

Whole Child Education Series

COMMUNICATING With Our Children

A Guide for Parents and Teachers

Rabbi Doniel Staum, LMSW

Dr. Yitzchak Schechter, PsyD

A project of Yeshiva Bais Hachinuch

COMMUNICATING
With Our Children:
A Guide for Parents and Teachers

Printed in honor of the 6th Annual Dinner of
Yeshiva Bais Hachinuch

February 14, 2009
מוצאי שבת קודש פרשת יתרו תשס"ט

The authors wish to express their great appreciation to
Rabbi Dovid Hojda for his outstanding editing of this work

©2009 by Yitzchak Schechter and Doniel Staum

לזכר נשמת
מרדכי נפתלי בן

דוד

Sponsored by
The Felsing
Family

Rabbi Staum

Mazal Tov on this worthy accomplishment.

May Hashem bless you with strength and הצלחה to be able to continue to strive to help us in the important role of חינוך הבנים

Kehillat New Hempstead

Yasher Koach Rabbi Staum on this necessary and important accomplishment.

May you go מחיל אל חיל

Benson Family

Gershuny Family

Kaplan Family

Shelley Karben

Rabbi Kerner and Family

Rabbi Kohl and Family

Roberta Leitner

Polin Family

Resnick Family

Wolfset Family

Wolicki Family

FOREWORD

RABBI NAFTALI EISGRAU
MENAHEL, YESHIVA BAIS HACHINUCH

Shevat 5769/February 2009

To write a preface for a book about communication is a daunting task. Communication is the essence of almost all relationships. We communicate with family, relatives, friends, acquaintances, employers, and employees.

But perhaps the most important communication is how we communicate with our children. Our students and children look to us for guidance and direction. How effectively we communicate with them directly effects the extent of the guidance they will accept from us.

The תורה הקדושה guides us with many important principles regarding communication.

When משה רבינו told Klal Yisroel that they would imminently receive the Torah, He utilized the terminology, “ כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגד - So you should say to the Bais Yaakov, and so you should tell the B’nei Yisroel”. רש"י explains that “Bais Yaakov” refers to the women and “B’nei Yisroel” refers to the men. משה ה' instructed to utilize a different manner of speech when speaking to the men than when speaking to the women. תאמר connotes a soft delicate form of speech, whereas תגיד connotes a firmer directive. The תורה is telling us, that although the underlying message was the same, the method were very different. As the saying goes, “it’s not what you say, but how you say it!”

As any educator can attest, education often requires rebuking and reprimanding. This poses a significant challenge. On the one hand, the educator must penetrate the heart of his child. Yet, at the same time, he must be wary not to damage the child’s ego.

A lesson can be gleaned from a homiletical understanding of the שמע, recited daily: The תורה commands, ” וואהבת את ה' אלקיך וכו' - And you should love ה' with all your heart”. The pasuk then continues “ והיו הדברים - And these words that I am commanding you today should be on your heart”. There is a clear relationship between our love for ה' and our capability to internalize His words in our hearts.

When there is a foundation of love, even the most difficult aspects of communication becomes accomplishable. When one feels that the individual talking to them really and deeply cares for them, he is able to accept messages- even harsh messages - because he feels it is truly being stated for his benefit.

דברים היוצאים מן הלב נכנסים אל הלב. Words that emerge from the heart, (are able to) enter the heart.

The ספר עקדת יצחק relates a poignant thought. The pasuk in Mishley (27:19) states, "כמים הפנים לפנים כן לב האדם לאדם" – As the face of the water reflects the fact that its shown, so too is the heart of a man to a man". Simply understood we treat people as a reflection of the way they treat us. We like those who like us and tend to feel disdain for those who shun us.

The עקדה however, offers a beautiful novel understanding: When a person faces his friend, his right hand is opposite his friend's left hand and his left hand is opposite his friend's right hand. Chazal explain that the right symbolizes strength while the left symbolizes weakness. This is because most people have more strength is their right hand and use their right hand for their primary activities. Essentially, we lift with our right hand and push down with our left.

When we face a peer, our natural tendency is to utilize our right side (the side that lifts) to 'lift up' and accentuate his left (i.e. his weaknesses) while using our left side (that pushes down) to minimize his strengths. Our goal however should be כמים הפנים אל פנים, like a reflection of faces in water. When we look at a reflection of ourselves, our right side and left side face each other. Our goal is to 'lift up' the strengths of our peers and to 'push down' his weaknesses, just as we are wont to do with our own strengths and weaknesses.

So should be the goal of all personal relationships. If our children, students, and peers, realize that we are interested in their growth and achievement (and we really have to be) then our level of communication will become that much more potent.

May ה' help us all find the correct words and feelings to properly enhance the growth of our next generation of stars and leaders.

Before concluding, I take this opportunity to thank Rabbi Doniel Staum and Dr. Yitzchak Schechter, for spending so much time helping the staff and parents of Yeshiva Bais Hachinuch better understand and relate to the needs of every child. Their "Whole Child Education" program has done wonders for all of the Yeshiva Bais Hachinuch family.

I hope and *daven* that this book does the same for you.

Table of Contents

Chapters

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS**
- 3. WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?**
- 4. THE COMMUNICATORS**
- 5. THE BALANCING ACT**
- 6. THE ESSENTIALS**
- 7. QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION**
- 8. THE TOOL BOX: DOs**
- 9. THE TOOL BOX: DONTs**
- 10. APPENDICES**

PREFACE

The pasuk most often quoted in regards to chinuch is **תִּנְחַן לְנַעַר עַל פִּי דְרָכּוֹ גַם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסוּר מִמֶּנָּה**. It appears, of course, in Mishlei 22:6. Its translation is *Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not deviate from it*. When one looks at the entire verse - - and not just the first phrase -- one sees that success is measured by the extent to which the education will stay with the child for the rest of his life. In other words, *chinuch* must be designed so as to optimally leave a positive, indelible imprint upon the student's soul.

In Tehillim (127:4) Dovid Hamlech states **כְּחִצִּים בְּיַד גִּבּוֹר בֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים**: -like arrows in the hands of a warrior so are the youth. What is the connection between a warrior holding his arrows and young children?

The Kotzker Rebbe explained that the closer an archer pulls his bow towards him, the further and straighter it will go when he releases it. So too with children, the closer we hold them and cherish them in their youth, the further and straighter they will go when we send them off to seek their own path later in life.

Every educator hopes and strives to 'connect' with their children in a manner which will profoundly draw them close and foster an internal eternal connection.

It's been said, "The greatest gift we can give a child is roots and wings."

It is our sincere hope that our thoughts will contribute to that gift.

...וּבְרָא אֶת עוֹלָמוֹ בְּשִׁלְשָׁה סִפְרִים

בספר

וספר

ספר יצירה (א:א)

וסיפור

...And *He* created *His* Universe with three books

With text

With number

And with Communication

INTRODUCTION

When asked to identify the greatest threats to spiritual and personal growth, many of us, conditioned by years of *deroshos* and *mussar shmuezim*, might immediately respond: “External influences – of course!” Doubtless that is true; external influences most certainly play a major role in insidiously wearing down the growth we achieve.

However, we wonder whether we might consider that the hectic bustle – and routine -- of everyday life poses a threat of no less magnitude.

Think about it: We become inspired, resolve to make improvements, and then, rather than make those improvements an integral part of our lives, we remain shackled. Shackled, that is, by the chains of day-to-day existence, day-to-day routine.

How does one get past this?

The chapters that follow are intended not only to help attune the mind to certain issues, but also to show how to keep them at the forefront of one's consciousness. For, "automatic mode" is the enemy of change.

"I am not authoring this work to teach people things that are not known...but rather to remind people of what they already know...The more known something is, the more forgotten it becomes..."

Ramchal, Introduction to
Messilas Yesharim

Our goal is not the presentation of ideas that you don't already know, but rather to help you to bring those well-known ideas to your consciousness.

If you happen to find something here that strikes you as particularly useful, put down the book. Then, take a minute to consider how you might attempt to actually "own" this idea that appeals to you – that is, to implement it in your own life. Speak about it with your spouse. Jot down your goals, perhaps together. Track them over time.

B'hatzlacha!

Let's not forget that even thinking about how we communicate is in and of itself a success!

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

To a great extent, the way we experience the world is directly tied to the quality of the relationships we have with others, be it friends, parents, children, and – of course – Hashem. (We don't mean to exclude one of the most important relationships of all -- that which we have with ourselves. Nor do we mean to exclude the relationship we have with *ideas*. But for the purpose of this book we focus primarily)

Our ability to “know” is tied to our ability to communicate.

Chazal (Avos 5:1) say that **בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם** –G-d created the world through ten statements. One way of understanding this is to say that the act of creating the world was, for Hashem, a communication. It expressed His love and care for His creation.

The three mishnayos that follow mention various events in the unfolding of history. There is the bringing of the *mabul*, the delay of the appearance of Avraham for 10 generations, and Avraham's ten tests. These are described as a powerful communication: **להודיע כמה ארך אפים** **להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם** and **לפניו** (to communicate G-d's forbearance and to communicate His great love for Avraham).

It would be difficult to overstate the significance that relationships have in our lives. To a great extent, they are what primarily inspires many the child and adult. The desire to not disappoint, to do well, to create pride, and to share are what primarily motivates most of us to follow through with many of our tasks. In the school setting, it is this, rather than raw manipulation and fear of punishment that produce the greatest results.

Even the endeavor's intrinsic value (if there is one) will often not be sufficient to sustain ongoing interest from the beginning of a task through its end.

Experience tells us that when the educator (be it teacher, Rebbe or parent) seeks to control through manipulation, threats, and power, he will ultimately fail. Each side will consistently need to up the ante so as to make sure they get the "last word." That is the nature of power struggles.

A healthy child will always push boundaries. And, a good educator (parent, Rebbe or teacher) will maintain boundaries. However, he will balance this with recognizing the child's perfectly valid need to test those boundaries.

Consider what happens when the whole connection is through fear and manipulation. The child pushes boundaries. As he does so, the threats, warnings, and punishments necessarily increase in austerity and become more punitive. The stand-off inevitably rises to the point where the child will realize that the parent/teacher has upped the ante as far as it can go.

We all know what happens next. The child shouts: "I don't care! You can't make me! What are you going to do? Kick me out? Send me to my room for three hours, and take away my favorite toys? You already did all that!"

Now what?

The parent or teacher has now arrived at a frightening realization. Namely, that the child happens to be exactly right!

Classroom reliance upon superior fire-power simply does not work. Yes, there is most certainly an illusion that it is effective, as it can be most helpful for the immediate short-term. However, if the educator's

goal is **גַּם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה**, that the child maintain the education even when there's no adult towering over him, corporal punishment and the like are a dismal failure. Research clearly demonstrates that extremely strong deterrents work only for the moment. Once the deterrent is removed, the child will return to that behavior. The child is conforming only to the “carrot or stick.” There is no internalization.

This issue extends to many areas of life, religious practice in particular, given the central role that religious values have in parental self-identity. Often, the more that parents are invested and involved in seeing that their children conform to parental religious values, the children's sense of being pressured increases as well. This becomes most apparent in homes where one of the parents is somewhat rigid and controlling.

True, the child may indeed conform, but he will do so resentfully, and only when the authoritarian parent is present. In other words, it won't be because the child is internalizing anything. Rather, he just wants to avoid the “abuse.”

As the years go by, the resentment builds. Often, there are catastrophic results, G-d forbid. It could happen that the child will have internalized not the religious message, but the stress. He might become depressed and anxious, G-d forbid. Perhaps, rather than “keep it all inside,” he might externalize his feelings by casting aside the parental yoke and rebel against the parental values he feels were insensitively drilled into him.

Unfortunately the above describes many (though not all) of those precious children who are considered “off-the derech.”

Often, power struggles, rigidity, and demanded compliance pave the road to unhappiness and the abandonment of a Torah lifestyle, G-d forbid.

The Kotzker captures this beautifully.

Traditionally, the pasuk (Tehillim 23:4), **גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צְלֻמֹת** **לֹא אֵירָא רָע כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי** is understood to mean, *Though I walk in the valley overshadowed by death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.*

The Kotzker, however, gives this a different reading: “Even when I walk in the valley overshadowed by death, I do not fear. However what is **רָע**, is that You [G-d] are with me [sharing in this pain].

It is not *my* fear, but *His* pain.

My concern transcends my personal situation; it stays focused on *His* situation. The way to develop this vis a vis God is to develop it with our personal relationships

“Suppose, for example, that I am highly over-reactive to my children. Suppose that whenever they begin to do something I feel is inappropriate, I sense an immediate tensing in the pit of my stomach. I feel defensive walls go up; I prepare for battle. My focus is not on the long-term growth and understanding but on the short-term behavior. I’m trying to win the battle, not the war.

I pull out my ammunition – my superior size, my position of authority- and I yell or intimidate or I threaten or punish. I stand there, victorious, in the middle of the debris of a shattered relationship while my

children are outwardly submissive and inwardly rebellious, suppressing feelings that will come out later in uglier ways.”

(Stephen Covey, The 7 habits of Highly Effective People, p. 105)

The only real “hold” we have on our children is the relationship they have with us. If we have not been successful at building that relationship, we are in trouble. The alternative to relying upon a good relationship is the relying upon raw power as a substitute. (I am *BIG*; you are *small*. I am an *ADULT*; you are a *child*).

When we refer to motivating through good relationships, we do not mean to say that “I want to please my teacher/parent” is the greatest motivator out there. Rather, what we mean is that the connection with the adult figure will give the child the confidence he needs in order to believe that he can accomplish.

“Children do not develop into what we think they can become. Children do not develop into what they think they can become. Children develop into what they think we think they can become!”

Studies shows significant fluctuation on many types of tests, even including IQ tests, depending on whether the tested person developed some sort of rapport with the tester¹. Even something as “objective” as an IQ test has motivational and emotional factors that can affect the person’s output. Additionally, when there are ambiguous situations, a positive rapport can bias the person to see it more positively while a negative

¹ Many studies have looked at this phenomena including the meta-analysis of Fuchs and Fuchs (Review of Educational Research, 1986, 56(2):243-262 and as noted in the manuals of some of the standard IQ tests.

relationship can have the evaluator or educator interpret the ambiguity consistent with the negativity of the relationship.

When there is a relationship and there is a feeling that “we are okay with each other”, even if the educator must ‘come down hard’ on the child on occasion, it is done in context of that “*okayness*” and, although the child may be upset with the consequences, he will not feel that acrimonious resentment toward the educator. (As described below, a healthy relationship is always balanced and can accept both the positive and negative and does not have to be artificially- “all good”)

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is the transfer of information. It comes in many forms, not only through the substance of one's words, but tone, cadence, and volume – to say nothing of the body language that accompanies the words.

Every nuance and subtlety communicates, be it the dramatic pause, the quiver of the voice, increasing or decreasing the volume, the speaker's turning away or his looking directly into his audience's eyes, etc.

We often recommend a certain exercise when leading groups in the art of social skills: "If your body was holding a sign, what would that sign say?"

Often, more of speech is communicated through its accompanying body language than through the actual words.

Currently, a burgeoning and exciting field of serious research is trying to ascertain the extent to which physiological indicators, like facial expressions and other complex muscle patterns, demonstrate a person's true feelings – as contrasted with what the speaker is actually saying. (The implications here are enormous.)

We communicate constantly and we are constantly sending messages, both spoken and unspoken, both consciously and sub-consciously, both knowingly and unknowingly.

Consider: What happens when we, in the presence of our children and students, speak to other adults. We believe that the children can neither hear nor sense what is happening in that conversation. However, even if they cannot hear (and that is not necessarily the case), they can certainly see. How do we speak? How do we react?

When speaking to our children and students, it comes across loud and clear (whether we realize it or not) exactly what we think of them. And, even if the way we truly think about them does not come across, the children will nevertheless be reading a message as to how they *think* that we think about them.

They will see – or think they see – what is important to us and what is not.

Even where there is no conversation or verbalization, still there is communication. Others see how we act when driving our cars. They see how we react to getting lost and to receipt of bad news. They see how we face our setbacks. They even see what we enjoy as well.

We never stop modeling, communicating, and projecting how we are. And, from the children's vantage point, we never stop sending messages to them, telling them how they should be as well.

It is foolish to deny this reality. "Do as I say, not as I do" will never even register.

It is for that reason Avtalyon wisely exhorts (Avos 1:11) **חכמים הזהרו בדבריכם** (Wise ones- Be vigilant with your words). This is valuable advice not just for its own sake, but for the sake of the catastrophic chain of events that emerges from it: **שם תחובו חובת גלות ותגלו למקום מים הרעים וישתו התלמידים הבאים אחריכם וימותו ונמצא שם שמים מתחלל** (Lest you incur the punishment of exile and be exiled to a place of bad water and the students that follow after you will drink and die and the name of Heaven is found to be desecrated)

This is the lesson of one of the Mishnayos (Avos 1:9) that precedes it as well: **והוי זהיר בדבריך שמא מתוכם ילמדו לשקר** (and be careful in your words lest through them they will learn to lie).

Rabbi Lawrence Kellerman related that when he was authoring his book, “To Kindle a Soul”, he interviewed many menahelim and deans and asked them about the challenges they face with contemporary education. The most interesting response was from the dean of a school in an upscale neighborhood. The tuition costs in that school was well over \$ 20,000 a year. The dean lamented the fact that “parents throw out \$20,000 in order to save five dollars.” He explained that during vacations many parents take their children to amusements parks. At the entrance when paying for admission, there is a sign which states that children under 12 pay five dollars less. Parents will often tell their children to lie about their age in order to save those few dollars. “We are teaching our students about honesty and integrity and then the parents unwittingly throw it out the window to save a few bucks.”

EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNTS

We all know what a financial bank account is. Into it, we make deposits and build up a reserve from which to make withdrawals. An “emotional bank account” works much the same way. While the financial account is between ourselves and the bank, the emotional bank account is between ourselves and some other person. It is the foundation of our relationship with that person.

Whenever we act courteously, respectfully, do acts of kindness, and make sure to be true to our word towards someone else, we are “depositing” into the emotional bank account we hold with that individual. With each deposit, the level of trust goes up and the quality of that relationship improves.

It is called an “account” because, just as in the financial instrument, I know that I am accumulating something from which I may draw at the proper time. That which I am accumulating is called “trust.”

Why would I want this?

It is because, when I make mistakes, which is inevitable, the emotional reserves in that account will compensate. When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.

However, like all “accounts,” it is only as deep as its reserves. And, the more the “account” is drawn upon, without a compensating stream of deposits, the more likely it is that this “account” will become depleted. One who has a habit of not keeping his word with someone else, of not caring about his feelings, of showing him discourtesy and disrespect, and of overreacting will find that his emotional Bank Account with that individual has become overdrawn. And, like bank accounts,

“overdraft protection” is not guaranteed. And, even “overdraft protection” is never without limit.

With each withdrawal, the level of trust declines. Seemingly innocuous comments and innocent mistakes will cause eruptions and flare-ups. The relationship is now viewed as fickle and unstable. Potentially, anything could now lead to a blowup.

Unfortunately, it is all too common that families, marriages, and other relationships devolve into such distrustful and unhealthy patterns. The tension becomes immediately palpable. All involved suffer.

In fact, just about every relationship depends upon a large reserve of trust. Otherwise, even the best of relationships will deteriorate. In marriages without such deposits, the spouses will – at best -- seek to live independent lives under one roof. Their marriage will center upon efforts to avoid each other and in getting through the day without having to interact. The relationship may further deteriorate to one of hostility and constant defensiveness. It may escalate into a cold war. Needless to say, children suffer greatly.

The more constant a relationship, the more the need for constant deposits. With continuous expectations, old deposits evaporate. Although high school friends who have not seen each other in twenty years, can pick up where they left off, this is because the old deposits are “preserved,” which is not the case where there has been ongoing interaction. There, ongoing investment is required.

Let’s say that a parent or rebbi says to his child/talmid, “Tuck in your shirt! What are you, some kind of bum in the street? You’re supposed

to look like a ben torah!!” Or, “Nu, get to Mincha already! Don’t look at the wall! Don’t look at your friends! Look in the siddur!”

Each critical comment and demand constitutes a withdrawal.

Will there be sufficient deposits to cover those withdrawals?

Even where the talmid is struggling and is desperately looking for guidance, the trust level may have become so low that the Rebbe’s advice, no matter how well-intentioned, will go unheard. It simply will not register. The Rebbe may indeed possess the experience, wisdom, and understanding to help this student. However, if the emotional account is overdrawn, the student will see the Rebbe as sticking in his own two cents where it isn’t wanted. He will not sense the care and concern that the Rebbe truly feels.

All of the above applies to the parent/child relationship as well.

To rectify the situation, the parent will have to work on slowly building up the relationship with positive deposits. Of course, that doesn’t mean the parent should cease disciplining the child as necessary. However, he must constantly work at building trust as well. It is very doable that the adult “hold his ground” with firm and consistent boundaries, yet be beloved by his children/students. In fact, being able to maintain that delicate balance is one of the telltale signs of an effective educator and parent. The key is to ensure that the emotional bank account is well-funded.

This process of deposit and withdrawal applies as well to the relationship we have with our selves. Day-to-day life often requires the marshalling of inner strength. That energy must then be expended. Where

will it be coming from? How will it be replaced, so that there will still be something to draw upon in the future?

The replenishment comes from positive experiences, both with our selves and with the positive regard and genuine care shown to us by others.

THE COMMUNICATORS

Each morning, the Kotzker Rebbe would take a long time to recite “*Modeh Ani*.” Needless to say, he wasn’t just posturing. Kotzk was renowned for its unyielding dedication to truth. Artifice and superficiality, that is, external actions with nothing behind them, were positively not welcome there.

If the Rebbe was taking a long time in saying “*Modeh Ani*,” it was most definitely not for show.

He explained that when saying the words “*Modeh ani lefanecha*,” this is what he thought of: “I am thanking You, admitting to You, submitting to You, and appreciating all that You do.” He continued, “To properly express that sentiment, one must answer the question, ‘Who am I that is speaking here?’ and ‘Who is the You that I am speaking to?’”

Furthermore, “What does it mean that I am speaking to You and relating to You?” “How is that occurring?” “What does that mean?”

The Rebbe would re-contemplate the answers to these questions each morning. He did so because it was the key to his whole connection with G-d.

The Rebbe’s questions are foundational; they may applied to most any interaction and relationship. “Who am I?” “Who are you?” “What is our means of communication?” “What kind of relationship do we have?”

It is said that one classroom is actually many classrooms, due to the multiplicity of personalities, temperaments, approaches, learning styles, and capabilities all mixed within that one room. To an extent, the same might be said of family dynamics.

Two children witnessing the same thing will very likely have vastly different experiences and perceptions, given that each is filtering what they see and hear through their own life experience and self-image. Even within a single family, there are often children of extremely different personality and extremely different feelings of comfort-level within the home.

Differences in learning style (visual, auditory, etc.) often demand different educational approaches and tools. The same applies to different emotional temperaments, introvert vs. extrovert, for example. There are also differing ways that children respond. Some will internalize everything, and suffer silently, while others will be highly verbal.

When dealing with children, we are dealing with different brains. As an example, different brains have different reticular activating systems², which lead to different thresholds of reactivity!

There are also differences in emotional reactivity. Some children need to be jump-started and encouraged to participate. Others naturally mesh with the lesson.

Attentional differences (e.g. ability to sustain focus, susceptibility to distraction) are highly-significant, as is social ability. The latter often determines how happy a child will be and is often related to the child's level of sensitivity. This is especially true where the child is being bullied either at home or in the classroom. Another factor is how self-assured and

²The reticular activating system is the name given to the part of the brain believed to be the center of arousal and motivation.

confident the child is as to his own social ability. Academic challenges, familial issues, and strong emotional reactivity also play a significant role

The emerging theme is that we must always bear in mind that one size does NOT fit all!

TEMPERAMENT

Another aspect of the relationship is “The goodness of fit.” This is the idea of temperament. For example: slow to warm up vs. quick to become a part of whatever happens to be going on. Some children thrive on no structure at all; others cannot deal with anything but.

Children are not only born with a certain temperament, but indications are that patterns of temperament are already discernable in utero! The extent to which siblings within the same family can have such diverse personalities is nothing short of astounding. The need for an individualized approach to each child cannot be overstated.

Personality is determined by the way that temperament interacts with the environment. Each person comes with a “factory-installed” wiring. This “wiring” heavily impacts the child’s personality. How well their temperament fits with the environment and how well they are received by the people in that environment determines how a child sees himself and others.

Another way of looking at this is to say that temperament is a set of in-born traits that organize the child’s approach to the world. They are instrumental in the development of the child’s distinct personality. They

also determine how the child goes about learning about the world around him.

Temperament appears to be relatively stable from birth. Although these enduring characteristics are never actually “good” or “bad,” the child’s perception of how others receive them is often determinative of whether the child sees his own temperament as being “bad” or “good.”

The better that educators (parents and teachers) understand their children’s temperaments, the better they can successfully educate each child according to his needs.

When people’s demands and expectations, plus the environment, are all compatible with the child’s temperament, there is said to be a “goodness-of-fit.” When incompatibility exists, however, you have what is known as a “personality conflict.”

Parents need to work *with* the child’s temperamental traits, not *in opposition* to them. This must already begin at the earliest age. As the child matures, however, parents can help the child to adapt to *their* world. This means helping him to learn how to accommodate the temperamental traits of those around him, notably the parents.

It is also advised that parents convey to the child’s teachers their insights as to the child’s personality, so as to make it more possible that the child will be taught in the way best suited to his individual needs.

It sometimes happens that adults interpret a child’s style of interacting as inherently “bad.” Things are not quite that simple. It is true that a youngster’s temperament can be extremely problematic. Specifically, this occurs where it conflicts with the expectations of his parents, other family members, friends or teachers. For example, if a

parent is intense and ambitious and his or her youngster is mild-mannered and easygoing, the parent may feel disappointed, frustrated and angry. The child, pressured to behave in ways foreign to his basic inclinations and innate personality, may resist and cause conflict within the family.

Once the educator (be it parent or teacher) recognizes and accepts the reality that there is a mismatch of temperaments and forgoes the value judgments, the problem is on its way to being resolved. Once the adult acknowledges that your personalities are different, any tendencies to blame either the child or yourself should ease.

When we are able to think of our children's temperament in objective terms rather than react to it emotionally and instinctively, we will build a far better relationship with our children.

If a child has a difficult temperament as a preschooler and the parents understand and respond appropriately, the child will often modify his behavior. This may save him from becoming a "problem child." His intensity can become part of his enthusiasm, determination, charm, and zeal as he feels better about himself and his relationship with others. For that to happen, his parents' attitudes and behaviors are major factors in how he adapts and expresses his feelings.

It is also vital to recognize the fundamental difference between *techunos hanefesh* (personality) and *middos* (character traits). Middos are moral/immoral character traits and it is within our capacity to mold and change them. The study of mussar is devoted to effecting these changes. It is within our purview to increase the magnitude of our benevolence, patience, and altruism. We also have the capability to eliminate traces of anger, cruelty, and selfishness through work, guidance, and sincere effort.

Techunos on the other hand are innate. These facets of our personality profoundly define and shape our essence. For instance, some of us are naturally artistic. Others are drawn to numbers and math. Although one can always be taught how to paint, the desire for it that is felt by the natural artist cannot be conveyed to those who lack similar inclinations.

The Gemara in Shabbos (156a), for instance, advises that one who is born under the influence of the “red planet” [i.e. a “blood” personality] should become a butcher or a surgeon. Otherwise, he may seek to satisfy his “feeling” for blood through murder, r”l. The inclination to blood is not something that can be changed. It is an immutable component of this person’s personality. His task is to utilize it for the betterment of mankind so that he doesn’t utilize it in negative ways.

