Powerful Non-Defensive Parenting
Tape 1-The Authority Continuum
by
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(Note 9/30/04: This is protected and copyrighted material developed by Sharon Ellison to be part of a CD set she is developing on Powerful Non-Defensive Parenting. She has agreed to share this material with us, and she asks us to be respectful with how we use it.)

Do you think I should have a baby?" a daughter asks her mother. "It will change your life," the mother says, keeping her tone carefully neutral. This short exchange was part of a Mother's Day story on the Internet. I received it from my daughter, Ami—now the mother of twin boys.

The story describes a mother's inner thoughts about the incredible degree to which being a parent changes our lives forever. She reflects, "As a parent you will never again read about a tragedy in the newspaper without thinking, 'What if that had been my child?' No decision will be simple. Even deciding whether your five-year-old son can go in the Men's bathroom at McDonald's alone instead of going with you into the Women's can become a major dilemma."

The tremendous responsibility we have for our children's lives can be ever so magnified by our love. . . most of us have no words to describe the depth of delight we have felt in just hearing our baby's laughter, watching the miracle of it's tiny hands and feet moving in the air; and later, after our child learns to talk, laughing *ourselves* silly at the outrageously funny things he or she says.

This mix of massive amounts of love and responsibility can make us afraid and distort our thinking as parents. We become confused about how to make the best decisions for our children—*and* how much to expect of them.

I want to be clear that throughout this tape, when I refer to parents, I am referring to *anyone* who is in a parenting role. A child may be reared by both birth parents, adoptive parents, a single parent and a step-parent, or a single parent. A child may have parents of the opposite sex, or the same sex, grandparents, kinship providers, or other people who serve in some official or unofficial capacity as surrogate parents.

I also want to honor that —just as there are many ways to create family —there are many philosophies that define parenting roles. Depending on a blend of influences — such as our culture and class background, our gender, our childhood experiences, and our own personality — our approach to parenting can vary dramatically.

The parent-child connection is further complicated by the fact that from the time our children are tiny, they see our every mistake, our moments of depression, our anger. Despite our best intentions, it's almost impossible for most of us to avoid feeling guilty for the ways in which we have hurt our own children. A result of this guilt is that we may lower our expectations, let them "get away with things," sometimes accept it when they treat us rudely. As a result, even people who are great with everyone else's children may let their own kids run them ragged. Conversely, of course, wanting the most for our children, we may at other times be very hard on them.

Are you feeling uplifted now? —as you picture this blend of love, responsibility, guilt, sorting our appropriate expectations, and stressful decision making? Honestly, my ultimate goal is to inspire you, not to overwhelm you. I absolutely believe that we can have strong, healthy relationships with our children, and many of us already do. But I think there are some issues with how we have learned to communicate that add huge and needless problems to our parent-child relationships. My mother used to say, "If you want to move mountains, have a lot of faith, and then make sure you have the tools you need."

In this series of four audiotapes, I will provide tools for communicating with toddlers, young children, and teens. Using these tools, we can eliminate much of the defensiveness and power struggle we have come to think of as "normal" kid behavior. I suggest that you take these ideas and adapt them to your own culture, beliefs, and personality.

In order for children to blossom as fully as possible, I believe we must provide the same kind of balance as we would for the plants in our garden. For our plants to be healthy and continue to blossom, we must give them the right amount of light, space, water and other nutrients. *And* we must prune them carefully, cutting any dead or diseased leaves, and plucking the dead flowers off.

I think the nutrients we give plants are analogous to the nurturing we give children; properly pruning plants is analogous to creating boundaries for our children. Nurturing and boundaries together, in a fine-tuned balance, give our children both the security and the freedom they need to

grow as unique, competent individuals, who participate reciprocally in the family and community.

How we create boundaries will fall somewhere between letting our kids "run wild" and expecting them to do *exactly* what we tell them to do. Wherever we are on the continuum that runs from being permissive to authoritarian, I believe that most of us have not found the optimum balance that creates a safe and nurturing environment for our children—not to mention sanity for ourselves. Many of us even fluctuate, somewhat erratically, between being permissive and authoritarian.

In 40 years of experience working with families, I have found that *how parents set limits* deeply impacts the ability of both parents and children to have genuine heart-to-heart conversations. If parents are more authoritarian, children often will hide their real feelings for fear of "getting into trouble." They may not even be conscious of their real feelings because it is too threatening to their security.

On the other hand, if parents are permissive, or try to get children to cooperate without setting clear limits, the child or teenager may use any conversation to get more of what they want. The child has an agenda that interferes with sincere conversation. When trying to manipulate parents to get what they want, children can't accurately identify their genuine feelings. I often say such children "don't know their wooden nickels from their real ones." Another way to look at it is that they are still testing to find out where the real boundaries are.

Also, when children are still pushing to find the limits; they seem unable to take in nurturing. I see this so often. And I find it devastating. One symptom I see frequently now is children who constantly look tired, and have little dark bags under their eyes. This may be partly from lack of sleep, or allergies, but in my experience it is also often because no matter how much the parents love them, without the safety of firm boundaries, the children will not be able to take in love very well. So they look exhausted.

It's like eating food, but having your body unable to absorb the nutrition it offers because some other element is missing that is needed to facilitate the absorption. In the same way, I believe well-defined, firm boundaries are essential in order for any child, or even an adult, to fully "absorb" love.

Of course, if the limits are too harsh, and there is insufficient nurturing, the sense of being unloved can also predominate, even if the parent cares deeply and is only trying to raise responsible children.

Over decades I have seen how hard it is for so many parents to come to terms with setting clear, gentle boundaries with their children. My frustration at witnessing this problem is intensified by the fact that I have seen again and again the incredible transformation children can make when they have consistent, firm, nurturing limits.

Just as the lack of appropriate boundaries can turn a loving child into a tyrant, setting effective limits can perform seeming magic on a little monster: Setting limits can calm the child—*without* medication—enhancing self-esteem, independence, reciprocity, the ability to learn, and overall functioning.

Once a parent can set effective limits, the child can make far-reaching changes, almost instantly. For example, Jason, age five, was demanding, bossy, would cling to his mother, Jeanie, pulling at her and even kicking her if she didn't instantly do what he wanted. Jeanie was a competent a teacher, who was highly skilled in the classroom, yet she was unable to carry on any conversation with another adult without Jason constantly interrupting.

If Jeanie told Jason he couldn't have crackers before dinner, he would immediately try to climb on the counter and get them himself. His behavior was hyperactive and Jeanie reported that he seldom ate even one serving of food. Instead, he jumped up and down during meals and eventually left the table altogether, day after day.

With little imagination you can probably envision this same scene with a teenager in the starring role. The teen is demanding, argumentative, or sullen, and refuses to eat healthy food or even sit with the family at mealtime.

In Jason's case, he was very small, and Jeanie was worried he wasn't getting enough nutrition. Jason was also in the habit of whispering to his mother during meals and refusing to talk to his father, Dan. Much of his conversation was disjointed, focused on fantasy. In an effort to talk with him, his parents tried to engage in such conversation, but he would change subjects or give nonsense answers and they always gave up, in confusion and helpless frustration.

During my first session with the family, I spent three hours working with Jeanie, helping her set effective limits. During the process, Jason's behavior progressed from being increasingly angry and demanding, to a quiet period where he sat under a table and listened to everything I said, to a full-blown tantrum, to accepting the limits and becoming extremely calm.

That evening, I had dinner with the whole family. Jason helped set the table when his mother asked him, ate three servings of food, talked to his father as openly as with his mother. He did not whisper or divert into fantasy or disjointed thinking. He was respectful, open and warm.

At various points during the meal, each of his parents looked at me wide-eyed, with their mouths hanging open. They were stunned by the sudden, pervasive change in his behavior. The limit setting hadn't just affected how well he did what he was asked to do; it had affected how he ate, whether he whispered, how he carried on conversation. Such quantum leaps in behavioral changes are common once a child has clear boundaries.

At the end of the meal, Jason spontaneously asked *permission* to leave the table so he could draw a picture. His mother asked if he would like to draw one for his cousin, Sarah, whose birthday was that week. He said "No, I want to draw it for Sharon."

I have often thought that a child wouldn't like me, or would be initially angry at me, because when I work with families at home, I'm standing right in front of the child *or teenager,* telling parents how to set limits and carry out consequences. But how Jason reacted is how most children react. They want the limits that feel *safe*. They recognize it when someone comes along and helps them get clear boundaries. In fact, in many cases, like Jason, even the most hyper children will often stop tearing around, walk over, and listen while I explain to their parents about why setting limits is so important and how to do it. —For teens, the reduction in anger is sometimes not quite so rapid.

Parents often tell me that they experience a rare kind of peacefulness in both young children and teens once they have succeeded in setting limits and holding limits firm until the child accepts them fully. After seeing such dramatic, wide-ranging changes happen — often suddenly — more than one parent has said, "It's like a personality transplant."

Of course, the goal would *never* be to change a child's basic personality. Rather, I think the limit setting skills actually get rid of self-defeating,

defensive behaviors, so each child's personality *can* come out with a fuller, positive spontaneity. The kind of calm the parent sees doesn't reflect passivity in the child. It's an inner calm that allows the child or teen to feel safe and therefore to express genuine qualities of openness and spontaneity, as Jason did in wanting to draw a picture for me.

Why is it so hard for parents to set effective boundaries when we could create such positive change for our children by doing so? Is it because we love our children so much we become too authoritarian as a way to protect them? Or, too permissive because we want them to feel personal freedom? Or, confused, because we are afraid of hurting them?

(How We Use Power)

These questions present another challenge we face in creating an environment where children can flourish. It is *how we use power as a parent.* I believe that most of us have a lot of "authority issues" we have dragged along from our own childhood, and so in the face of such overwhelming love and responsibility, it's incredibly complicated to sort out how to use our authority wisely.

As babies, our first significant relationships involved *one of the biggest discrepancies in power* many of us will ever experience. We were entirely dependent on our parent or parents for emotional and physical survival.

Over time, we may have rebelled against parental domination, and/or felt abandoned by parents who were not there to give us guidance. As adults, many of us still see those who parented us through a lens that gives them mythic proportions of power over our lives. Too many of us never get over it.

As a result, some parents may not like the idea of having "authority" over their children; others honor it as a grave responsibility; some like the sense of power it gives them; many feel overwhelmed by it. Some want to do just as their own parents did. Others vow to avoid making the same mistakes their parents did.

Using authority is not only linked to how we set limits. I believe that it equally impacts how we ask questions, give feedback, and express our own ideas and feelings. Our own attitudes about authority permeates every part of the relationship we have with *each* child we parent, leaving few untouched spaces.

Many of us are highly invested in our own ways of doing things, so if we don't understand the impact of how we use authority, we can be very blocked from making *any* shifts. We often have extreme fear of damaging our children if we change. Our fear and our inertia may do the greater damage.

My goal in this first tape is to focus on parental authority as the foundation for all our parenting habits, and most immediately, for how we create clear boundaries.

By the time you finish this tape, you will have an opportunity to evaluate how you use power with your children. You will hear essential guidelines for developing ever-greater competence in using your own parent-power wisely.

One of the most effective ways to become more competent at anything, is to first look at what we are currently doing that isn't working well. If my golf ball is slicing to the left, how do I correct it?

Looking at what we are doing to contribute to any problem is complex. If we had full understanding of the issue, we wouldn't have the problem in the first place. So figuring out how to make just the right alterations our golf swing can be illusive. What we have to change is often subtle and very different from what we might expect.

If I want to help my child have fewer unpleasant moods, I need to understand what I'm doing now to contribute to those moods. If my child is upset and I keep offering her various choices, trying to help her decide what she wants, I may erroneously *think* that I'm giving her the freedom of choice she needs to be happy. In reality, I may be causing her to become simultaneously more confused and demanding.

(The Authority Continuum)
I'm going to walk you through a step-by-step process of examining parental attitudes and behaviors along what I term the "authority continuum." I describe three basic types of authority available for parents: authoritarian, permissive, and democratic.

I'll start with the polar ends, authoritarian on one end and permissive on the other. I'll describe them consecutively so that you can see how they compare and contrast with each other. I'll focus some on positive aspects, but primarily on the damaging aspect of each.

Next, I'll examine two common patterns that swing like a pendulum between each end—between authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Both of them bring together what I see as the more damaging aspects of being too authoritarian or too permissive.

1. One pattern starts toward the authoritarian end, where parents have authoritarian attitudes, but make hollow threats and don't follow through with consequences. So the pendulum of behavior swings over to the permissive side. I call this behavior the "Permissive-Bully,"

2. The other starts toward the permissive end, when parents are permissive and try to coax children into doing what they want, until they reach their limit of frustration, and the behavior pendulum swings to the authoritarian side. I think this parent is acting like a "Coaxing-Authoritarian"

Last, I will discuss what I term the "democratic" method that brings together the positive parts of the authoritarian and the permissive approach. It is a unique form at the center of the continuum.

As you listen, if you like, you can ask yourself questions about your own parents and yourself as a parent. You may want to listen to the tape twice, concentrating once on yourself as a child and once on yourself as a parent.

Some questions to ask are:
"How did each person who parented me use authority?"
"How did I react to each method?"
"Were there any methods I swore I wouldn't use with my children?"
"Have I gone to the other extreme?"
"Do I do the same things I said I wouldn't do?"

And, currently,
"Which type of authority do I use most with each child?"
"Which do I use least?"
"How do each of my children react?"

If you have more than one child, you may gain a deeper understanding of ways that you use authority differently with each of them.

I'm concerned that, as you listen, some of you may start feeling some guilt if you begin to see things you wish you had done differently. Or, since parents often fight over how best to use authority, you might find yourself judging your partner or spouse. Therefore, as I launch into these

descriptions, I want to clearly state that I also believe that there are countless, loving parents using authority in ways that I think are, to varying degrees, harmful to children. But the mode of authority we use is *never the single element* that determines how secure and loved a child feels. Thankfully, we *can* have strong bonds of love that surpass the mistakes we make. I can assure you, I am thankful for that myself! Children also have their own spirit and destiny.

I hope you will listen for insight, and not be either defending or harshly judging your own parents or yourself. I hope you'll see the information as deepening your understanding, as helping to refine what you do, as challenging, rewarding, even exciting.

(The Authoritarian Approach)
I'll start with the authoritarian approach for two reasons. One, I think it is a good place to begin the discussion about the relationship between authority and power. Two, I believe that most parents, even permissive ones, still have more authoritarian attitudes and behaviors within them than they realize.

While many of us do not see ourselves as authoritarian, any time we reach the limit of our frustration when we can't "get" a child to "cooperate," we may resort to orders, such as, "*Alright! That's enough.* Go to the car *now*!" Or, "Turn *off* the TV and do your *homework*!" Any time we give an order, we are falling back on authoritarian language and behavior. When children refuse to "cooperate," it is often very hard for parents—who are at the end of their rope—to set limits *without* becoming authoritarian and giving orders.

So, as you listen to a discussion of the more classic "authoritarian" attitudes and behaviors, I hope you will look carefully to see how they might apply to you, even if you don't identify with them.

A strictly authoritarian parent's attitude toward the child is "I want you to mind me, to do what I say because I said so! I'm the parent and I know best. You are the child so it's your job to obey me. When you're out on your own, *then* you can do what you want." Here, the parent is *the boss.* I know—I can hear some of you saying already, "—*Sigh*— Sounds pretty good to me. Could I do it that way just for a little while?" —*Pause*— Essentially, giving orders is the primary format or means the parent uses to ask the child to do anything. The *goal* is obedience.

Thus, in an authoritarian system, there is an inherent belief that if I am the one in authority, I have both the right and the ability to directly

control how you behave, perhaps even what you believe. Whatever tone is used, the words "Billy, go get my paper," mean stop whatever else you are doing and do what I tell you—now. A parent may even phrase it as a question, asking, "Billy would you get my paper, please?" But Billy learns quickly that he does not have the option of saying no, or offering to get the paper as soon as he finishes his Nintendo game.

I describe this approach as "direct-line" authority. An authoritarian parent expects to control the child as he would control a car by turning the wheel, expecting immediate response. *—(Snap fingers)*—Snap to. Obey. In military language, "March. Left, right, left, right. Halt." My child must follow my commands exactly—as a private obeys a sergeant.

I believe that an authoritarian parent *can* be consistent and fair. In the best of cases, a child can trust what the expectations are and know the consequences for not meeting them. This can provide profound security. Such parents often earn their children's respect. It is no accident that many young adults have turned their lives around with the self-discipline they learn in the military.

In this vein, we may tend to think of being authoritarian as having very consistent, even rigid rules. While this may be the case, being authoritarian does not require consistency—because at it's core, being authoritarian means that I have control and you may not even speak without my permission.

We can be authoritarian and expect others to respond as we wish to our every whim, or our widely erratic moods. Countless children have grown up in households where they tiptoe in the front door, "testing the wind" to determine the mood of a dominating parent—who expects different kinds of behaviors depending on her own mood. Whether consistent or erratic, the only absolute expectation is obedience.

What happens if the child doesn't obey? The "fair authoritarian" will often let the child know ahead of time what the consequence for disobedience will be. The child has no chance of avoiding it. It will be firmly and consistently applied, severe enough that it makes an impact, but still appropriate to the situation. The attitude will be neutral, rather than angry. The parent may say, "You knew the consequences, son, and you made your choice. Now you pay the piper." He may even say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you," and mean it.

However, predicting consequences ahead of time, or even being fair about how they are implemented is never absolutely required in an

authoritarian system. Even the "fair authoritarian" has the right to tell his teenager what to do "with no questions asked" and no advance warning.

I want to make one qualifying statement here. Almost all parents will sometimes act in a directive, authoritarian way, especially if a child is in danger. I'm not going to "ask" my two-year-old daughter to move quickly if I see her step into the street in the path of an oncoming car. I will be likely to scream, "Get out of the street!" hoping to scare her into moving quickly. When I speak of being authoritarian, it is not in regard to how anyone might respond in an emergency, but rather, how we exert control in more ordinary interactions.

Within a family system, the person with the greatest authority essentially has the power of a demagogue. Whatever the authority decides, becomes "law " at the moment of any interaction. Most of us can get reactive and have our biases. Plus, if we have so much power over others, it is less likely that we will be receptive to feedback about our own behavior. Thus, although an authoritarian system can be respectful and give children security, it will easily foster abuses any time the parent does not hold himself to absolutely clear ethics.

Such arbitrary use of power gives a person the right to punish as he or she sees fit. "Punishment" it the form of discipline most closely associated with an authoritarian parenting style.

Perhaps the most commonly acknowledged function of punishment is an attempt to force the child to comply with the parents will, usually for "her own good." However, a second function that is equally, if not more prevalent— is simply to make the child suffer for daring to defy the parent's authority.

While there may be hope that a prison term will cause someone to consider carefully before stealing again, the punishment is there whether the person reforms or not. The punishment stands as retribution for misdeeds, even when there is no expectation of reform. In society, this would include sending a person to the electric chair for murder.

With similar punitive intention, a parent might hit or even beat a child as punishment for disobedience. Here, the goal to make the child change is often secondary to the desire to punish the act of disobedience. While this may sound exceedingly harsh, I think many of us carry into adulthood the sometimes secret desire to see people "punished" when they do things we see as wrong or hurtful.

Punishment can also include public or private disapproval, as in the past when a thief was tethered to a post in the town center to endure public humiliation. Likewise, a parent at a child's baseball game may call out, " Hey, why didn't you catch that fly? It came right to you! What's the matter, you got a hole in your glove? You know how to play better than that!" Whether the criticism is blatant, as here, or more subtle, the parent is choosing to humiliate his child publicly. Such comments are not just to get the young person to improve his baseball skills; they demonstrate a desire to publicly embarrass him for his failure to make that parent proud.

In it's more readily acknowledged function, punishment may be seen primarily as providing "correction" or "discipline," by implementing a consequence so unpleasant that it forces the child to do what she is *supposed* to do or quit doing what she is *not supposed* to do. Punishment is usually designed to be big enough to teach a lesson that isn't forgotten. The old practice of washing a child's mouth out with soap for swearing would be a classic example.

Dad might ground a teenager for long periods of time, from a week to a month, for talking back or getting into minor trouble in school. A teen who hasn't cleaned her room for weeks might be shocked when Mom suddenly says, "I'm sick of you not cleaning your room. You can just stay home tonight and do it, —and *tonight* is when she was suppose to go see her favorite rock star in a big concert. If a three-year-old rides his bike further down the sidewalk than he's suppose to, dad might take away his tricycle for a whole week. While the goal might be to prevent a re-occurrence and keep him safe, at that age, losing the bike for a week has the emotional impact of permanent loss. Whenever a consequence is significantly bigger than the infraction, it will become punishment.

When meting out punishment, the parent has total control, not only of the severity, but also of the duration of the consequence. If a youth is confined for two weeks, nothing he does will alter the extent of the consequence—even if he is contrite and sees the error of his ways. On the other had, if his attitude remains poor, his mom might add a day or a week to the confinement, at her whim.

Also, any consequence given in anger is punitive. When I say to my daughter, "What are you doing, hitting your sister?!" You know better than that! Go to your room!," I am not only giving a consequence without warning, but blending it with my anger. (As an aside, I want to be clear that I think parents can express honest anger, which we will discuss in

tape 4, but not when setting limits, which we'll also discuss more in tape 2.)

Harsh criticism often accompanies authoritarian consequences. "You knew better." "You deserve this." "It's your own fault." Sadly, we can slip into the habit of being more judgmental than complimentary. I think it is because the person who has the power to set "the rules" sees her or himself as having also the right to judge how well others follow them.

As you imagine some parents taking away the car privileges from their son on prom night, color them red with anger, and then throw in a lecture:

> **Mom**: "You knew you were suppose to mow the lawn.
>
> **Dad:** You can't expect to have privileges when you don't take responsibility.
>
> **Mom:** Don't blame us just because you don't plan ahead and do your work!"

Even if those parents feel bad about taking away their son's car and are partly defending *themselves,* all their son will experience is that they are harsh, they see him as unworthy, and don't care about how devastating it is to him to lose his wheels without warning right before the prom. This consequence also becomes a form of public humiliation, as he will have to figure out how to explain having no transportation and involve his friends and date in solving the problem.

The intention in the punishment and disapproval may be to get the child to improve her behavior in some way, perhaps become less defiant, or more responsible about chores, get better grades, be more successful in school—or stop fighting with her little sister. In some cases, parents are trying to protect the children. They even say they are "hard on" them to toughen them so they can survive in a cruel world. Whatever the reasons, the means is still to make the consequence for disobedience painful, like the army sergeant who demands so many pushups that the private will never want to march out of step again.

If, as parents, we ever give orders, or lecture—or give consequences in anger, perhaps without warning, or make the consequences bigger than needed, we demonstrate aspects of ourselves that are authoritarian and will create the experience of punishment for our children.

Of course, as parents almost all of us probably do these things. I was talking on the phone with my daughter Ami yesterday, who usually does a great job of setting effective limits. Sam, one of her four-year-old twins, kept doing something irritating and she said, "Don't do that!" He said, "*Whyyyy,* mom?" And she said, because I'm the parent and I said so." Then she said to me, "I'm sorry, I do my best, but sometimes you just gotta do what you gotta do."

It's true, and judging ourselves does no good. At the same time, I think it demonstrates the degree to which most of us still hold, deep within, a concept of power that is essentially dominating in nature: A demand for obedience and punishment for failure to obey are the goal and the means. In order to comply, my child will have to be willing to suspend his own *will* and surrender to mine.

We can ask ourselves, "How do *I* react when someone else tries to control *my* will?" I think the answer for most of us, child or adult, is that we don't like it. We find ways to resist having someone else have that kind of control over us.

While I absolutely believe in setting firm boundaries with children, when we do so in order to gain control —the"I'm driving this car" kind of control—I believe we will *always* create either power struggle or oppressive dominance. I don't consider either to be healthy.

While on the surface some children may function well for many years with an authoritarian parent, there are common patterns I see develop as the child grows older which result in some serious problems.

Whether we are looking at their strengths or weaknesses, I think we often see our children through lenses distorted by the interplay of our love, fear, guilt, and hope. So, as you listen to the different patterns children can develop in response to authoritarian parenting, I think it is helpful to listen as if you were an observant outsider. Without your own intimate experience and understanding of your child—as an outsider—what would you say if you observed your child's patterns of attitude and behavior?

(When a Child Feels Punished)
I want to first talk about the impact on a child who feels punished. He is likely to see the parent as wanting to hurt him, even when that parent is seeing herself as trying to discipline the child to help him be more responsible. *To the degree that the punishment is given out in anger, it can further intensify any child's sense that the parent wants to do him*

harm. The child will often feel rejected, isolated, perhaps even think, "If I don't do what she wants, mommy won't like me." The child can begin to see love as conditional.

Starting at an early age, in an effort to explain to themselves why a parent would want to hurt them, many children begin to believe that they must be bad in order to deserve such punishment. In response, some children will fight being "bad" and try extra hard to be "good," suppressing their own will. Others give in to being "bad" and develop a self-image that calls them to act out more and more.

Thus, authoritarian punishment can create wide divides between the "good child" and the "bad child," as will be clear soon as I discuss the various patterns. Each fights something; one fights the parent, the other fights the reputation of "being bad."

The good child will often identify with the authority and seek constant approval, shutting out any disagreement with what his parents do, or feelings of anger she might have. The good child often becomes co-dependent and may lose track of what she feels and thinks as an individual. Ironically, though she holds her own independence in check, the good child often fears being "found out" as a fraud. Somehow, inside, she knows that she is not as compliant as she looks, and therefore is not completely honest, does not have full integrity.

(Patterns)
One pattern is that the child always continues to obey the parent. William was completely obedient even throughout his teen years and into his adulthood, but he never learned how to stand up to his parents or his boss at work. In a sense, William didn't become "an individual" separate from his parents wishes. Someone like Jason might marry a woman who is dominating and even let his own children boss him around, like the person we used to call "milk toast" someone without his own backbone. Or, he might always give in to those he sees as the "authority" but *be dominating* with anyone he thinks has less authority than he does, perhaps his own wife or children, or someone he supervises.

A second pattern for the "good" child, is that he is compliant for many years, often till junior high, high school, or college, and then shifts at some point to a different "authority" than the parent. David was the model child until he was in junior high, and then his parents were shocked when he got caught with some other kids doing rather extreme forms of vandalism. They just couldn't believe it. But he had learned obedience as the ultimate rule, so he hadn't learned to think

independently. When he chose his friend Greg as his "authority," he followed that leader just as obediently as he had his parents, only this time, he was slashing tires and trashing restrooms at school.

While gender roles are somewhat less defined than in the past, the impact on teenage girls is often that they get involved in early sexual encounters. Denita was a good student and a "nice" girl. Her parents were in shock when she got pregnant and they found out she had a reputation for being promiscuous. But Denita didn't know how to say "No" to any boy who spoke to her with an air of authority.

A third pattern, which blends "good child-bad child" is that the youth obeys whenever the authority is around and then becomes a hellion when there is no authority present. The most charming child in the company of adults, may even be a bully when they are gone. The parents often are in denial when they get reports of behavior that seems so discrepant from how they "know" their own child. This pattern is the most consciously manipulative.

A fourth pattern is the rebellion of the youth who identifies most overtly as the "bad child." From the time she was tiny, Cathy reacted with defiance when her mother or her father gave her orders. She did not want to be controlled by anyone. Her behavior became more and more "out of control," and although she was extremely bright, she resisted anything she thought her parents wanted her to do, so she did poorly in school. And, of course, she did what they didn't want her to, and became involved with drugs and alcohol. It wasn't until she was in her late twenties, and got some good counseling that she started to put her life back together.

More extreme forms of punishment, such as in physical abuse, cause severe emotional problems, which I won't discuss here.

When we use authoritarian parenting methods, that is, giving orders, expecting immediate compliance without discussion, and punishing any disobedience, children usually respond — to varying degrees— with one of four primary patterns:

1. Continued obedience to authority throughout life.
2. Picking a new authority figure to obey, often someone with very different values than the parent.
3. Obeying when the authority is present and being a hellion the rest of the time.

4. Rebelling against any authority no matter what the consequences.

Many authoritarian parents really want their children to be responsible, good people and don't realize that, using these methods, their children will not learn to think well for themselves, whether they comply or rebel.

(Permissiveness)
"Permissiveness" is at the other end of the authority continuum, opposite the authoritarian parents. Permissive parents also have a hard time seeing how their children look to others.

One form of permissiveness can occur when a parent ignores a child because of some personal reason, such as a lack of caring, drug abuse, depression, or illness. In this case, the permissiveness comes out of neglect. While this is a serious problem, it is not the one I want to address here.

I want to talk about parents who have—with varying degrees of consciousness—*decided* that they want to be permissive. For them it is a positive goal, a gift they are giving their children. Remember the definition I used earlier for "authoritarian?" "Favoring the principle of subjection to authority as opposed to that of individual freedom." Well, I think the parents who pick permissiveness their "style prefer the second half of that definition; they want their children to be free, not under someone's thumb.

Unfortunately, I see so many parents who seek to avoid exerting control over their children to the extent that they don't create clear expectations and don't provide adequate consequences—either for poor performance of tasks, or disrespectful attitudes. I saw Lyle, a psychologist with a very good reputation, with his five-year-old daughter, Zoe, at a local gourmet coffee shop. He got coffee and a muffin for himself and hot chocolate and a cookie for Zoe. He started to sit down at a table and she fussed at him, pulling on his jacket, "Daddy, I *don't* want to stay here!! *Let's Go!!*

Lyle sat down and tried to persuade her. "Honey, how about if we sit here just long enough to eat and have our drinks, *then* we'll go. *"No!! I don't like it here!!"* He tried harder, a little less saccharin, a little more urgent. *Honey,* it will be harder to take our drinks and food in the car, it might be *messy.* Remember how you *spilled* last time?" *"I don't care!"* Zoe raised her voice and her hand, as if to hit her father. He flushed in what I assumed to be acute embarrassment, grabbed her hand, stood up, and said, quietly terse, "Ok, Zoe, lets go." He managed to carry their food and

drinks out the door while she continued to scowl at him, I assumed as punishment for his resistance to doing what she wanted more quickly.

Millions of parents try to get their children's cooperation by simply asking for it, trying to get their children to *volunteer* to be cooperative. When they don't get it, they often interpret demands, whining and tantrums as a legitimate expression of feelings and needs, so they try to support and console the children. Or just give in, as Lyle did.

While I absolutely believe we can build relationships with our children that are based on cooperation, if we stop expecting respect and don't follow through with consequences when our children refuse to do their part in the family, we are shifting to a permissive style.

Permissive parents often abdicate setting limits at all, regardless of how rude their children are. Recently, I saw a small child, Adam, speak sharply to his grandmother, who was sitting on the couch next to his mom. Scowling, he said, "Move, grandma. I want to sit by mommy." When grandma didn't move, Adam pulled at her until she got up and left. Adam's mom watched the incident without saying a word or providing any consequence for the behavior.

The impact is huge when we don't set clear limits regardless of how a child behaves. Zoe and Adam both learned that they could make demands and *the adults* would *obey*. In both cases, their attitudes conveyed punitive disapproval when the grownups didn't do what they wanted — immediately. They both also resorted to physical force — Zoe started to hit her father and Adam pulled at his grandmother.

Ironically, when these parents acted permissively, they gave over *their* authority to the kids. They complied with their children's demands.

From what I've said so far, it might appear that permissive parents don't provide any consequences for their children. While they don't provide *restrictive* consequences for non-compliant behavior, they do often offer *positive* consequences, sometimes called "positive reinforcement."

When providing positive reinforcement, the parent offers a reward to the child for doing a particular job or activity. It might be picking up toys, doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, doing homework. The "reward" might be anything from a ten-year-old going out for ice cream to a teenager getting to use the car. In other words, instead of focusing on punishing the children if they don't do what they are asked, the focus is the

opposite—on rewarding them if they *do* what they are asked. Many parents see it as a much more constructive approach.

And I would certainly rather see a child get to watch a special TV show as a consequence for cleaning her room than to get a spanking for not cleaning it. I have no doubt about that! Unfortunately, while *Positive Reinforcement* appears very effective in theory, the reality doesn't match.

A problem caused by the use of *Positive Reinforcement* was discovered after some experimental classroom studies in the 1960s, during a period dubbed by some therapists and school counselors as the M&M Culture. Although initial studies were done with students with learning disabilities, these experiments expanded to many classrooms. Programs were set up where students got an immediate reward, commonly, you guessed it, a few M&M's, every time they did a task correctly, such as a math problem, or reading a certain passage.

At-risk students did learn to read better, but stopped being interested when the reward was removed. Of course they *had* learned a skill they could continue to use. Nonetheless, the impact was devastating for many students. Even students who had always loved reading or art often stopped being motivated to do it unless they got the reward. Positive reinforcement actually had the power to *kill* the students *own* initiative. "What do I get if I do it?" is the pat phrase that represents this problem. The child or teen waits to see what he or she is going to get before performing routine activities and responsibilities.

Another aspect of positive reinforcement is that sometimes parents will barter directly. For example, a mom might say, "I'll take you to the dance if you mow the lawn. The dance may be tonight and she may be expecting the lawn to get mowed tomorrow. Permissive parents too often do their part first and then never get what they asked for.

I consider this to be a huge detriment to using positive reinforcement. Most of us want our children and grandchildren to learn how to contribute freely within their family and community, not just for what they can get that is self-serving.

I also see a second problem with positive reinforcement. Let's say dad offers to take his son, Yoshi, out for ice cream if he cleans his room. If Yoshi doesn't clean his room, there is no consequence other than the absence of ice cream. If he doesn't care about having ice cream, he might live with a messy room forever.

What does a permissive parent do then? Well, the most common response I witness is to try to get kids to do what they are asked by *coaxing* them. For example, Yoshi's dad might finally come in to "help" him, saying, "Let's just get this cleaned up so we can go get ice cream." Unfortunately, dad may end up doing most of the cleaning. And Yoshi may end up with that ice cream anyway.

Blending positive reinforcement with coaxing is extremely common. I recently stayed with an out-of-town friend, Miranda, whose daughter, Cally, and Cally's son, Jack, were temporarily living with her. Miranda had already told me that Cally didn't believe in setting limits with Jack because she believes it is an abuse of her power as a parent. I watched the following interaction between the two one morning when Jack didn't want to quit playing with his toys and leave for his kindergarten class.

Cally: "Jack, honey, are you ready to go to kindergarten now?"

Jack, *scowling:* "No, I want to play with my toys.

Cally, *smiling, leaning forward toward Jack, singsong:* "Remember, sweetie, they have lots of nice toys at school too.

Jack, *louder:* No! I want to play with my own toys!

Cally, *a little more urgent, but sweetly:* "Don't you want to play with your friends, honey?"

Jack, *sullen:* "I don't care. I don't want to go."

Cally, *even more urgently, eyes open wider and raising her forehead:* "Honey, the teacher told me she'd really like to have all the kids at school by 8:30, and I know she'd love to have you there by then too."

Jack, *immovable:* I don't care! Leave me alone.

Cally, *touching his arm, cranking her head, trying to make close eye contact, frowning and smiling simultaneously:* "What if I leave your toys just where they are all day? On the way home we can stop and get a treat, and then we'll come right back and you can play with your toys again.

Jack, *frowning deeply:* "All right, if you promise I can pick whatever treat I want."

Cally*, smiling a big, saccharin smile*: "Of course, honey."

For me, the saddest part here is that so many parents would see this conversation as a successful "discussion" with a child, based on trying to meet both the parents needs and the child's needs. The reality I see is that Cally was coaxing her son as a means to get him to do exactly what she wanted him to do, which was to quit playing with his toys and leave

for school. This coaxing involved appealing to his "reason" about things like having toys and friends at school, and the teacher wanting him to come on time, combined with offers of rewards.

In refusing to go, Jack had the bulk of the negotiating power and he knew it. He could hold out till his mother promised him that she would live all day with the toys strewn on the living room floor and buy Jack the treat of his choice on the way home. Although I wasn't there that night, I can be quite certain that if Cally moved so much as a single toy out of her own way during the day, Jack would know it and would admonish his mother for it. He would likely accuse, "Mommy, you said you'd leave my toys right where they were! You broke your promise."

Mom might apologize, "I'm sorry, honey," —maybe make an excuse, "I just had to pick up a little. Grandma had a friend over and they wanted to sit in the living room. I tried to put your toys back right where they were." —Or offer an extra treat, "Your favorite TV show is on in a minute, do you want to have a snack while you watch it?"

Jack ultimately agreed to go to school. If Jack hadn't agreed to go to school, Cally might even have decided that it might be "nice" if he could stay home for a day.

By the time Jack is a teenager, his mother might still be trying to talk him out of bed in the morning to go to school, with far less chance of success. Permissive parents who try to coax teens into doing what they want by using appeals to the child's sense of "reason," "cooperation," "responsibility," or "caring" fail most of the time.

I believe that when parents try to use coaxing as a means to get "cooperation" they are manipulating. In the previous example, Cally is manipulating with the intent of getting Jack to "voluntarily" say "yes" to going to school. Behind her forced smile she is also handing her son the power to demand extra privilege in exchange for what might be seen as doing a routine daily activity.

I think the child knows he is *being manipulated* by his mom, which breaks down trust. At the same time, he knows that he is able to manipulate *her* into getting a bonus or three for initially refusing to do what she asks. While Cally sees this process as a way to avoid abusing her authority as a parent, I think she *is misusing* her own power. She is also teaching Jack to abuse power, by using a system of mutual manipulation which will become more complex over time.

Part of the complexity comes when the coaxing begins to involve another form of control that permissive parents use — "guilt tripping." Parents may tell teens, "I do a lot for you, I'd think you could at least help with the dishes once in a while!" Or, to a smaller child, say, "Daddy has worked hard all day, it would *really* help me *a lot* if you would pick up your toys."

Parents often sees such statements as just communicating *their* own feelings honestly. However, I think they are in denial because a *pure* expression of feelings is not designed to get someone else to behave in certain ways. A parent sharing feelings with the motive of getting the child to pick up her toys is a manipulative guilt trip.

Although permissive parents don't see themselves as using negative or punitive consequences, guilt trips often cause children to feel guilty, even when they don't comply. Also, many permissive parents become emotionally withholding when their children make choices they don't like. So guilt and emotional withholding become the negative consequences permissive parents inadvertently use.

My conclusion here is three-fold. One, most permissive parents allow the children to behave in ways that lack reciprocity and respect. Two, at the same time, they do still attempt to exert control sometimes; they just use positive reinforcement and/or verbal and emotional manipulation. Three, any negative consequences for non-compliance are subversive, not clear and above board.

What is the outcome for the child in the face of such permissiveness? When a parent is authoritarian, the child chooses from various types of response that can vary dramatically. I think permissiveness affects most children in a similar fashion, with at least eight outcomes that can occur, to varying degrees. Children with severely permissive parents are most likely to experience all of these "symptoms," which are often progressive.

One, without clear boundaries, children don't feel safe, they simply can't "get grounded." So they keep pushing to find out where the limits really are. If a child has any tendency to be hyperactive, it will be magnified by permissive parenting.

Imagine, for a moment, what it would be like to be in a room where the walls and floor and ceiling move every time you touch them or push on them. That is what is happening to so many of our children. They can't find the firmness of the walls and floor, so they are thrown off balance, unstable. When I ask children, even those who are quite "out of control,"

what it would be like to be in a room where they can move the walls and floor around all the time, they almost never say, "Cool. Fun," they say, "Weird, no way," or, "I wouldn't like that."

Two, without firm limits, children develop unpleasant attitudes. Once they are de-stabilized and pushing to find out where the boundaries are, children become scared, angry, rude, demanding. They try even *harder* to "control the environment" which can include their siblings, their parents, and people outside the home such as teachers and peers at school.

Three, they blame others instead of being accountable for their own behavior. When their parents ask them to do something they don't want to do, or they don't get what they want, they attack. I watched a three-year-old who had just kicked his mother, blame her when she sent him to his room. "You are a mean. You don't love me!!" In too many cases, even at an early age, they may also resort to hitting and kicking siblings and even parents. In essence, they learn habits of being abusive toward others.

Four, children in permissive environments under-perform. For many years, data has been available that clearly demonstrates how children fail to develop their competencies and achieve their full potential in permissive environments. They resist doing anything they don't want to do, which can include picking up toys, doing homework, chores, and, of course, going to bed at night. In a study reported by Rudolph Drieker, children in classrooms where the teachers were permissive under-performed as compared to classrooms where teachers used either authoritarian or democratic methods.

Five, they are not appreciative or reciprocal. Some children and teens will be able to be very giving "when they choose," or when they want something, but it is more often manipulative, less often genuine. In fact, many of them will be demanding even when they receive gifts, wanting more, or finding fault with what they have received. Daniel's dad stretched financially to get him the computer he wanted for his birthday, and Daniel was sulky because he didn't get some of the extra software he asked for. "I told you I wanted those software programs!." His father, who felt emotionally beaten up and depressed, was beyond anger.

Six, as a direct outcome of lacking appreciation and the ability to be reciprocal, children with permissive parents do *not* experience feeling nurtured. When any of us believes we got less than what we deserved, we feel cheated, not loved and valued. This can show up physically. Children who lack firm boundaries often have those dark circles and bags

under their eyes I mentioned earlier. They actually can look neglected even if they have many "advantages." No matter how much we give, demanding children will not feel the love.

Seven, the child or teen's self-esteem, motivation, and personal initiative become progressively damaged.

Eight, they can become increasingly prone to involvement in self-destructive activities, such as severe tantrums, and later, activities like drinking, taking drugs and sexual promiscuity. The youth with permissive parents is the most likely to get involved with mind-altering substances.

The sad irony is that while so many children are making life unpleasant for those around them, even dictating to their parents, they feel frightened, insecure, and unloved. I think far too many children today do not have adequate boundaries and fit the category I refer to as "frightened, powerful children." They have too much control, too many choices, too much guilt — they are overwhelmed and lack security.

Yet even when their children are disrespectful of others, many parents still react negatively to setting clear boundaries for fear that they will damage their child's individuality. So many parents, in their desire to avoid the authoritarian oppression they experienced themselves as children, swing the pendulum so far to the other side that their *children* become the authoritarians. The authoritarian system is still being played out. The roles have simply been reversed.

