

Another sort of conflict arises when the cared-for wants something that we cannot, in good faith, give him or help him to attain. Conflicts of this sort range from situations involving a child's desire for a strawberry sundae just before dinner to suggestions or commands that we find deeply wrong. Again, as thoughtful persons committed to rational deliberation, we talk to ourselves. We examine the implicit rules by which we usually operate. We ask ourselves whether the rule is a guideline, a useful and dependable aid to generally acceptable behavior, or whether it is an imperative never to be violated by us.

Again, after analysis—sometimes brief, sometimes long and agonizing—we turn back to the persons and the concrete situations. In the case of the child who is begging for a sundae, we may properly refuse him under many circumstances. But, then, there are times when the situation (as well as the child) just begs for an infraction of the rule. Perhaps the child needs to know that he is more important than the rule. We do not have to say this to him. We might just say, "Well, I wasn't planning much of a dinner anyway—let's do it!" When we care, the humor, the harmless desires, the tendency toward playfulness of the cared-for enter us. We see the desired sundae with our own eyes and with the child's. If our own view reveals nothing very important and even seems a bit stuffy, we turn to the child with eyes brightened and refreshed with delight. Interestingly, when we interact in this way with a child, he is not likely to become spoiled. Rather, when we have to say no, he is likely to believe that our reasons are worth his attention. We shall discuss situations of this sort more fully when we consider the cared-for and his role in caring.