Another example is hyperactivity, which Rav Wolbe zt”l maintained is a techunah, not a middah. Accordingly, the hyperactive child cannot magically be transformed into someone who will sit calmly for hours on end, curled up with a good book. Seeking to force this transformation would not only be futile, but even damaging, particularly to the child’s sense of self. That is not to say that the child could not be controlled. But, it will only work in the short term. Internally, he will remain unchanged.

Instead of trying to control and manipulate the hyperactive child into becoming someone else, we should acknowledge his energy and teach him how to properly channel it. This is critical. For, he will not be under our control for the rest of his life. When he matures and is beyond our influence, his inherent personality, repressed up to now, will surface,

without a doubt. Unfortunately, at this point in his life, lacking the tools to channel his energy constructively, he will be at a loss as to how to develop into a productive and contributing member of society.

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF OUR CHILDREN

Parents must constantly ask themselves, “Am I trying to live vicariously through my children?” The post-holocaust generation was especially challenged in this regard. They often wanted their child to have and to be everything that they could not, pushing them into lucrative careers that the child often had no interest or desire for. The children’s sense of guilt and desire to please their parents would in turn push them towards occupations and lifestyles that they otherwise had no interest in. Often, this lead to great personal dissatisfaction.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt”l expressed this succinctly: “Parents often think that their children are the second chapter of their book. They fail to realize that their children are a completely separate book.”

Our goal must always be to develop our children according to what works for them, not what works for us. We cannot change who they are!

Imagine a shy child, slow to warm up and introverted, whose parents are extremely extroverted. They are “life-of-the-party” types; they jump head-on into just about everything. Their child is quite the opposite.

Now imagine what would happen as the parents push their child to be just like themselves. Needless to say, there will be terrible resistance. Not just that, but friction and embarrassment.

The same holds true with the father who pushes his child into sports, despite the child's not being well-coordinated or athletic. Perhaps the child will comply. What choice does he have? But, he will hate it.

The shy child / live-wire parent and the athletic father / non-athletic child will be a poor fit as long as the parent's expectations are out of tune with the child's nature. Once the expectations come in to line with the child's nature, however, then the parent / child differences need not be a problem at all.

Another characteristic of effective educators is openness and humility. One must be able to step back and recognize that the understanding one has of a given situation is never perfectly objective. Rather, it is an outcome of one's own temperament and experience. Once one realizes this, they can then better appreciate that their child has his own set of experiences that will cause him to interpret the same situation quite differently.

Armed with that insight, the educator / parent can then temper his response.

This is not to say that one should ignore a child's talking in class, rationalizing it away, saying to oneself, "Well, if he's talking in class, that must be perfectly valid. After all, it's only my perspective, as the one charged to do the teaching, that the classroom should not be chaotic. From the child's perspective, however"

Still, one must always keep in mind how the child might be experiencing a certain situation. For instance, a teacher in class looks at one of his students and says, "Shloime! That was a funny thing for you to do in class!" Now, the teacher might very well have intended the remark

as a subtle and gentle admonishment. He just wants to let the child know, in a non-threatening way, that he should not act that way.

Despite the teacher's intent, however, the child may hear it as a massive insult, a source of embarrassment in front of the whole class. Why? Because, unbeknownst to the teacher (or maybe even knownst to him!), he may have just gotten into a fight with three boys because they had called him a "funny kid."

Yes, it does require more than a small degree of humility to keep in mind that there's another valid perspective to what is in front of someone, especially when the perspective that one has to acknowledge is that of a child. It would only be possible where one is prepared to grant the child a certain level of respect. It is a very powerful lesson.

All of us have our own emotions and "stuff" that we carry along with us. We each have certain "buttons" that others can push, eliciting reactions that we might not be proud of. And, there will be children who, knowingly or unknowingly, find those buttons and wind up pushing them.

Therefore, remember this rule: Whatever is going on, try to not take it personally!

MINDFULNESS AND CONSCIOUSNESS...FOR THE EDUCATOR:

"This child is misbehaving - What am I doing and feeling?" That may sound like a pretty funny question. After all, it is the child that is misbehaving, not me!

However, it is important to realize whatever situation we are involved in, we inevitably contribute to it. All, based on our “stuff.”³

“Why is it that I am really tired and frustrated right now?” Is it because the baby kept me up last night? Or, maybe because I spent forty minutes on the phone with the Phone Company, getting nowhere?

You might ask, “Who cares what the reason is? The point is that I am tired and frustrated!”

In fact, it is very important to know the reason, for it will (and should) affect your response.

OUR OWN FEELINGS

Part of the training of social work students is to write process recordings. Students are asked to write out the content of a client session and submit it to a supervisor for review. The sheet of paper used for these reports has at least two columns: one for supervisor’s comments and another for the student’s factual account of what happened in the session.

The sheets for first-year students have an additional column, for the student to record his own feelings (as the therapist). He is not to write personal thoughts, opinions, or prognosis. Rather, he is to write one thing only here, namely his own feelings. “What did you feel when you heard that?” “How did it make you feel when the client said that?” [Second-year students have a fourth column, for opinions and thoughts.]

³ Note to the reader: We have chosen to use the uncomplicated word “stuff” to represent all various issues that we encounter. It is an encompassing word that includes all of the issues and contributing factors to a person’s personality and emotions. How we deal with a child in any situation will have a lot to do with the child’s “stuff”, i.e. his background, personality, home situation, etc. Also, how we react to any given situation depends on our stuff. Yes, teachers have “stuff” too! It will also depend on the situation and context. All of these factors are integral parts of the child’s matrix.

It taught me [DS] a meaningful idea: You cannot deal with other people and help them without also being in touch with your own feelings. YOU must know how YOU are feeling as well.

This is because we do not function as machines; rather, our own feelings play a vital role in how we react and respond to all situations.

Although it's easier said than done, when something is going on in one's life that is liable to evoke strong feelings, it's a good idea to "leave that package hanging on the doorknob" upon entering the classroom. Don't worry; you'll always be able to pick it up on the way out.

