

Many generations of children have lived in fear of the mushroom cloud. Many of us, including our critics, share vivid memories of crouching under school desks or leaning against cold basement walls "preparing" for the impact of the bomb. Today, with the world older and our children wiser, this morbid anxiety is far more pervasive.

The psychological impact on children and adolescents "living in a world where thermonuclear disaster is a constant threat" was the subject of a study conducted between 1978 and 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association. The results, recently published by Harvard psychiatrists Dr. John Mack and Dr. William Beardslee, indicated that among 1000 Boston, Los Angeles and Baltimore grammar and high school students, "the imminent threat of nuclear annihilation has penetrated deeply into their consciousness." A majority admitted that the nuclear threat had discouraged their thoughts about marriage, even their plans for the future. Most said it influenced their daily thinking and feeling. Compared to research studies of twenty years ago, the APA study showed a marked increase in the level of children's nuclear anxiety.

Our choice then is not whether we wish our young children to know or not to know about the nuclear threat (they already do), but how we can help them to live with it. All the psychiatric studies point clearly to the same conclusion: it is therapeutic for children to perceive that their parents are actively working to prevent nuclear war. As Yale psychiatrist Robert Lifton testified before the House Committee hearing on Children's Fears of War (September 20, 1983), "Children ask of us commitment to end the nuclear threat. They seek collaboration between the generations in preventing nuclear holocaust. Their sense of threat will diminish only when that threat itself has diminished." We must show our children we are working hard to make the world a safe place for them to grow up in. What children see and sense about our individual response to the nuclear threat will help them cope with their own worst nightmares. "As parents," says Dr. Lifton, "we have a responsibility, both psychological and biological, of seeing our children safely into adulthood."

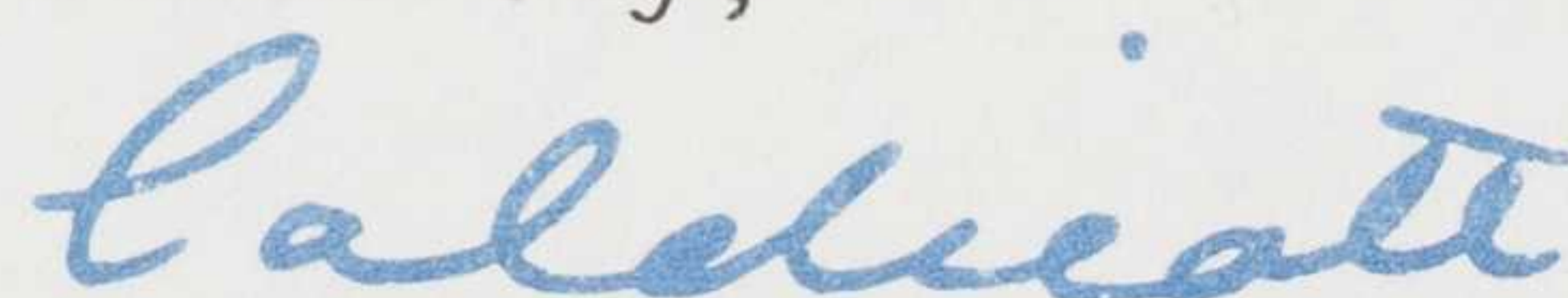
Last November you probably watched the ABC television movie, "The Day After", a graphic dramatization of the aftermath of a nuclear attack which reached millions of people. We were pleased that ABC allowed us air time to warn parents of the film's devastating impact on impressionable youngsters. For months prior to the show, we worked with PTA's to prepare parents and teachers how best to respond to the concerns of those children who did watch it. Accurate information on nuclear war must be sensitively given. We must remain deeply concerned with the threat of nuclear war--both real or imagined--on our youngsters' development.

But to accomplish our work we need your help. Your participation in the work for peace sets a healthy example for your children. The best gift you can give your child or any child is that knowledge. PSR believes that the fears of parents and children must be addressed as surely as the nuclear arms race must be halted. For, as one Brookline, Massachusetts, student wrote:

Not Knowing is Terrifying
And Knowing is Terrifying
But Not Knowing is Hopeless
And Knowing May Save Us

Your contribution to PSR will help insure the "knowing" and replace a child's despair with hope and understanding. Help us to guarantee a peaceful future for all our children. Please give a generous tax-deductible contribution to the continued work of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Sincerely,



Helen Caldicott, M.B., B.S.
President Emeritus