



EMPOWERED PARENTS

Dear Parents,

Our world is filled with assertive business people, self-assured politicians, over confident athletes, narcissistic celebrities and forceful media personalities. People are quick to become aggressive on the road, combative when talking politics and pushy when shopping. Everyone seems to be quite tough when standing up for themselves in shul, in a store or any public place.

“...there is one exception to this pattern of aggressiveness, assertiveness and pushiness.”

In the ultimate twist of irony, there is one exception to this pattern. We seem to become downright docile and submissive when it comes to our children! We find it hard to point out shortcomings, to confidently state our needs and to hold firm against their seemingly never-ending requests and demands. Even more perplexing, we tolerate disrespectful talk, inappropriate body language such as eye-rolling and demeaning looks, along with the children’s impatience – with us!

What is going on here?! The Torah sets down very clear ground rules about how children are to behave and act towards their parents. This week’s *Parsha* tells us: (*Vayikra 19:3*) "איש ואיש ואביו תיראו" *One must fear (revere) his mother and his father....*" The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin (31b)* elaborates on what this means – “Don’t stand (or sit) in his (father’s) place, don’t refute his words, don’t confirm his words, etc.” It should be obvious to everyone that other than one’s (Torah) teacher, there is no one besides a parent who should expect to be on the receiving end of such reverence and deference.

“...the laws of *Kibud Av V’Eim* are not for our benefit, but for the benefit of the child!” The fact that the world is seemingly upside down, and we stand up for our rights in the face of almost anyone we encounter, but struggle to maintain even a modicum of self-respect in the face of our own children, should receive our attention and introspection. This situation, from an objective perspective is even more ludicrous when we realize that the purpose of the laws of *Kibud Av V’Eim* is not for our benefit, but for the benefit of the child! The laws of honoring parents are an extension of the laws of honoring *Hashem*. When children give honor and reverence to those who so clearly do so much for them, it becomes much easier to give great honor to *Hashem*, the Ultimate Provider.

The obligation of *Chinuch*, (according to *Rashi*) rests upon the parent. How do we fulfill that obligation properly? We are understandably and appropriately concerned at how easily children can become estranged from parents in the modern world. Many feel firm discipline will drive children away. It has become a societal norm to work on making one’s child happy. How do happiness and discipline coexist?

The best answer perhaps can be found by examining some practical examples that are commonplace:

“A child who ... lives within a respectful environment, will be filled with *Simcha* and self-confidence.”

AFTERNOON CARPOOL LINE: The child drops his backpack on the ground and doesn’t bother to pick it up and put it into the car. The impatient mother asks then pleads for the child to put it into the car. The child ignores the reminders, and mom gets out of the car, picks up the bag and puts it in the car herself. It should be apparent that irresponsibility, lack of *mentschlichkeit* and outright disrespect has just been reinforced. A better approach is to remind firmly, but gently, they need to place the backpack into the car. If no response (no need to repeat the reminder more than twice), either of the following can be tried: Tell them (as calmly as possible) that if they don’t pick up the backpack it is going to be left there, and it would be a shame for them not to have the knapsack. If they still don’t get it, then follow through. Leave the backpack on the ground and drive away, (It is ok to try to get someone else to save the backpack to be returned later).

Is that too drastic for you? Alternatively – pick up and put the backpack by your place and let the child know that the backpack will not be returned to him until a time of your choosing, not right away.

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It would probably help to keep it for a few days and offer a few plastic bags for your child's book and materials transport needs. These are very logical consequences that will make an impression on the child and help steer his behavior in the right direction. Always remember to let the child know that you love him in words and tone, especially when you are consistently enforcing the right behavior.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR? You decide to serve a healthy (and delicious) meal and your daughter makes a face and says "this is so yuck!" Don't refute her and try to convince her how delicious it is and get into an argument about how she has to eat it. Calmly inform her that what is in front of her is tonight's supper and you feel bad that she thinks it is not tasty. Offer the option of cereal or crackers etc. as an alternative and calmly proceed with the meal. It is now up to the child to choose. Don't let it be a confrontation or argument or power struggle. The issue of her calling *Hashem's* food "yuck" can be addressed at a different time as a positive lesson in how we make *Brochos* before and after eating to show our appreciation to *Hashem* for the wonderful foods He provides us with.

AND THIS SCENARIO: Your child is constantly pestering you with his need for some electronic device, because "everyone has it." You have decided it is not something you want to give in to but you don't want your child to be unhappy with you. What to say and what to do? Let him, and all your children know that "our family" is special and does special things that are not necessarily the same as their friends' families. Each Mommy and Daddy knows what's best for their family and makes the decisions and that is the way it is. This requires clarity of vision and strength of conviction. When a child experiences this, despite the short-term disappointment, (and initial fuss and noise) the sense of security and closeness will only grow between parent and child. It is when the parent waivers and appears unsure, that children pick that up, and sensing weakness, will continue asking and demanding, until they "wear you down."

AND OF COURSE AT THE END OF THE DAY: You come late to pick up your child from school on a day she has a playdate with a friend. She is extremely frustrated because she was so looking forward to it and now she'll have less time. She blurts out angrily; "Why can't you show up on time!?" You are feeling guilty but it is very important to first tell her "that is not how we talk to Mommy. I know you are feeling frustrated and I'm so sorry for being late. Alternatively say to her "Let's try again and let Mommy know how you are feeling in a respectful way."

A child who feels parental love, is raised with clear boundaries and lives within a respectful environment, will be filled with *Simcha* and self-confidence. Not only will the parent fulfill the Torah's requirement of guiding one's child to properly fulfill the mitzvah of *Kibud Av V'eim*, that parent will reap the boundless *nachas* only loving children can provide, from the years of effort and devotion.

Hatzlocha and best wishes for a wonderful, respect-filled *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann