

About Deborah Hage:

Drawing on 50 years of experience, both as a parent of 14 foster and adopted children and as a reactive attachment disorder therapist, working with emotionally and behaviorally impacted children (resulting from early childhood abuse and neglect), Deborah specializes in coaching parents help their children adjust and heal from past traumas, overcome their fears, and effectively integrate into their new families and environments. As a lecturer, author, therapist and coach, Deborah has helped thousands of families overcome the impacts of past neglect, abuse and other traumas; providing the support and tools they need to create for themselves a happier and more connected life.

The ideas and interventions presented here have not been developed solely by Deborah. She has worked with numerous other therapists and parents over the years, notably Nancy Thomas, whose continued partnership and collaboration she appreciates.

To learn more about Deborah, her practice and her family, please visit deborahhage.com

Teaching Self Control to Children Out of Control

by Deborah Hage, MSW

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“The mind under control is your best friend. The mind out of control is your worst enemy.”

Bhagavad Gita

I was once asked to testify at the trial of a foster mother being accused of abuse. Particularly, she was being accused of “forcing the child to sit in a still position for long periods of time.” The “long period of time” was 10 minutes, one minute for each year of age. The “still position” was cross-legged on the floor, chin level, straight back, with his hands folded in his lap. The same position people through the ages have used to still themselves in order to listen to their inner voice or, for some, the voice of their god. There was no “force” involved. The child was given an opportunity to practice getting control of his body and he chose to do it.

Teaching self control is not about mindless drill or subjecting children to dictatorial and autocratic demands. Rather, it is about addressing and healing the underlying cause of resistance, which is lack of trust. Parents often get frustrated and angry over the child’s resistance to cooperate with the simplest of requests. The message parents give themselves when their child is not cooperative is that their child is being senselessly defiant. In actuality the problem stems from a lack of trust. The child does not trust that the parent has his best interests at heart. The child equates the parents’ requests with requests and demands that other authority figures have made to them in the past and which caused them to suffer. The goal is to build a healthy relationship, using that relationship to enable a child to take control in appropriate ways of their own behaviors, not to enforce compliance. Teaching self control to children out of control is a pivotal step for them to enter society as free and self sustaining adults. To not teach a child self control is, in the long run, neglectful of the full range of parental responsibility.

A Societal Dilemma

It is odd to think that people in social service and judicial positions believe that teaching self control is bad for a child when educators know it is pivotal to learning and adult success. It is precisely when children are not in control of their body they are described as hyperactive, inattentive, violent, destructive, assaultive, obsessive, oppositional, defiant and uncooperative. It is precisely because a child is without internal control of his hands that he steals without thinking about the consequences. It is because a child is lacking impulse control of his mouth that he lies, while knowing the truth will be discovered. Most people are in their positions because they are in control of their bodies, mouths and hands. They learned at an early age from loving parents that following lead and being responsive to parental instruction worked out well for them. Yet, citing “best interest of the child” social services objects when children, who did not have that loving training from caring parents at an early age, are taught the same skill at a later age by a loving and caring adoptive or foster parent. The assumption by social services personnel is that if the child did not learn the skills of following lead when he was a toddler the discomfort and discipline required to teach the same skills to a child who is no longer a toddler is “coercive” or “abusive”.

Educators on the other hand know that, “To control her mind’s output, a child has to monitor and regulate the quality of three main forms of such output – behavioral output, social output and academic output. Children need to become planners of what they do rather than puppets dominated by their impulse.” (Mel Levine, MD, *A Mind At a Time*, pg 76, Simon & Schuster, 2002) Inability to exert positive self control is an indicator of greater issues operating in the child’s life. Chaotic thinking and out of control behavior is a distress signal, letting everyone know that all is not well within that child or between

him and his environment. Children with insight can be reasoned with and they can use their mental powers to think their way into a new way of behaving. Many children, however, lack insight, and it is far more effective to help them behave their way into a new way of thinking. For example, some alcoholics can reason themselves out of their negative behavior. Others do not change their behavior until their current situation becomes so untenable they must change or die.

The principal of “No pain – No gain” is applicable. Either the child can endure the discomfort of learning through loving and caring discipline to follow lead and then use those skills to create a good life for himself or.....Society can avoid having a child endure the discomfort of learning self discipline in the present, and then have that child as an adult suffer loss of freedom, i.e., behind bars. Society can suffer expense and victimization for the rest of the child’s (now adult’s) life due to the repercussions of his lack of personal control. Either the child can learn now or the child and society can pay later. There are no other choices. It is a fact of life that external controls to behavior must be used until an individual’s internal controls are appropriate enough to take over.

Just because a child doesn’t like it doesn’t mean it shouldn’t happen. Adults don’t ask a child’s permission to administer immunizations or attend school. It is the responsibility of adults to exercise their best judgment on what is in the child’s best interests. No child is going to ask, “Please, may I have surgery for a brain tumor?” or “Please, will you get me my immunizations?” Just as no child is going to say, “Please, will you teach me how to control my body?” Often, the child who needs to go to summer school is going to object, whine or plead to avoid what they believe to be onerous. If the child is in the custody of social services he might ask his worker to intervene on his behalf. However, the wise worker will not allow the child to avoid a task that is good for him just because he doesn’t like it. Teaching children there is a greater good to be gained from doing something unpleasant is part of teaching delayed gratification; a task adults take on when they agree to raise a child.

Any technique can become abusive. There was a time when a parental “pop on the rear” was not considered abusive. However, as some parents exhibited no ability to limit their discipline to a “pop” and progressed to beating a child the need for society to step in and control out of control parents became greater. Laws and rules regarding the use of corporal punishment prohibit a practice that could quickly turn abusive. The progression of the use of any discipline or parenting intervention must be closely monitored so that sitting, jumping jacks and chores do not ever move from beneficial to punitive and abusive. Progressing from having a child do 10 jumping jacks to doing 1000 is moving from body control training to punishment. 10 minutes of strong sitting does not become more effective at 1 hour of strong sitting, it becomes less. 30 minutes of chores a day is good discipline. 3 hours of chores a day is onerous. We do not, as a society, decide that having children help out around the house is abusive just because some parents misuse their parenting authority.

When Things Go Right

When children learn to follow lead naturally at a very young age it is because they have a loving and responsive mother. They cry and their mothers, in a state of internal composure, say “Yes” to them. “Yes, I will do for you what you need.” The mothers soothe them, quieting them with a bottle, touch, eye contact, rocking, soft voice and/or a reassuring smile. The agitated child relaxes from the calming interactions with his mother, who radiates calmness herself. As a toddler his mother can calm him with a touch on the shoulder, a smile across the room or a gentle word. He learns as he grows older that he can internalize the feelings he gets from his mother when she calms him and apply them to himself.

When his mother, modeling self control, tells him to stop doing something, he knows that by following her directions he obtains her approval. The more approval he has from his mother the more freedoms and privileges he has. The more he says “yes” to his mother the more apt she is to allow him to make decisions for himself. He easily says, “Yes, Mom”, if not aloud then by his actions. By the time a small boy heads off to kindergarten and out into the wide world he is adept at hearing his mother say, “Sit still, stand in line, be quiet, do what your teacher says.” He accepts that the adults now surrounding him can be trusted to keep him safe, give him appropriate boundaries, limits and expectations and guide him in nurturing ways. He

says “Yes” to his teacher as a means of saying “Yes” to his mother. He can listen to the caring directions of the adults around him and his own inner voice. He can relax and respond appropriately because he has learned that frustration tolerance and self control are the norms for society and it works out well for him. He knows the more self control he demonstrates, the more the adults around him will respond by giving him more freedoms, privileges and responsibilities trusting he will behave in a way that meets with their approval. The ultimate accomplishment comes when he has demonstrated such excellent acceptance of boundaries, limits and expectations that adults are willing to give him control of a \$20,000 vehicle with the horsepower to kill himself and others. Their trust in him is so solid they turn him loose on the roads knowing he will internally exhibit the self control to say “Yes” to stop signs, red lights, speed limits and yellow lines and say “No” to the urges of his peers to drive faster! His ability to demonstrate self control allows him an ever expanding array of freedoms.

When Things Go Wrong

The child who begins life without an initial relationship with a loving mother cries and mother does not appropriately soothe him. The mother models “No” to the child’s cries. “No, I am not going to comfort you, feed you, change you.” Instead of becoming calm from the nurturing touch of a loving mother, the infant escalates in fear and anger as the mother models indifference, hostility and/or violence. There is no modeling of appropriate interaction and control by a caring mother exhibiting self control, so there is no development of appropriate internal control. When the adult wants to drink alcohol excessively, the adult drinks, regardless of the consequences. When the adult wants illegal drugs, the adult takes the drugs regardless of the consequences. When the adult wants sex and anyone, even a child is “available” the out of control adult has sex regardless of the consequences. When the adult wants to leave the child unsupervised, hungry, dirty, the adult does so, regardless of the potential result. Self control, approval from others and regard for consequences are not values the adults surrounding the child exhibit so they are not internalized by the child. This is where the intervention of social services is appropriate. The child cannot learn something that is not taught. Soft voices, cuddles, gentle smiles have no effect on a toddler who, having never experienced them, does not associate any particular meaning to them. Positive and negative consequences are not observed or experienced by the child. Seeking adult or outside approval is not part of the realm of conscious behavior the child has experienced so children with these experiences will not be initially responsive to traditional parenting techniques that depend on pleasing the parent.

In fact hurtful actions, loud voices, destructiveness and impatience are often what are modeled to the child. These are internalized by the child as the norm rather than the exception. When the child needs or wants something the adult response is often negative, modeling for the child that negative responses are the norm. When the adult acts out violently the child internalizes aggression, a high level of activity, chaos and no thought for consequences. There is no consistent reward for cooperating with adults as sometimes they ignore it, sometimes they make fun of it and sometimes they accept it as their due. Rarely are there appropriate rewards for a job well done. There is therefore, no learning a foundational fact of human behavior, which is, the more you say “Yes,” the more “Yes” is said to you. The adult says “No” to the child’s needs and thereby exhibits negative control of the child. The child, in return, says “No” back, not only to the adults in his early life, but by extension and generalization, to all adults and their rules, ie. the rules of society throughout his life. The message is, “There is no value to having self control and no value to cooperating with others.” The critical learning that occurs is that saying “No” thwarts the “control” others have over you. Since being under the “control” of adults has resulted in physical and emotional pain, refusing that “control” becomes pathologically paramount to survival.

There are times when a child’s behavior appears to be out of control and randomly destructive, when in reality he is under complete and total self control in a twisted way to demonstrate to himself that he is competent to take care of himself and needs no one else to help him. A child who kills animals, attacks his parents and intentionally breaks precious family heirlooms is sending a loud and clear message to the adults in his environment that they are not competent to keep themselves, their pets or their possessions

safe. If they are not competent to keep these things safe they are also not capable of keeping him safe. The feeling of safety is the primary ingredient in the healing process.

The critical learning that is lost is that saying “Yes” results in more freedoms, privileges and responsibilities. The more control the child demands by saying “No” the less control he actually has as responsible adults do not learn to trust that his decisions will be in keeping safe due to good choices. The adults actually must then exert more and more control over him in order to keep him and society safe. The ultimate freedom and responsibility of those adolescents who learn to say “Yes” to adults, society and their rules, that of driving, must therefore, be withheld. Indeed, the less self control the adolescent exhibits and the more control adults must assume over his behavior the more likely he is to end up in jail. For, as a society, those who must be controlled externally due to their lack of self control, are gathered together in one spot. Society hires people to safeguard itself from their negative, out of control behaviors. We call them guards.

An individual, therefore, will ultimately have to learn to cooperate and follow the boundaries, limits and expectations, set by himself or someone else. They can learn to control themselves or they can endure being controlled by others (jail) for the rest of their lives. Again, there are no other choices.

Self Discipline - “Only ask a child to do something when you know what you will do if the child refuses.”

Learning what to do when a child does not respond positively to directions requires self discipline and planning on the part of the parent. Learning and reading about paradoxical parenting techniques and how to appropriately use consequences is pivotal. Children who have been abused and neglected have developed a world view that is different than their healthy parents. They tend to view the world as hostile, rejecting, abusive and uncaring. Out of that world view they have developed an internal rationalization that they are not safe and they must continually and always be on their guard to protect themselves. This means they must not trust adults to keep them safe, lead them or to teach them anything worthwhile. In their distorted view to trust an adult is to compromise one’s safety. Understanding this world view and gently guiding the child to see the adult’s world view as being safe and caring takes training, skill and specialized parenting techniques.

Most healthy parents were raised in environments that were firm, yet caring. Out of that environment they developed a world view that is consistent with the world view of most of their contemporaries. The assumption is that everyone shares the same world view. When a child with a different world view, shaped by abuse and neglect, enters the home the parents attempt to teach the child using the same techniques that worked with them when they were children. While those techniques form a foundation they are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Learning and practicing the techniques that a parent must acquire in order to reach the frightened, oppositional and defiant child takes a great deal of self discipline. Good intentions are insufficient.

Teaching a child self control as early as possible therefore becomes extremely worthwhile to all concerned. This first step is the most important one. For if adults don’t model self control and the positive results that accrue then there is no way for the child to internalize self control.

Modeling

Parental modeling is the major parenting technique but will not work if the child has not learned to follow lead or if the parental model is dysfunctional. In order for a child to learn self control it must be modeled by the adults around him. Often a child, who has come through an orphanage experience or an early life of abuse and/or neglect, has not experienced adult modeling of self control. Being in the company of an adult who exhibits self control could make him very uncomfortable. It may make him so uncomfortable that he will make every attempt to shake the adult’s composure. He may use foul language, lie, steal, act out in myriad ways as a means to force the adult to lose her temper, to force a loss of control. In the face of adult self control, the child will often escalate negative behaviors to further challenge the adult to lose composure and to prove to himself that being out of control is normal. If he is successful then he can sit

back and relax, sometimes even exhibit a slight knowing smile, assured that he continues to control his world. If the adult succumbs to the escalated pressure from the child to explode then it reinforces for the child the distorted belief that being out of control is still the norm, it just requires a higher degree of escalation in order for it to occur in some people. It will confirm for him that anger and raised voices are indeed the norm and he continues to fit in with that norm. When the adult resists becoming aroused and out of control then the child must question which behavior is “normal.” It is, therefore, absolutely essential that if a child is to be taught self control, the adults in his world must exhibit self control.

If an adult stoops to blaming the child by saying, “He makes me so mad” then it allows the child to also resort to the same abdication of responsibility and blaming of others for his own choice to behave in an angry or otherwise out of control manner. If an emotionally healthy adult proves she is incapable of controlling her words and actions then it is unreasonable to expect a child who has been traumatized with abuse and neglect to control his words and actions.

The bottom line is that getting angry at a child and escalating mood and tone of voice does not work! Instead the opposite occurs. As soon as the adult gets angry, becomes sarcastic or edgy the child reverts to previous memories of being hurt (PTSD response) and his fear systems are aroused. When fear systems are aroused he responds to the adult out of his primal brain, not his cognitive brain. So, the exact opposite of what is needed will occur with the child. Instead of becoming calm and cooperative the child becomes alarmed and resistant. The adult will often then escalate her anger believing the child is trying to deliberately thwart her wishes when, instead, the mother has set the child up to be unable to respond cooperatively by arousing his fear. This aroused fear forces the child to shut down in a predictable “fight, flight or freeze” reaction. A child will not exhibit more self control than the adults in his environment. “If the child is driving the parent crazy, who is behind the wheel?” is a question Nancy Thomas asks her clients.

Good modeling also requires that when an adult does lose control and say or do anything that is disrespectful, rude, intimidating, shaming or scary to the child an acknowledgement and apology are quick and sincere. This ability, in turn, teaches the child that ownership of wrong doing is part of a healthy relationship and is an indicator of strength, not weakness.

There are numerous ways for a child to learn self control in the loving and nurturing care of a healthy parent. Many of these ways can be elaborated on.

History of Reciprocity, Compliance Parenting and Therapeutic Techniques

Therapy is often necessary to work through the trust issues surrounding cooperation between the parent and child as the child’s resistance goes back to a habitual pattern of non-compliance and the brain pathways formed in previous experiences need professional intervention in order to be interrupted and redirected. The therapeutic process needs to incorporate opportunities to practice cooperation in ways that the child experiences as trust building. When the child sees that he can comply, and not only survives but feels a measure of joy and accomplishment, then he can begin to transfer that ability to trust adults both at school and at home. Developing therapeutic techniques that support the parent and child’s relationship by incorporating trust and cooperation exercises were initially incorporated into therapy by Foster Cline and Jay Haley.

Most children with behavioral problems are generally actively or passively resistant. They are usually noncompliant. Compliance means following the lead of adult expectations, limits and boundaries. In other words, doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. Often this is difficult to check, for children can appear to be cooperating when they are not, doing the right thing at the wrong time, or consciously or unconsciously resist doing it “really right.” Children can be non-compliant around chores, treatment of other children and may walk a thin line between respect and disrespect. Sitting, however, is easily observable and the child can be immediately and joyfully reinforced for doing it “right.”

Teaching children to have physical self control is essential for children who did not go through the initial bonding and weaning process during the first two years of life. Babies who have bonded with their mothers grow up to become children who are predisposed to following their mother’s lead and will

generalize the ability to follow lead to other authority figures, ie teachers, day care providers, and society's laws. This ability will be the foundational base for the child's ability to internalize and learn from his environment. The ability to follow lead, that is, give eye contact, follow simple directions easily and willingly, is a pre-requisite to the child learning cause and effect thinking, conscience formation, frustration tolerance, delayed gratification, reading, writing and arithmetic. When a child does not exhibit this ability for any reason, usually due to early trauma, abuse and/or neglect, then it must be taught. A child that will not make eye contact, come, go, sit, or stay for a parental figure will not be able to have a successful and productive experience in school or anywhere else. Equally important, without this ability to accept leadership, there is no way the child will be able to internalize the feeling of being loved, highly valued, esteemed, and of worth. Therefore, teaching children to be positively responsive to simple instructions is the foundation for their not only developing the ability to follow lead, but the willingness to do so. Teaching a child to sit still, to sit quietly, to come when called, to go where they are told, provides the therapist and the parents a venue with which to teach children to follow lead, as well as become responsive to loving touch and smiles that are accompanied with treats (sugar). This recreates the initial bonding cycle that the child missed. Once this is successfully accomplished then the child will be able to model his or her behavior after the nurturing adults and in doing so will learn to develop and maintain loving relationships in their own life.

Strong Sitting

Initially, a young child can be taught to sit through the use of "bubbles". The parent shows the child how sitting is done and then has the child "sit." As soon as the child is sitting correctly the parent blows bubbles and tells the child to jump up and pop them. The child jumps up and, typically, squeals with delight as the bubbles burst or are popped with his hands. The parent then tells him to sit again. As soon as he is strongly sitting then the bubbles are blown again. The point is that not all discipline needs to be taught through consequences or through punishment. Much can be accomplished through play.

An older child will generally skip the "bubble blowing" step and simply be told to sit and get up as quickly as he can. The goal is just to get the child to sit when told and to get up when told, getting a small treat when he does it. This is a very important learning exercise for the child. He learns that he can do what an adult tells him to do and he does not die. He remains safe even though he is doing what he has been told. The goal here is to make the initial task so easy, so simple that even the most oppositional child sees that it is ludicrous to reject such a minor request. Next the child is shown how to sit correctly. Bottom on the floor, legs crossed. As soon as he sits correctly in a strong, self controlled manner, he is directed to stand. He is rewarded with a positive verbal acknowledgement, a quick hug, small candy or smile. There is initially no time spent sitting. Often, teaching the strong sitting position coincides with something the child wants to do....have a snack, go out to play, etc. When the child asks for something, anything, it is an opportunity to ask the child to quickly sit and stand up. Once the child has sat down and stood up quickly then the parent can agree to the child's request. This is an excellent tool whenever a child refuses to follow through on a parental request....put away your books, time to brush your teeth, etc. The child says, "No" either verbally or behaviorally and the parent asks them to sit, giving them an opportunity to rethink their response. As soon as the child sits he has demonstrated he is ready to follow through and so the parent can ask the child again to "take his dishes to the counter".

If the child does not sit as requested then nothing overtly happens. Life goes on. However, as soon as a child asks for something, the parent makes the request to sit again. The parent can offer treats to other children by saying, "I have a candy for those who have done what I asked". The child can have the candy as soon as he has sat, gotten up and then down what was requested. This is so much easier and less frustrating than arguing, cajoling, threatening, explaining, ad nauseum. The child does what he is asked....great. He doesn't, he is asked to sit. As soon as he has sat, gotten up and done what was asked he gets a small treat. It sounds like puppy training....it sort of is!

When a dog goes out for a walk with his owner and continually tugs at the leash, the adult is constantly pulling the dog back and giving ineffectual commands. The dog owner does not trust the dog to be obedient and walk next to him so can not let the dog off the leash. Children are, in a way, comparable.

When a child is trusted by his parents to do what he is told then the parent will give the child more freedom. If the child does not cooperate then it is more difficult for the parent to allow the child more choices.

Clearly, if a child is not willing to either sit when told the child is in control of the environment, not the adult. Anytime a child, who is out of control and is in control of the environment, the child can not feel safe. They easily make the assumption that if a child can control the adult then other adults, such as the ones who hurt him, can also control the adult. No one is, therefore, powerful enough to protect him should his abuser return. The child knows he is unsafe in the face of a weak adult and will force the issue by escalating in order to bring some form of resolution. Either the adult will step up and establish loving leadership in safe ways or the child will step up until he forces being removed from the home.

It is important to emphasize that if a child does not give physical compliance with coming when called and doing what it asked, there is no way that adults are going to be able to teach more complex tasks as reading, writing and arithmetic.

The same process can be taught using jumping jacks or frog hops. It is not the sitting. It is the doing what one is told when one is told to do it that is the goal.

Boundary Setting

Many children do not understand the concept of boundaries. They wander around the house, get into cupboards, touch things they should not and use the freedom to interact inappropriately with other children in the home. This works fine if the child has self control and internalized boundaries about what is and is not appropriate to touch and use. Teaching boundary limits is for children who do not have them. It teaches the child to settle in one spot and not intrude on other people's things or spaces. When children have an understanding of appropriate boundaries then the home and all the people in it are safer, the comfort level of the home increases while the tension decreases.

Teaching boundaries requires "boundaries". One way to define for the child what his play area is the use of a beach towel, a small blanket, anything that clearly defines for the child when he is in his space and when he is out of his space. This skill is an important one in order for a child to transfer the ability to stay at a desk in school. The child is expected to develop the ability to play in his space for approximately 30 or 40 minutes. The child is given construction toys, one at a time, such as puzzles, Legos, books, doll and doll clothes, something the child can enjoy playing with and which can be reasonably expected to keep him entertained and occupied. Play time is over when the child leaves his play space. He can then be asked to read in a chair or color at the table, also clear boundaries for him to practice. If the child continually "tests" the boundary then he can be sent to his room to rest until he is stronger. At the first opportunity that the mother has the child is given an opportunity to return to the play space and practice occupying himself within it.

Boundary setting is an excellent alternative to a child being sent to his room for being intrusive and engaging in unsafe, unwelcome behaviors. Rather than seeing the boundary as a punishment, the child sees the boundary as an opportunity to be around the family in a good way.

Going to the Room - A child's pivotal skill if he/she is going to live at home

In order for an oppositional defiant, mood disordered child to remain living at home through adolescence it is essential he understand the concept that his parents are deserving of respect and they are going to take good care of themselves and provide a safe home environment regardless of what he chooses to do. He also must initially master one pivotal behavior. He must be able to have enough self control to be able to go to his room when given direction. The non-verbal message to the child is, "If you want to live here you must obey the house rules. If you cannot follow the rules then you are not safe, the house is not safe and I am not safe. In order for this family to remain safe then we must find a more structured and safe place for you to live until you develop the ability to cooperate." The non verbal messages to the rest of the family are, "We have rights to peace and quiet. No one person can be allowed to sabotage the family environment." and, "The parents in this home are strong enough to keep us all safe from someone who is

acting out." The longer it takes the parents to establish this level of cooperation, the harder it is for the child to learn. To wait until the child is an adolescent to begin this level of expectation is very risky for the child and the family. A child who can comply with a parent's request will generalize that skill to other skills, such as chores and homework, and to other settings, such as school and employment. The earlier it is learned the better.

Refusing to comply involves a typical scenario: A child is told to do something, perhaps a chore. He becomes defiant and his anger escalates. His mother tells him to go to his room to calm himself and she will come and get him when he is calm. He refuses. What happens next is critical to the continued health and safety of the family!

The child will be helped on the path to healing if the room is not full of treasures to hurl and endless entertainment possibilities to encourage isolation. Setting up the room so it is an optimum environment for creating thoughtfulness is essential. First, everything and anything that has sentimental or financial value needs to be removed. It is not helpful to have an angry child stomp off to his room, destroy everything in it and then feel guilty. Guilt is not a particularly useful emotion when emotional healing is just beginning. It drives children deeper into hopelessness rather than change. When things of value are destroyed it also has a tendency to arouse anger and resentment in the parents who have invested heavily in their child's possessions and hate to see what they have lovingly given destroyed. Secondly, games and activities that contribute to calmness and thoughtfulness are left in the room. Cards, puzzles, books, etc are left in. Telephone, computer, Game Boys, Nintendo, television, etc are removed

Due to the habitual nature of many oppositional and defiant behaviors, it would be better if the situation does not escalate when the child becomes uncooperative. Optimally the adults would de-escalate the situation while remaining firm on what he must do - that is go to his room. Many children with Bipolar Mood Disorder, ODD and AD thrive on a high level of arousal. They are accustomed to high levels of anger and fear in their environment. They are not only accustomed to it but welcome it. When they can create an angry and aroused situation then the chaos they have created in their environment is finally in sync with the chaos in their brain. Rather than having the child imitate the rhythms of a calm adult, they become successful at getting the adult to imitate their frantic, frenetic hyperarousal. Parents generally become angry because they believe their authority role and their ego are being attacked. A child's resistance is not about the parents and parents need to separate that issue out. Anger and resistance are about the child. If the child is to heal, parental anger must be avoided and the situation must not be allowed to escalate. Parental anger activates the "Fight, flight or freeze response" in the brain. Activating it increases, rather than decreases, the child's ability to respond appropriately. Pathology gets more severe when it feeds on parental anger, resentment and fear.

What, then, are the parental options? They are numerous, depending on the situation.

The first rule is for both parents to agree on parenting issues and approach. "A house divided cannot stand." If they do not agree and must get outside help or couple's counseling in order to agree that must be the first order of business.

Units of Concern

It is important to understand the concept of "Units of Concern". When a child is born the parents take on all of the units of concern for everything. As the child grows it is appropriate to gradually turn over those units of concern to the child until at age 18 the child has taken on the units of concern for everything. Teaching a child to brush his teeth is done as a preschooler. By the time the child begins going to the dentist the parent can begin to say, "Only brush those teeth you want to keep." Then....drop it. Telling a preschooler to put on a coat is appropriate if it is cold outside. As the child grows older the parent can say, "I think it is cold enough for me to wear a coat." Then nothing more. As the child is older yet the child can simply see the parent putting on a coat and make their own choice. Gradually letting loose of parental directives in as many areas as possible gives a child to practice self control and see how their actions affect themselves. This concept is crucially important in high school when parents are not

present to make minute by minute decisions for their children. Their children need to look for themselves at whether or not they get into the car driven by a classmate and have the experience and trust of their parents to know what is and what is not a good idea.

Whose problem is it?

The second rule is to make sure parents are not engaging in an issue that is inappropriate or unwinnable. Briefly, parents should only engage in issues they can win. They can only win when the issue affects them directly. Therefore, the issue must be very carefully chosen. Issues to avoid are those which have to do with school, friends, hygiene, food, etc. Those are all met with a "good luck message." Worthwhile issues to engage in have to do with chores, respect for parents and the home environment.....specifically who is the leader in the home and who has the leadership to tell a child where he can and cannot be!

Next, if the issue is something that directly affects the parents or the home environment then it may be necessary to carry a very small child who refuses to cooperate to his room, if it can be done easily without anyone getting hurt. If that is appropriate then the parent can say, "Would you like to go to your room with or without help?" Then the parent follows through depending on what the child chooses. Not to choose is to choose to have the parent carry him.

If the child is older, for example older than five years old, and refuses to comply with the command to go to his room, then the parent says, "Good luck with that" and goes on about what she was doing. The parent could get a book, read, and pour a cup of coffee, anything to demonstrate that the child is not in control of the parent and the parent is still in control of herself. The point is for the parent to calm herself and remind herself it is not her ego at stake, it is the child's. The parent must not escalate the situation by making threatening moves toward the child or physically forcing the child to comply.

Frequently a child will calm down and be ready to comply. However, just because he calms down does not negate the fact that when he was told to do something, he refused. The child who refuses to go to his room when told can be given numerous opportunities on a Saturday or in the evening to correct that behavior by the parents devoting "practice time" to it. That would mean that at a time convenient to the parent the child would be told to hop off to his room, close the door and wait until the parent opens their door and invites them to rejoin the family activity.

The point is a child must do what the parent requests when the parent requests it in order for an appropriate parent-child relationship to develop. For the child to do what the parent requests, but on his timing, negates the impact of the interaction and allows him to manipulate the adults. The parent can explain, "Honey, I know you are being good right now. However, that does not change the fact that when I told you to go to your room you didn't. So now, hop off to your room for a few minutes and I will come get you."

Ideally the parent can then announce to others in the house, "Everyone who has done what was asked can come with me for an ice cream cone...or other treat." This is to ensure that those children who do what is asked are rewarded and the whole family does not dissolve into chaos over the child that was not cooperative. If there are no other children then the parent can make arrangements to do something special for herself. If there is no other adult in the home then the parent can do it while the child is at school. "I had fun today. Went to see the movie..... I would love to have taken you as well but I couldn't trust you to be fun to be around."

If he is going to be allowed to demonstrate cooperation the parent can say, "I want you to go to your room quietly for a few minutes. Parental discretion is advised and must take into account how quickly the parent becomes calm. At any time during this period the parent can pop into the room and give the child a hug and kiss, telling him how nice it is to have him around when he is cooperative. To continue the example, when the parent wants to check if the child is ready, she opens the door and asks a question that requires the child to respond logically, not emotionally. For example, "What happened?" Do not ever ask "Why" questions as the child will get defensive and the parents will be disappointed in the answer. There is no appropriate way for a child to answer why he misbehaved. If the child verbalizes that he understands

and accepts what he did to cause his parent to send him his room the parent might request him to demonstrate cooperation in a fun way by requesting that he touch his nose to the door do a somersault, hop on his left foot 5 times or do 25 jumping jacks. (Scale down the number for a younger child.) When the child cooperates the parent needs to become appropriately pizazzy, with a hug.

