

Permission to Obey?



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I recently overheard one parent telling his young child very firmly – “*I need you to obey me. Now, will you please obey?*” This is a contradiction in terms! In fact, it is like the traffic police coming up to me and say – “I need you to obey the speed limit. Now, will you obey it?” By asking for my permission, he has just diluted his authority to enforce the rule!

Clearly, much of the parenting stress we observe today stems from the fact that we as parents do not take up our God-given authority to lead (especially in the child’s first 12 years of their growth) and we have somehow bought into the deception that the home must be governed in a *democratic* manner where the child has the *choice* to obey. Every instruction given must be supported by the results of a by-election where every vote is counted before the child decides whether the mandate is to be carried out or not!

A child is free to disagree but she is never free to disobey.

Disobedience is never free. Every choice equals a corresponding consequence. In life, I can select my choice but I can never select my consequences! For example, I can choose to eat candy floss everyday but I can never choose the consequences of my blood’s sugar level! So, if we let our child get away with disobedience, we are actually *mis*-training them i.e. we are not equipping them for what happens in the real world. The reality, folks, is that in the world “out there” – every breaking of expected rules will bring on a corresponding consequence. This is the law of the harvest – *you reap what you sow*.

Here are 3 needful steps for you to take in order to claim your place of leadership at home :

Step 1 : Tell, not sell!

When you want your child to do something (eg. pick up the toys) – just tell it plainly as it is, with a firm, clear and no-nonsense tone. You do not have to “sell” the idea or bribe with promises of ice-cream galore and then end your political speech by saying “OK?” Do not waste your breath in cajoling the child with 100 words when just 5 would do – “Pick up your toys, now”. Do not ask for permission by using “OK?” and tell it as it is. Be a leader, not a politician.

Step 2 : Mean what you say!

Every threat not acted upon dilutes your parental authority at home. Very soon, your child will figure out the routine of the game. Mom threatens, raises her voice, repeats herself five times, and then just before the fifth time, I better pull up my socks and begin to obey. By letting the volume of our voice rather than the execution of action take its course, we are actually training the child in *delayed* obedience (which is hardly obedience at all). That is why I encourage parents to carefully think through your words before letting it out of your mouth! When you are not sure, well take a break and come back to the child with the consequence when you have had the chance to deliberate on the matter. Oh yes, do all of the above in a calm and collected manner, please. The minute you blow your top, the credibility is down the drain!

Step 3 : Unity is strength!

A child is totally defenseless when confronted with parents who are in total agreement with each other. There is no recourse for appeal when he observes the unanimity in the marriage relationship. In other words, husbands and wives should never contradict each other when it comes to *directing* the child. That’s why your parenting strength draws upon the foundation of a united marriage. Take time to discuss parenting policies and issues during your regular “coffee time” when the children are in bed and be ready with a united press conference the next morning! Let the children sleep early and reclaim your marriage time!

It is not about creating rules at home as much as it is about *who rules* at home. The family is meant to be ruled by two loving adults rather than a terrible toddler. Think about it.

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