

SERIES G: Topic 6

Guiding Your Kids

Many parents would be horrified to hear this, including many who are guilty. The average parents spend less than 7 minutes a week talking to their children, according to an article that appeared in *USA Today*.

Spend time every day with each of your children doing things they like to do. While doing so, avoid serious topics, issues, and questions unless your child brings them up. Comment favorably on as many things about your child as you can.

Children become competent when the power they receive is won by being responsible and making good decisions. Children who get too much power too soon tend to misuse it.

Exerting too much control can cause children to withdraw from life, rebel or become bullies. On the other hand, permissiveness encourages youngsters to push parents to the limit of their tolerance. It allows children to think everything revolves around their own wishes. It causes children to demand undeserved rewards and to fail to appreciate the advantages they have.

Except when a child has a specific need like hunger or a diaper change, his behavior is a negotiation. Everything he does has a purpose. A child's misbehavior can become his way of gaining:

- Power or the ability to do whatever he wants (often learned from parents who are bossy).

- Attention from parents who put up with tantrums, or who have to constantly remind, punish, reward, coax or cater to a child.
- Revenge by being difficult and making your life harder, to punish you for not letting him have his own way (often learned from parents who retaliate).

Children do what works. Misbehavior is reinforced when parents don't draw clear boundaries or confront the negative behaviors.

Crying is your child's way of negotiating. In families where both parents are deaf, their children cry much less because crying simply doesn't work. A child who is used to having free reign will test his parent's resolve by behaving more forcefully until the adult either gives up or reclaims his control of the child.

When you react to children's misbehavior in a way that puts you in a bad light or makes your reaction predictable, they can do that to you all the time just to entertain themselves. You become their puppet.

Misbehavior needs to be met in a way that is calm. Give your child simple commands that you enforce. State consequences clearly and firmly and enforce them always, especially if your child is testing you. Briefly explain the rules. State them only once. Do not feel like you need to defend them. You are not in a debate. Be a parent, not a pal.

When your child can make you react, you give them power over you and reward bad behavior.

If your child misbehaves, it's often because you have given him an immediate reward for doing so: the power to control you. When you make a rule or a decision, explaining your reasoning helps him

make good explanations. But when he can make you give him an explanation over and over, he is turning you into his fool. When your child uses his antics or behavior to dictate the terms of your parenting, you have to break up the reinforcement process by reacting to him or her in new ways. You have to make sure his attempts to manipulate you don't work. Enforce your rules and commands. Respond to him when you want, not while he is using his routine on you. Maybe you'll choose not to respond at all.

> **Studies have found children feel more self-assured when they have been given clearly established rules and family structure with the parents firmly in charge.**

Giving in to children too often leads to disrespect. Parents who are overly helpful prevent their children from learning to think on their feet. Don't interfere too much with your children as they attempt things that are at the upper limit of their capabilities (or that have an element of danger). Struggling and overcoming helps develop character. Self-esteem requires coping skills, and those skills are best learned when children are allowed to solve their own problems and deal with the consequences.

Children are quite skillful at driving wedges between parents. Children can't "divide and conquer" unless their parents let them; agree in advance to back each other up.



ASK YOURSELF

How have I been letting my children take power from me?

How can I keep an or Johnnie or Ann challenged?