Practice Sessions

Going-to-the-room practice needs to occur numerous times during the day in order to give it a routine quality, removing the defiance. A new pathway in the brain can then be laid down that will kick into automatic when required. A child can be helped to go to his room in a variety of ways.

When no one is aroused, just enjoying each others company, the parent can interrupt the activity and tell him he needs going-to-his-room practice. He needs to go to his room, close the door, and then wait for the parent to call him. When he is called he can come out.

Broken Record

The broken-record technique is calmly repeating the same phrase after every negative response of the child. "Carl, go to your room." "Carl, go to your room." "Carl, go to your room." Key is not being sucked in to his diversions such as, "It's not fair", "You don't love me", "Why, what did I do?", etc. No matter what he says, the parent calmly yet assertively says, "Carl, go to your room."

When he asks for something, for instance a toy, the parent can tell him she will give it to him as soon as he goes to his room and goes through the above scenario. Every time he makes a request for anything it is an opportunity to practice reciprocity. "Please take me to soccer, Mom." Response is, "I will be glad to take you to soccer practice as soon as you go quietly to your room." End with a hug.

Prediction

Another possibility is for the parent to use a paradoxical technique called prediction. The parent tells him she is about to tell him to go to his room, but before she tells him that she wants to give him an opportunity to have a tantrum and refuse. The parent predicts, for her son, the usual pattern of his negative behavior so he has an opportunity to change it if he chooses. The parent could say, "I know how hard it is for you to do something the first time you are asked and that you often prefer to scream and yell first. So let's get that out of the way before I tell you to go to your room." If the child says he can go to his room without screaming and making a scene then the parent can lovingly feign mild disappointment and tell him he can do it that way if he wants, but she really doesn't mind if he screams first. If the child tantrums as directed then he can be complimented on a very fine tantrum and asked if he needs to throw another one or if he is ready to go to his room yet. Either way, he is doing it the parent's way. He is either going to his room without a tantrum, which is what is desired, or, he is going with a tantrum, which is what he was instructed to do. Either way it is a win-win for both parent and child.

Making covert thoughts overt

Another possibility is to have him directly face his parent and say out loud what he is thinking inside. This is a form of "making the covert overt." Preferably the parent and child will hold hands, facing heart to heart. Either way, with or without touching, the parent tells him to say loudly in her face, "You're not my boss." "You can't make me go to my room." "I'm not going to my room." Etc. (This works because he is yelling on the parent's terms, not his. Before a behavior can be stopped, it has to be controlled.) This technique can only be used when the parent is truly not angry or resentful and no matter what the child says resentment and anger will not be aroused. The love light needs to stay in the parent's eyes. After he is done yelling the parent asks him if he is ready to hear the parent say, "Go to your room." If not, repeat. If he is ready, tell him to go. The child can be taught he has the option of saying, "I don't want to and I will do it anyway." It is best that he says "and" instead of, "But I will do it anyway" as "but" takes away the positive feeling.

If he immediately cooperates and goes to his room with a good attitude the first time he is told then he may leave his door open. If he is snarky and uncooperative and must be escorted to his room then the door is closed.

Whatever happens, the parent must not get into a physical tug of war over the door with the child trying to open it and the parent trying to hold it closed. This could allow the child to hold the parent hostage by creating a situation in which the parent feels compelled to hold onto the doorknob in order to gain cooperation. Rather than being held hostage, it is wiser to let the defiant child control the door and add time on to what must be spent in the room before the child can come out. The goal, after all, is self control on the part of the child, not control exerted externally by the parent. If he keeps opening the door when it is supposed to be closed then the quiet time in the room does not begin until the child voluntarily closes the door.

For some children, in extreme cases, it is important that an alarm be put on the door so the parent knows when the door is opened. It does not imbue a child with a sense of safety when he knows he can leave his room and wander about without his parents knowing. It also creates a high level of anxiety in all members of the family when they believe the child sent to his room is not there, but rather is entering other bedrooms and possibly stealing or destroying other's possessions. Rather than the family relaxing when the child goes to his room and recovering with peace and quiet, members become more tense in anticipation of what is going on outside of their supervision. An alarm on the door allows the family to relax its constant vigilance for a few moments. If he refuses to stay in his room and calm down continually comes out, activating the alarm, there are several options. One is to have him spend 20 minutes longer in his room for every time he sets off the alarm. Another is to send him to therapeutic motivational respite.

Once he is in his room, he needs to remain in his room with good quietness. How long that time is depends on the situation. A small child may only need to be in the room for 5 minutes to calm down. An adolescent who has just screamed at his mother interminably may need to stay in his room for an hour or more until mom and the teen are both calm. One way for mom to determine if she is calm enough and the child is calm enough to be reunited is for her to go to the child's room and request some form of cooperative task. If mom is not able to have love in her voice then she is not ready to interact with her child. If the child is not ready to demonstrate self control then he will not be able to do the task, thus demonstrating it is best for all concerned that he remain in his room longer. One examples of a cooperative task may be asking the child, "What happened?" The question is best not phrased as one requiring a "yes" or "no" answer as what is being looked for is the child's ability to think logically while responding appropriately to mom. "What happened?" is followed by "What were you feeling", "How did you handle that feeling?", "How did that work out for you?", "How do you think you might better handle it next time?" The mom is looking for words and tone of voice that demonstrates the child has shifted from the defensive, angry, defiant, blaming area of the brain to the logical, thoughtful area of the brain. Another example: When the parent is ready she can go to his room and ask him if he is ready to do 10 jumping jacks in order to demonstrate that he has his self control back. After he has done processing verbally or done the jumping jacks then he can come out and do the chore he refused to do which set in motion the whole going to his room scenario.

The longer it takes him to go to his room, the longer he needs to quietly stay there before he can do the cooperative tasks and come out. If he is in his room and remains angry, he may be so angry that he may choose to express it by inappropriately urinating in his closet, on his toys, in his dresser, etc. Loving parents need to use their best judgment in determining when a child is requesting or demanding to go to the bathroom whether the child is using this as an honest need to relieve himself or if he is using it to manipulate mom. If mom believes the child honestly has a need and the child agrees to immediately return to his room then he may be allowed out of his room to use the bathroom. The child who urinates inappropriately when angry may often not ask to use the bathroom. In order to avoid the child manipulating the time in the room by using the excuse of having to go to the bathroom and thus get out of his room while he is still angry and uncooperative mom may choose to give the child a chamber pot or "potty chair" as an option to the child repeatedly requesting to go to the bathroom. This gives the child an

opportunity to appropriately dispose of his wastes. If the child refuses to use whatever device is offered, instead urinating on the carpet or in the toybox, it is clear that the child is using urination as an extension of his anger, not as a physical need. Wherever he chooses to urinate outside of the toilet is his responsibility to clean.

