

Special Character-Wise Report

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Joy Before Discipline



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Much of what is discussed amongst parents today is about how to discipline our children, what are the "magic bullet" techniques that will cure all the ail of rebelliousness and defiance? Over-focusing on techniques creates stressful parenting because you will constantly be searching for the right match between the pill and the symptom – and if the "prescription" doesn't work, you find yourself in the parenting section of your local bookstore again – looking for the latest and greatest. So, how does one escape from this stressful cycle of search for that one discipline trick that will do it all?

Discipline is not the end-all and be-all; it is only part of the process of communication between parent and child. Let me say it again – **Discipline is about COMMUNICATION.** If we think of discipline largely in terms of consequences then, we may affect behavior but we will never be able to reach the heart. And as the child grows, the need to reach the heart escalates almost exponentially! What then is the characteristic of the "parenting environment" where there is a lot of "heart" – *it is the pervasive presence of JOY.*

I am not referring to JOY that is a result of pampering and pandering to the shopping list of the child – rather it is the JOY that comes from deep fellowship and an attitude of just enjoying the presence and company of your child. You know that JOY is missing from your child-rearing if the following rings true :

1. Your child's schedule is so full of CCA (Co-curricular activities) that he hardly has time to relax at home and be involved in family activities like going to the park, doing chores together, playing board games, sharing hobby interests, etc. So much of what the child does nowadays is dis-connected with the parents' interest that the parent focuses on paying the fees, and let someone else do the child development!
2. You tend to micro-manage EVERYTHING such that even playtime is planned in advance by the minute! Think about your own childhood – didn't your parent allow you free time to explore and be creative. I remember that inventing and making up our own games held so much fond memories! Don't deprive your child of this impressionable sense of joy!
3. Every childish behavior is treated "apocalyptically" – Resist the temptation to extrapolate childish behavior to extreme future scenarios which will only cause undue stress for yourself! Just because little Johnny pull his kindy friend's pants does not mean that he will be a pervert for life! Treat it as a discipline situation that needs to be handled firmly and consistently – that's it. Do not over-analyze and "read too much" into the situation.

Remember the time when you were in love? You did not need to read a book entitled – "101 ways to express your love" – Why? It's because you are so much in the JOY of enjoying one another's company that the creativity just flows i.e. the "romantic deeds" were expressed as a result of this attitude of being at ease with the other person. So it is with you child. It is an irony that while we parents know that we are not perfect, yet, we expect to raise perfect kids! Accept the fact that the child will never be able to fulfil all your hidden dreams and expectations and take the present time to enjoy their presence before it's too late.

In fact, when you live a life of JOY with your child, when it comes to administering discipline – the effect will be felt because your child cannot bear to be separated from the "lifeline" of JOY and will do his best to be restored to the fellowship of JOY with you again. The danger is when you discipline without a prior environment of JOY and fellowship – then it will come across as something hard and dry. *You get compliance but not connectedness.*

Does our child need our discipline? Absolutely YES but do it within the context of an environment of JOY and deep fellowship. Or else bitterness and anger is the result of your discipline efforts – and that will only spiral downwards and widen the communication gap. Think about it.

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