

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Teaching Melancholics

Melancholics are the worriers of this world. If they haven't got something big to worry about then they will worry about little things. There is little point in not accepting the melancholic's disposition towards the outside world.

Adults should therefore encourage melancholics to overcome and free themselves from their fears and inhibitions rather than try to harden them against the world. Many adults may well attempt to shock or force children into action. More than likely the only result of this type of approach will be to force the child into himself more; to become even more apprehensive and withdrawn.

Melancholics need above all other things to express their feelings. Whereas choleric live in the world of action, melancholics live in the world of feelings. Many of their feelings relate to their apprehension and worry about their lives especially when they are feeling a little withdrawn.

They need to be allowed to express their soulful and sad disposition and to be treated with a mixture of sympathy and firmness. It is pointless however to try and enliven melancholics so that they look upon life less seriously.

One of the worst things you can say to the melancholic is "that it doesn't matter" or "that it isn't important" or even worse "don't take things so seriously". If the melancholic feels that something is important, however trivial or small the thing is in itself, then they need someone to relate to how they feel about it; the thing itself is almost incidental.

The task of the teacher is to see that the energy is flowing outwards for if it is, melancholics will be of very little trouble and will be helpful and sensitive to situations. The balance has to be found, therefore, between diverting the child's attention and energy to the outside world while at the same time seeing that inner needs are fulfilled.

There is always a continual conflict, to some degree, within melancholics between their selfish and unselfish tendencies; between their desire to be helpful and of service and their egotistical nature to refrain and withdraw. Teachers have the task of diverting their disposition to concentrate on their own emotions, on their own suffering to the suffering of others in the world.

Teachers need to be sympathetic so that melancholics can express their own sorrowful if indulgent feelings. At the same time they need to be firm and work out the appropriate cut off points so that the child does not indulge in an orgy of egotism.

Once the energy is directed outwards melancholics do need difficulties and obstructions to overcome. They perceive life as being difficult and facing obstacles almost reassures melancholics that their judgement was the correct one. If the inner needs are satisfied their energy may be directed outwards by their own volition. If this does not occur they need help to achieve it; the objective must be to direct melancholics outwards through their own motivation.