Mom/Dad Dynamics

If the child typically does not respond positively to mother's directives but is more cooperative with father then when the father comes home at the end of the day he sends the child to the room. When he arrives home, he asks mom, "How are you doing? Did he do his best to wear you out? Did he try to drain you?" If he was helpful then father can spend some time with him to reward him for being cooperative with his mother. If Carl was not helpful then father says, "Hop off to your room. I am going to spend time with mom while she rests from your behavior. I will come and tell you when we are ready for you to come out." If he is in his room through a meal time then Mom or Dad can bring him the regular meal or a sandwich and something to drink, give him a hug, thank him for staying in his room, then leave.

The point is that it is not appropriate for dad to reward a child who is pushing mom away all day by giving him time with dad. Mom needs dad more than the child does at that point and feels pushed aside when the child is rewarded for his bad behavior by getting special time with dad. Mom needs time with dad! It also sends a clear message to the child that the marital relationship is very important and the child cannot manipulate and/or triangulate that relationship. The parents are a team and what hurts one hurts the other.

While enjoying the rest of the evening together it would be appropriate for mom to have him practice going to his room several times with dad there to reinforce the expectation.

Relying on dad to reinforce discipline is an age-old, effective technique when it is applied in such a way as to not undermine mom and the child does not interpret it as a demonstration of mom's weakness. What is important is the child learns to go to his room when his mother tells him to. The goal is not ego massaging a mom who needs to prove she is just as capable as a man. It is obvious mom is incredibly strong and just as capable or she would not be still raising such a difficult child! This is not about male-female politics. When dad backs mom up he is saying, "I love your mother and you are not going to be allowed to hurt the woman I love. I am standing by her and what she says goes." He is saying he will not allow their child to manipulate them against each other. It is an essential message that both the mom and the child need to hear!

Practice Sessions with Dad

One way for dad to effectively demonstrate the team concept is to expect the child to practice with dad what he failed to do with his mom. Dad may ask the child, for example, to go to his room for short periods of time numerous times over the weekend or in the evening, with the message to the child being, "You can either do it 10 times for me or once when you mother asks."

Other members of the "circle of support" are friends, relatives, caseworker and therapist. Each of these people, in their own way must support the mom's directive to the child to go to his room. Friends and relatives do not interact warmly with the child unless they ask mom if the child is going to his room when he is told and the answer is yes. If the answer is, "No" then they can say things like, "Well, honey, good luck on that. As soon as that changes your mom will let me know. Until then, I cannot spend special time with anyone who is trashing someone I love." The caseworker must use part of her visit to send the child to his room and then have mom send the child to his room while she observes. For every time the child has not gone to his room when told the first time by his mom the caseworker sends him to his room twice during her visit. The mom and the caseworker can just sit at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee and talk casually while taking turns sending the child to his room. The therapist must also reinforce this behavior as essential. During therapy the child could be directed to say to the therapist phrases expressing his anger over being sent to his room. For example, "Mom is not my boss." "She can't make me go to my room." "I'm not going to do it." "It makes me mad mom is always sending me to my room." Etc. The child must express in therapy the same feelings and words he expresses at home with the same intensity.

During therapy the defiant child can also practice cooperation for the therapist in front of the mom and for the mom in front of the therapist by demonstrating an appropriate response to various requests. "I want you to pick up the book and hand it to me." "I want you to go stand by the door and count to 10." "Please take off your shoes." "Please do 10 jumping jacks." This rewires the child's brain and gives him practice getting over his resistance. This allows mom to see that she is not the only one being vilified and disrespected by the child. It also shows the child that whatever behaviors he uses at home must be worked through again in therapy. It demonstrates clearly to the child that the parents and the therapist are working together to help him develop self control and cannot be manipulated or triangulated.. If the therapist wants to see the child behind closed doors and work on issues he and the child choose instead of the behaviors occurring at home, find another therapist!

Regardless of how parents and their circle of support teach a child to cooperate, it is critical that children be able to respond to their parents directions for two reasons: One, the child who refuses to follow the directions of the parents is not safe and knows it. A child cannot bond to someone he perceives to be too weak to keep him safe. Children internalize the voices and values of those people they consider to be more powerful than they are. They do not internalize the voices and values of those they perceive to be weaker than they are. Two, the child must be taught how to respond appropriately to the voice of someone else before he can follow his inner voice to control himself.

By sending a child to his room when he is using his disrespect and volatility to control the family environment the child learns his behavior must be reciprocal if he is to interact with other members of the family in a healthy, mutually satisfying way.

Teaching a child self control is one of the best gifts a parent can give!

By continually tolerating disrespectful, hurtful and obnoxious manner is to teach the other children in the home that when they are old they are going to have to put up with such behavior from their spouse and children as they are powerless to stop it. The other subliminal message to the healthy children is that they are not worthy of being treated respectfully. Neither of these messages is healthy to the other children in the home! Demonstrating to other children in the home the parents are strong enough to keep everyone safe is critically important to the mental, emotional and physical health of everyone in the family.

It is hard to teach these skills early but the long-term results are worth it. Failure to teach cooperation and respect at an early age because it is so difficult only causes problems in the future. Parents lose track of the bigger picture when they think discipline is about getting a child to go to his room. Being able to go to his room when told merely exemplifies the larger goals of the development of respect, reciprocity and self-control.

Each successively difficult skill generalizes to other skills, such as doing chores right the first time. It takes many months of patient, determined and consistent effort before a child internalizes the messages that (1) parents mean what they say, (2) they can be loving when they say it and, (3) regardless of what the child chooses to do the parents are going to take good care of themselves and others.

One way for parents to keep cool, calm and collected while the child learns is by remembering it is not up to the parent to "force" a child to change or to make a child do as they are told. Parents are only responsible for giving their children numerous opportunities to change and practice self control of their behavior. If a child refuses, it is not about the inadequacy of the parent or that the child is attacking the parent's ego, it is about the child. The child is saying, "I need to practice cooperating. Our relationship is not healthy yet and I do not yet trust you to take good care of me. I need more practice on this skill."

