

# Award-Winning Teacher: 8 Problems Plaguing Children

Shortly after being named New York teacher of the year in the early 1990s, John Taylor Gatto wrote a [public letter of resignation](#), explaining that he could no longer be a part of a system which hurt children and families.

Following his resignation, Gatto released a book of essays called [Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling](#). In it, Gatto described eight pathologies that afflict today's children:

- 1. The children I teach are indifferent to the adult world. This defies the experience of thousands of years. A close study of what big people were up to was always the most exciting occupation of youth, but nobody wants children to grow up these days, least of all the children themselves – and who can blame them? Toys are us.*
- 2. The children I teach have almost no curiosity, and what little they do have is transitory. They cannot concentrate for very long, even on things they choose to do. Can you see a connection between the bells ringing again and again to change classes and this phenomenon of evanescent attention?*
- 3. The children I teach have a poor sense of the future, of how tomorrow is inextricably linked to today. As I said before, they live in a continuous present: the exact moment they are in is the boundary of their consciousness.*
- 4. The children I teach are ahistorical: they have no sense of how the past has predestinated their own present, limits their choices, shapes their values and lives.*

5. **The children I teach are cruel to each other; they lack compassion for misfortune; they laugh at weakness; they have contempt for people whose need for help shows too plainly.**
6. **The children I teach are uneasy with intimacy or candor.** They cannot deal with genuine intimacy because of a lifelong habit of preserving a secret inner self inside a larger outer personality made up of artificial bits and pieces of behavior borrowed from television or acquired to manipulate teachers. Because they are not who they represent themselves to be, the disguise wears thin in the presence of intimacy; so intimate relationships have to be avoided.
7. **The children I teach are materialistic,** following the lead of schoolteachers who materialistically 'grade everything' and of television mentors who offer everything in the world for sale.
8. **The children I teach are dependent, passive, and timid in the presence of new challenges.** This timidity is frequently masked by surface bravado or by anger or aggressiveness, but underneath is a vacuum without fortitude.

It's been nearly 25 years since Gatto observed these pathologies. Would you say they are even more prevalent in today's children? If so, what can we do to reverse course?