I want to mention two variations that swing back and forth between each side of the authority continuum. I have tagged them the *Permissive-Bully* and the *Coaxing-Authoritarian.*

Each is fairly easy to clarify. Parents who are Permissive-Bullies threaten punishment, but don't have the heart to follow through. So their children and teens live with authoritarian threats blended with a permissive reality.

The Coaxing-Authoritarian attempts to use positive reinforcement and coaxing conversations to get children and teens to "cooperate" When it doesn't "work," — that is, the child won't do what the parent wants, the parent resorts to authoritarian orders and create consequences out of anger. For example, let's examine what might have happened if Jack had kept refusing to go to school and Cally wasn't willing to be *totally* permissive and let him stay home. Here's how the scene might have looked.

Cally, *dropping her veneer of sweetness, brings her frustration and anger out in the open,* says: "Alright Jack. That is enough. You *know* you have to go to school. Now get up and come with me or I'll take you!

Jack, *protesting this sudden turn of events,* says" "Noooooo!"

Cally, *grabs his arm, drags him to the door, grabs his coat, picks him up and carries him to the car*, complaining: "I don't know why you can't just come when it's time for school! *Stop* screaming."

Jack, *who trantrumed, screamed, and cried all the way to the car, and is still tantruming on the way to school, may still try to negotiate a little, asking, in exchange— now— for stopping his tantrum:* "Can I get a treat on the way home?"

Variations on this scene—with children of all ages—are incredibly common. Monica and Shane used to say to their three teenagers, "Why don't we clean up the house now? We'll all feel better if everything is in order." Well, they might have felt better, but the kids didn't care and they never got the cooperation they were seeking. So periodically one or the other would blow up. "I am sick of being not getting any cooperation around here!! Get in here and help. NOW! No one leaves this house till it is clean!"

Ultimately, the parents try to create cooperation without setting clear boundaries, but they still know exactly what they want the child to do. So many parents—who are trying not be authoritarian— don't realize the degree to which they are still making efforts to control their children's choices in that old "I'm driving this car" way.

When the frustration of these parents reaches a limit, their intentions come out in the open and they shift back to authoritarian techniques and angry punitive attitudes. As the cycle completes itself, then they feel guilty about getting angry and shift back into being permissive. In this case, the parents cycle back and forth starting with permissiveness and then swinging over to authoritarianism.

Many parents, on a daily basis, go back and forth between permissive and authoritarian practices. I believe the children get some of the benefits of the authoritarian and the permissive methods. For example, they may be less afraid of their parents than they would be if the parent

were consistently punitive. They may be able to talk with their parents better, and have some discipline along with some freedom.

However, they also get some of the worst of the impact of both the authoritarian and permissive approaches. They feel punished when their parents set limits out of anger; they get away with too much disrespect and sloppy job performance.

None of us were raised in "perfect environments," but most of us survived it. The human spirit is as strong as it is fragile, and children in any environment can still learn to be productive, creative, and loving. Also, children can find models and people to inspire them outside their own home. However, both our permissive and authoritarian habits take a high toll on our children and ourselves, a toll we can stop paying if we change how we use our authority.

(Democratic)
In a democracy, we have freedom as long as we don't infringe on the rights of others. Is five-year-old Jack infringing on someone else's rights when he doesn't want to go to school? No. What would the "natural consequence" be if he stops going to school? Unless he gets home tutoring, he might not learn to read or write. He would fall behind the other students. He might not develop peer relationship skills.

As a parent, I'm not willing to have my child have that kind of freedom, with those *natural* consequences. In our complex society, natural consequences are often too big, too lasting. In my mind, it is comparable to having no speed limits, where the only consequence for driving too fast is an accident.

In a democratic society, we don't just wait for speeding drivers to crash and kill. We create speed limits to try to prevent accidents, and we have what we deem to be "logical consequences" for people who get caught breaking the rules. As drivers, we decide to obey the speed limit or risk getting a ticket. In many cases, the money will be used to repair roads to keep them safe.

In a democracy, we also have consequences for many of our choices, even if the choice doesn't directly "hurt" someone else. If an adult doesn't go to work, she will have consequences. She will fall behind. If she has an hourly wage, she will get her pay docked. If she continues to skip work, she will be fired. In other words, she would have consequences because she stopped being reciprocal—stopped doing her work in exchange for getting her pay.

One of the problems I see when parents try to become more democratic is that they get confused about what they can and can't expect from their children. They are confused about how much control the children should have over family decision making. For example, how much say should an eight-year-old have over where we take our vacation? How much control should a fifteen-year-old have over what time she comes home at night.

Sandra's parents, who were paying for Sandra's college education, suspected that she was flunking out. When they asked Sandra, she said that it was an invasion of her privacy to make her tell them her grades. They accepted it as her *right* to withhold that information. I know of situations where the parents continued to give their son or daughter money for school when the student had flunked out months earlier. Sandra continued to get "paid" when she was not performing. Here, like so many parents who try to be more democratic, Sandra's folks have slipped right into permissiveness.

When I work with parents in using their authority democratically, I show them how to create a system of expectations and consequences built on a foundation of respect and reciprocity. This means that, as a parent, I have certain expectations for what my child will contribute within the family or at school, but I do not try to force the contribution, or coax it out of my child. I am clear about what my expectations are, and what the consequences will be if they aren't met. Then, just like the driver who gets to decide whether to follow or violate the speed limit, my child gets to decide freely whether to meet the expectation or have the consequence.

Instead of using punishment or Positive Reinforcement, I think the most effective form of democratic limit setting is what is known as "Negative Reinforcement." Essentially, Negative Reinforcement is the flip side of Positive Reinforcement. Instead of offering a desirable consequence for doing chores or homework, an undesirable consequence is predicted if the child or teen doesn't do what is expected of him as part of the family. This "negative" consequence is essentially a temporary restriction of the child's privileges.

I don't particularly like the phrase Negative Reinforcement. I think it is confusing to people, so have renamed it "Temporary Restriction."

(Temporary Restriction)

When we use "Temporary Restriction," we provide consequences that limit a child's privileges if he doesn't meet expectations around homework or chores, or if he behaves rudely.

Here's how it works. Dad tells Yoshi that if he doesn't clean his room, then he will not give him permission to watch TV, talk on the phone, ride his bike, or play with his toys—whatever consequence seems appropriate to his age and free-time activities. Yoshi gets to chose:

1. Whether he loses the privilege at all, and
2. How long he loses it for.

If he cleans his room right away, he can have his privileges immediately when he's done. If he doesn't clean his room for an hour, or a day, then he will lose his free-time privileges for a longer period of time.

Thus, Yoshi has the power to lift the consequence whenever he decides to comply and take care of his responsibilities as part of the family. Some people say a child's room is his own and don't require him to clean it. In that case, these principles would apply to whatever other family tasks the child is assigned to do.

To use another example, If Sandra said it was her right not to tell her parents what grades she was getting at the community college, I would agree. I would also recommend that her parents not be willing to pay for her schooling unless she is willing to verify that she is doing her part by getting passing grades. Until she is willing to show them her grades, they will not continue to pay. Thus, the consequence of a Temporary Restriction can also have a financial component.