To the extent that the above is easier said than accomplished in the classroom setting, it is even harder to achieve in the home. This is true not only because one is dealing with their own children, rather than someone else's, but also because we are talking about one's home, rather than the daytime workplace.

Still, one must try.

Some people have found it useful – assuming that the nature of the relationship makes it feasible – to seek support from one's spouse. These "team meetings" can be very helpful for some. Others have found the setting aside of personal time to oneself to be absolutely essential. Needless to say, it is always important to maintain perspective and develop realistic expectations as to what one can reasonably do -- and what one can not.

A powerful, though difficult, method is to reframe one's role as a parent. Let go of the outcome. Just "do what you can do" as a human being – and expect nothing more. Of course, you would like to create

change in your child. However, give up the illusion that it's within your power to control every situation.

Try to do the maximum to create change. But, keep in mind that the impulse to always remain “in control” often leads to escalation and negative consequences.

THE BALANCING ACT

THE BALANCING ACT: ACADEMICS VERSUS SELF-ESTEEM

Many would say that the past 15 years have seen our yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs becoming more aware of the differing needs of individual students. And, they have, in general, showed greater recognition of the need to teach with affection and warmth. This is a wonderful development and a welcome improvement.

However, we must realize that LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH. Surely, it is necessary that we love our children. However, if our goal is to help them to be healthy and competent, it is not sufficient.

It is also not enough [merely!] to love them. Rather, we must learn to *communicate* our love. This means that we must love them in ways they can understand and accept.

Most of us love our children deeply. We therefore assume that the love we feel would be perfectly obvious to them. Or, we might assume that it's the children's responsibility to realize just how much we love them.

Here is our thinking: "We brought them into the world. We provide for all their physical needs. We cook and clean. We work to support them. And, we love them."

"Given the great mass of data that children have on the subject, gained through a lifetime of personal observation, we can naturally assume the child knows that we love him!"

This truth is so obvious to some parents that, as one father put it, "Only a fool could miss it!"

Right?

Wrong.

Because, unfortunately, this is not the case. Frequently, there is a major gap between the love we feel for our children and our ability to express it in ways that a child can relate to. It is one thing to love our children; it is quite another for them to feel our love daily.

STRUCTURE

The importance of structure, for many children, can not be overstated.⁴ It grants consistency and a certain measure of familiarity. Without having been given expectations and guidelines, many a child will feel lost, although this is not always the case.

A typical classroom might contain a certain number of children from homes where structure is almost nonexistent. When those children are not doing well, it may be even more important to demand structure than it would be from other children, since they won't be picking that skill up elsewhere.

THE EDUCATIONAL PARADOX

A paradox is a contradictory idea often at odds with common sense yet somewhat true. Educational relationships, be it between teacher and student or parent and child, will always feature a certain level of paradox – if they are to be successful.

⁴ We have had boys in Yeshiva who thrive and do very well although at home they are absolute terrors. The major glaring reason is that yeshiva provides them with tremendous structure which is lacking in their homes.

A child must feel that the educator (parent, Rebbe or teacher) loves them. But, the educator must also impose limits and boundaries. He cannot, and should not, allow the child to have whatever he wants. This is something we all know.

[Paradox is a feature of marriage as well. Both spouses may feel the other loves them and is devoted to them, despite having experienced their partner's having done something personally upsetting. In positive, healthy relationships, difficult events and issues need not loosen the bond.]

We are able to hold onto conflicting feelings simultaneously, love + annoyance + frustration, for example.⁵ Similarly, we must simultaneously hold on to the rational and the emotional, even though they often do not agree.⁶ This is an essential feature of an emotionally healthy individual.⁷

Maintaining a healthy balance is critical, especially in education. However, children generally do not understand that balance. We must therefore exemplify it, demonstrate it, and explain it.

Children learn from the reactions and behaviors of their mentors. Therefore, a teacher can emphasize to the student, "I like you very much, and you like me. But, I am very disappointed with your behavior."

All interactions are not going to be positive. However, even a negative interaction can be done in a loving manner. What is critical is that the relationship be on solid ground.

⁵ It is as Shlomo Hamelech writes in Koheles, מזה אל תנח ידך וגם מזה אשר תאחוז בזה וגם

⁶ For example, "שבמקום גילה שם תהיה הרעדה, ובמקום הרעדה שם תהיה הגילה (ברכות ל, ב)"

⁷ There are some psychological disorders – such as Borderline Disorder - where people lack this ability causing them some dysregulation. Those are the people who say, for example, "I hate you; please don't ever leave me!"

We often feel that it is our job to compensate for our children's deficiencies and struggles. We believe that if we tell, show, and direct them, they will then listen, observe, and improve. "Unless we demonstrate to them the errors of their ways," we say, "how else will they learn?" This extends to school work, sports, table manners, and everything else under the sun.

Not only that, but we would like our children to learn life's lessons without mistake or blunder. We fear that "errors of youth" will hurt our children psychologically and physically.

"Listen to me," we say. "We've been there, done that, made mistakes. We can help you."

Yes, our motives are noble. They reflect our desire to guide a youngster into a happy, healthy life's journey.

So, how does it work out?

Well, amongst young children, the responses to these paternal offers of guidance and assistance are as varied as their personalities. Some children watch and listen, but then don't do. If it's a constant feature of the parent/child relationship, this can lead to a pattern of helplessness, passivity and low initiative.

Some young children respond with resistance. They exhibit a pattern of behavior that we are quick to label "stubborn and strong-willed." In these cases, the stage is often set for this becoming a family destined for angry conflict.

The majority of young children, though, can tolerate our "helping behavior." However, little is accomplished towards achieving the ultimate goal, which is developing healthy and resilient young people.

