the nation's children, born and yet to be born­to thank Kenneth Keniston and his colleagues on the Council and its staff most warmly for their devotion to this task. However wide the audience their work reaches, I believe that the Council's members would be the first to say that what they have achieved is only a be­ginning. The effort to make this a better world for children, and hence for all human beings, must continue and be intensified many­fold.

Alan Pifer

President

Carnegie Corporation of New York

**From the Jacket of** ***All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure***  
American parents blame themselves for almost everything troublesome in their children's lives. By droves they consult books and counselors in search of advice in raising a family in today's world. When both parents work, when a parent raises a child alone, when chil­dren fall behind in school, parents are the ones who feel helpless and guilty.

All Our Children is a major book. In its pages Kenneth Keniston probes our basic assumptions about children and families. He shows that the family as we think of it-a self-sufficient cradle for future citizens, to be blamed for its failures and credited with its successes -is a myth. The family cannot be sep­arated from society at large. The pres­sures of parents' jobs, the costs of rais­ing children, the work of doctors and teachers, the entire social ecology from television to packaged food define and limit what parents can do. For most Americans-rich, middle-class, and the poor especially-necessary services are expensive, intimidating, and often in­adequate. Only when we recognize that the old myths about the family do not apply to new realities will we be able to relieve the frustrations of parents and improve the lot of children.

The diagnosis is bound to be contro­versial, and so is the prescription: a "national family policy" whose premise is that supporting the development of the next American generation means, above all, supporting parents. It in­volves sweeping reforms in social policy, work practices, law, and services de­signed to return to parents the author­ity they ought to have.

*All Our Children is* a strong, passion­ate, hopeful book, one that reaffirms (as many critics are unwilling to do) the central importance of the family, and shows how it can again be made, for all our children, the bedrock of American society.

The Carnegie Council on Children has been created and supported by Carnegie Council Corporation of New York, an educational foundation. The principal author of this book and chairman of the Council is Kenneth Keniston, Professor of Human Development at MIT and au­thor of *The Uncommitted, Young Radi­cals,* and *Youth and Dissent. All Our Children is* the first of six books writ­ten under the auspices of the Carnegie Council on Children; forthcoming books will examine the effects of physical handicaps and social inequality on chil­dren, caste and minority education, child care within families, and other topics.