

# Children Learn What They Live: Lessons from Dorothy Law Nolte

by [Marilyn Price-Mitchell, PhD](#)  
COMPASS-INSPIRED



**Meet Dorothy Law Nolte. She's a woman who understood the field of positive youth development before it was invented.**

Born in 1924, Dorothy Law Nolte became a parent educator, family counselor, and writer known for her inspirational poem, *Children Learn What They Live*. First published in 1954, it was pasted to refrigerators, printed on posters, and distributed to millions of parents by a baby formula maker. As a researcher, I am always delving into the latest study and looking for cause and effect relationships that show how children develop. Sometimes though, I find a refreshing simplicity in the words of a poem. When I came across this poem by Dorothy Law Nolte I envisioned numerous research studies that support her assertions. I thought I would post it for your enjoyment. Who knows, maybe you'll paste it to your refrigerator!

Dorothy Law Nolte died in 2005 at the age of 81. Her legacy as a parent educator, practitioner, and family counselor taught many people about family dynamics and parenting

## Children Learn What They Live

By, Dorothy Law Nolte

If children live with criticism,  
They learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility,  
They learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule,  
They learn to be shy.

If children live with shame,  
They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement,  
They learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance,  
They learn to be patient.

If children live with praise,  
They learn to appreciate.

If children live with acceptance,  
They learn to love.

If children live with approval,  
They learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty,  
They learn truthfulness.

If children live with security,  
They learn to have faith in themselves and others.

If children live with friendliness,  
They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

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