Likewise, if my child is not willing to ask me for what he needs or wants in a tone of respect, then I will not consider the request. For example, if a child or teen speaks to me rudely, I might say, If you speak to me rudely, I won't answer your request. If you speak to me respectfully, I'll consider it. It's that simple . . . **well, getting from wherever we are now, is a little harder [unclear what this refers to].** But I think the concept is simple.

As the parent, my prediction creates clear boundaries, "Speak rudely—you get no answer. Speak Respectfully—I'll consider your request. At the same time, if I use my authority in a way that is genuinely democratic, my child is free to make whichever choice he wishes without my trying to influence him.

To use a democratic boundary-setting process, I must not try to influence, threaten, or cajole my child into making the choice I want her to make. Nor must I *help* her when she repeats the question in a way that is still not respectful. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a parent coax a young child or even a teen—who repeats a request, perhaps in a less demanding way, but still sounding harsh, rude, angry or whiny—in an effort to help her use a respectful tone. I want to respect my child enough to trust that she *knows* how to ask in a respectful tone.

What about Cally and Jack's situation, where he's refusing to go to school. If Cally knows she is not willing to let Jack stay home from school, I think she'd be better off to let him know in advance. We are leaving for school in five minutes. If he says "No. I want to stay home and play with my toys," his mom can say, simply, "We're leaving in five minutes. If you aren't willing to come, I'll carry you to the car. If you are willing to come on your own, great. You can walk out yourself."

When we use temporary restriction, positive reinforcement is built into the boundary we create. If Jack comes on his own, he gets more freedom to walk to the car. But if he'd rather be carried, that's his choice. His mom can do it *neutrally, without being angry*. He may not walk the first time, but I'd lay odds that he would the second time if his mom carried out the consequence without any coaxing or punitive anger.

Once Sandra demonstrates she has passing grades, her parents will pay her college tuition. Once Yoshi cleans his room, he can have full privileges.

Temporary Restriction is (1) predicted in advance, and (2) imposed *temporarily*, just until the task is completed or the attitude is respectful. Thus, (3) the child has the power to determine when the consequence that restricts privilege is lifted. (4) The positive consequences follow naturally. They consist of getting privilege commensurate with the respect and reciprocity the child demonstrates.

I believe the positive consequences go deeper and wider than gaining immediate privileges. I believe when parents use Temporary Restriction as their method of limit setting, children and teens learn to anticipate the consequences of their actions, make informed choices, take responsibility, and become respectful and reciprocal. They are almost always appreciative of what they receive from others. They feel secure and are self-empowered and capable of fulfilling their creative potential.

Much of the change can happen quickly. In the story I told earlier about Jason—who wanted control of his mother's attention at all times—changes in his attitude and behavior happened in a matter of three hours. Though I'm sure those three hours felt very long to his mom, by dinnertime he was open and friendly without trying to control her. Even his appetite changed. Of course, they still had to work at maintaining the changes when I wasn't there to guide them. Most of us, as parents, don't make a complete shift so easily, and the child already has ingrained attitudes and habits that will take time to alter. Yet, whenever parents can balance 1) clear limits with 2) not trying to control, in any overt or covert way, which choice the child makes— the results I see are always dramatic.

The next audio-tape in the series picks up where this one leaves off, and is devoted entirely to the topic of exactly how to set effective limits, using step-by-step instructions and examples.

The core strength in being authoritarian is that there are often firm boundaries, and the core strength in permissiveness is that the child does have some freedom of choice. Parents who use authority in the third approach, the democratic method, take the best from each of the other two "models."

Using a more democratic method of limit setting actually accomplishes the goal most authoritarian parents have of wanting their children to be responsible, and the goal most permissive parents have in wanting their children to have choices and develop their individuality. While the democratic method maximizes the best of the other two approaches, I think it also eliminates the pitfalls. We do not have to choose between being dominating or abdicating our authority and handing the control over to our children. We do not have to fluctuate erratically between giving orders and trying to get cooperation through conversation. We don't have to fall into the trap of becoming manipulative or neglectful of our role in guiding our children to become competent and ethical. We can express a blend of firmness and love, regardless of what kind of choices our children make.

Best of all, as parents learn, I watch young children and teens modeling the same skills successfully with their siblings and peers. My grandson, Will, said to his three-year-old twin brother, Sam, who was pushing him while they were playing on the staircase, "If you keep pushing me, I won't play with you on the stairs. If you stop pushing me, I'll play with you." Sam stopped pushing.

(Conclusion)
In my book, *Taking the War Out of Our Words,* before I describe all the steps in the *Powerful, Non-Defensive Communication* process, I talk about how we have used the rules of war as the basis for all conversation. In that model or system of communicating with each other, power is constantly used in both oppressive and manipulative ways.

So for many people, the words "power" and "nurturing" are diametrically opposed. "Power" brings visions of cruelty and oppression and "nurturing" is seen as loving and giving. It reminds me of the man who said to me, "Power isn't important to me; I want to be nurturing and sensitive."

If we return to our analogy of the garden, it's like having to choose whether to feed the plants nutrients or provide them with the space and pruning they need—never seeing any way to do both. With our children, nurturing often gets tied to being permissive, and setting limits tied to being authoritarian.

In the "War Model," using authoritarian power is the thesis and being permissive is the antithesis. Both create conflict and pain, for parents and for children. Using authoritarian power, we *are* likely to treat others abusively. By being permissive, we *do* encourage others to take us for granted and abuse us. I believe swinging to either extreme in the authority continuum involves misuse of power.

The other parent-child relationship we have is with our own parents or parent figures. Most of us have tremendous "issues" with them. We know what it is to live with all the problems *they* have passed on to us, the ways they were—or still are—controlling, or too enmeshed, or too emotionally distant and not "there" for us. For many of us, our struggle to come to terms with our own parents may continue long after they have died.

I doubt any of us like to think of the baby we have held in our arms growing up to spend adulthood dealing with the damage and fallout from how we misused our authority with them. The question is, can it *really* be different? In one sense, no. Children see all our struggles, they live them. While we can want to change some of that, I also believe that part of being human is learning to love ourselves and others in our fallibility.

In another sense, yes, I believe with all my heart that we can change our use of authority so that it becomes a strength instead of a liability. And if we get past the blocks to actually doing it—we can absolutely transform

our parent-child relationships. If we are to be wise parents, I believe we must come to terms with how we understand and use the power we have.

On a wider scale, I think how we manage our personal authority reflects how we use power in all our relationships. We can be equally permissive, authoritarian, or erratic with people above or below us in the hierarchy at work, or with our own spouse, or our family of origin and our friends. Sometimes we alter which mode of authority we use depending on how we experience the *other* person's authority and power. Our own continued "authority issues" bind us as adults, inhibiting us from reaching full maturity and creativity. The widespread consequence is that we create havoc in our intimate relationships and in our communities.

I frequently hear people say that they assume we should all *know* how to cooperate by the time we grow up. So we seldom set effective boundaries with other adults, either. Learning to use authority differently with our children can also foster change in how we live together as adults.

When we use our authority to create firm boundaries in support of our expectations that our children learn to be competent, reciprocal, and respectful, we lay the foundation for the kind of deep, tender connection with them that we dream about. It is also a foundation for changing humanity.

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