The attuned parent will make sure the child gets the practice opportunities he needs before he gets any older. Dr. Foster Cline was known to have commented that being able to go to the room when instructed is the defining line between a child maintaining placement in a family or having to be placed in a residential facility or, ultimately, jail.

Saying "Yes"

One of the smallest, yet most important, set of muscles to learn to control is the mouth. The mouth also

proves one of the most difficult to control. Without control of the mouth, however, it is difficult to be successful in any environment. An initial skill, therefore, is for a child to learn to look at the adult speaking and say, "Yes, Mom" (Dad, Mr. Smith, etc) each time he is addressed. Or, when a child is in another room, the child confirms that he has heard by calling "Coming, Mom". These are both ways for the child to practice taking his attention off of his inner voice, which tends to be chaotic and negative, and paying attention to the voice of the adult speaking to him. Saying, "Yes, Mom" puts the child's emotional state in a receptive mood. It is a respectful way for the adult to know she has been heard and the child has entered into a contract to be compliant.

Kindergarten teachers have long known that if they hand a child a paper and ask the child to take it home to his parents the chances of the parents getting it are much greater when the child looks at the teacher, they smile at one another and the child says, "Yes, Mrs. Johnson." A contract has been made between the two of them and the child is more likely to honor that contract if it is said out loud. The same principal applies at home. When the child compliantly says, "Coming, Mom" or "Yes, Mom" a small reward initially is appropriate. The goal is for the child to get pleasure from pleasing mom, just as a toddler would, so that small candies and hugs for rewards can ultimately be discarded. However, they are often useful in the beginning so the child learns to associate doing what is being asked of him with sweetness and good feelings.

Doing anything on the adult's terms often challenges a child who has been abused and/or neglected and whose sense of survival depends on not trusting the adult. In the past when he was under the control of an adult he was not safe so he will not readily follow lead. That is why such a seemingly small thing as saying, "Yes, Mom" is so difficult to accomplish yet is critically important if the child is to learn to develop higher skills of self control. If a parent cannot get a child to look at her and say, "Yes, Mom" there is little likelihood that the child will be able to do anything else dependably. Yet verbalizing this two word statement is only saying out loud what most toddlers learn to say internally to their mother when they make their first attempts at cooperation. The path to teaching self control in an older child is most successful when it mimics the path a toddler naturally takes.

Star Jumps

Teaching a child to do jumping jacks or "star jumps" when told is a way to teach the child that his body is not only under his control when it is still, but it is under his control when it is moving. When he tells his body to not do something it is obedient and when he tells it to do something it is still obedient. Jumping jacks must be done in a very crisp manner if they are to be effective in helping a child learn self control. The arms go over the head and the hands clap. The legs jump apart and then together. The count is done when the hands are over head in a clear voice. This is taught in a "pizzazzy" loving way, not like a military drill sergeant.

Star Jumps not only help with self control, but increase oxygen to the brain which enhances clearer thinking. They also contribute to the development of coordination. Additionally, the up and down movement activates the limbic area of the brain, where attachment occurs.

Most children can start with 2 or 3 jumping jacks and then work up to counting out loud to 20.

The parents' roles during the star jumps are to give the child soft looks of encouragement and to enfold them in a hug when done.

Chores

Advanced forms of self control training are found in chores. In accepting responsibility for completing increasingly more difficult and age appropriate chores the child matures in his ability to become reciprocal and competent. Doing chores well and getting a reward is when it begins to truly become worthwhile for the child. Self control has to begin with strong sitting and jumping jacks, as a child who cannot do either of these cannot be expected to make his bed or sweep a floor. If the child tries to get by with poor sitting or sloppy jumping jacks then it can be expected that he will try to get by with sweeping dirt under the rug or putting the knives and forks on the table incorrectly. If a child needs to be constantly watched to see

that an appropriate sitting posture is maintained then it can be expected that the child will have to be watched as he sets the table. Therefore, it is important that a child not be assigned chores until after he has developed the ability and willingness to take control of his actions by appropriate sitting. There is no point in setting a child up for failure as then both the parent and the child become frustrated and more dissatisfied with their relationship.

Use of Force

The use of “force” in teaching self control to a child who is out of control must be avoided at all costs. The use of force will negate any and all potentially positive learning. Forcing a child to do anything, even something that is good for him, does not teach self control, it teaches external control.... or the exact opposite of what is needed. If a child has learned to not trust adults to take good care of him then forcing a child to submit to that which he does not trust will not increase trust, it will increase distrust. Thus, any and all opportunities that a child is given to learn and develop self control must be seen and presented to the child as exactly that.... Opportunities. The concept of chores, strong sitting, saying “Yes, mom” as “opportunities for growth” are dealt with in other chapters. How to give children the “opportunity” to make good decisions for them is taught in the chapter on “Paradoxical Techniques.”

Summary

The question for society becomes, “At what point is a child going to learn self discipline and the willingness to cooperate with authority?” Is he going to magically pick it up by osmosis? Is he going to be medicated into stillness? Is he going to learn from repeated and progressively punitive consequences? Is he going to be assigned a classroom aide to sit next to him in school to serve as an external conscience and control because he has not developed internal control? Is he going to be placed in special education classes with other children who are not in control of their bodies so that they all prey on one another and education is sacrificed to maintain safety? Is he going to be put in residential treatment where the staff can restrain him when he is out of control? Is he going to go to prison where cooperation is imposed on the individual by guards with guns? Each of these is progressively punitive to the individual and progressively expensive to taxpayers. Yet, ultimately without the external imposition of cooperation on a person who exhibits no self control, the price to society is not in dollars but in victimization.

Not all children need to be taught self control at an older age. However, for those who do need the lessons that accompany it, there is never an age at which self control no longer is necessary, rather the need for it increases with age. Loving and nurturing parents who are in control of themselves can teach children self control. A child who is in control of himself is a blessing to himself, his family, his school, his future employers and to society at large. Teaching such self control is a worthy goal.

Teaching self control to children who are out of control in a nurturing, structured environment provides them with a sense of safety and trust, not only in themselves but in the world around them. Children who successfully develop self control develop as well the ability to respond to life with a resounding, “Yes.”

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