Somewhere along this path, we became stuck in a paradox: On the one hand, “If I don’t help you, how will you ever learn?” On the other, “But on so many occasions, when I correct, show or even offer to help, things get worse, not better.”

Our noble message, “I am your parent; let me help!” often leads either to outright conflict or to complacency. From our perspective, helping is synonymous with fixing. Our children, however, often experience it as our not accepting their abilities.

We must remember that **Helping Does Not Necessarily Mean Fixing!** Parental goals should center upon assisting our children to feel competent, secure, happy, caring, and self-reliant. To realize these goals, our children need to develop the inner strength to deal competently and successfully, with the challenges and demands they encounter day-after-day.

Most of us know this – and accept it as true.

Why is it, then, that what begins as an effort to help often results in the parenting paradox, meaning our children’s “resistance to being fixed?”

For some educators, it is the words they choose. Or, it is their tone of voice. Or, it is their body language. Whatever it is, its message is “I am criticizing you” – not “I am encouraging you.”

For others, it is the rush to tell the child *what* to do. Rather, he should have tried engaging the child in an exciting process --- that of *discovering* a solution.

Let us not allow our efforts to help our children be transformed into exercises in fixing them. Interact with them in ways that allow them to view our input not only as desirous, but even helpful. Learning to

support our children in ways that are truly helpful is part of the process of raising resilient youngsters.

Resilience embraces the ability of a child to deal more effectively with stress and pressure. It means that he will be able to cope with everyday challenges and bounce back from disappointments, adversity and trauma. It means that he will develop clear and realistic goals, solve problems, relate comfortably with others, and treat himself and others with respect.

We will present ideas of how to build our children, instead of “fixing them,” later in this book.

THE ESSENTIALS

VALIDATION

Show respect for how others are feeling.

A young man related...

My Bubby was a Rebbitzin for many years. Every Shabbos, and especially Yomim Tovim, her home was bustling with guests. She is older now and has been a widow for almost two decades. Yom Tov is especially difficult. When I called before Yom Tov, she would invariably tell me how difficult things were.

My response was to encourage her: “Bubby, you’re going to be with your children and grandchildren! And, we are so happy to spend the Yom Tov with you! You’ll see your grandchildren’s growth and it will be great!”

She would always answer, “Yes, it will be nice!” and that was the end of it.

When I learned about the importance of validating someone’s experience, I changed my response. I began to try to empathize with her feelings. When she told me how hard Yom Tov was going to be, she sadly - but appreciatively - responded, “You know, only you understand!”

Imagine that someone was very upset about what was going on at work. So, she calls a friend and tells her the whole story. The friend then responds, “I don’t know what your problem is! Your boss is 100% correct!” You can be sure that the caller will regret having shared her

feelings. Next time, she'll think twice before pouring out her heart to that particular friend.

When a child tells us the sadness, anger, frustration, etc., he is feeling and we react by downplaying it, the child might likely repress his feelings -- at least from us. If he comes home angry from a basketball game, saying that "everyone" was fouling him and "no one" cared, many of us might say, "Don't let it bother you! You played really well and you won!" Unfortunately, despite our best intentions, we have just made the child feel worse, not better.

True, we do this out of love and a desire to shield them from problems and challenges. We believe that our response is appropriate. But, we need to respect the child's experience. It would be preferable to listen empathically and allow the child to feel heard. He must see that his experience and his feelings are validated by us, no less than what we, as adults, like to see happen in our own relationships.

We are often tempted to say that children are small and their problems are proportionately small. When we do so, we are really saying that their problems are trivial. Yes, it might seem that not being called on in class, not doing as well as hoped on a test, and getting a B on an otherwise straight A report card seem pretty trivial when compared the kinds of problems we adults have to deal with. However, just imagine how we would feel if someone marginalized that which bothers us, dismissing it with a wave of the hand and telling us how our problems are insignificant when compared to the "real" challenges of life.

LISTENING

One of the most important practices of *any* relationship is empathetic, non-judgmental listening. This is especially true as regards to children, who often feel that they are not understood and that their opinions are discounted.⁸

When a child approaches with a question or comment, try, if possible, to stop what you are doing. Look at the child. Listen attentively. If you cannot take the time to do so right now, then promise her a time when you can do it. Explain that now is not a good time.

Of course, this is not to say that children don't use questions simply in order to gain their parents' attention. If he keeps asking the same question over and over again, it might be useful, after already having answered the question the first time, to ask him, "What did I just say?" As he responds to you, correct any wrong notions. Then, praise him for listening and learning.

Why Listening to Children Is Important

To a child, an attentive ear is more important than a parent's advice. Listening to our children shows them we're interested in them. Research has shown that a major difference between strong and troubled

⁸Rabbi Dr A.J. Twersky often quotes a classic comic depicting a family ordering their dinner at a restaurant. When the waitress asks the child what she would like to order the child replies, "A frank, french fries, and a coke". The mother immediately interjects and says to the waitress, "She'll have a baked potato and steamed vegetables." Without even turning towards the mother, the waitress asks the girl, "Would you like mustard or ketchup on your hot dog." After the waitress walks away, the young girl looks at her stunned mother and says, "You see Mommy, she thinks I'm real."

families is the amount of interest that family members show in each others' lives. The more interest shown, the stronger the family.

Many studies have found that simple steps, such as families eating dinner together, have a profound impact on the child's development this includes increased grades in school and greatly reduced involvement in drugs and alcohol⁹.

You don't need a lot of time to do this. Take just a few minutes a day to ask children about their interests, their activities, their friends, and how they are changing and growing. This can go a long way toward making them feel appreciated and valued. Check in with your children daily or at least several times a week. Try doing so while you're preparing dinner, at mealtime or at bedtime.

From our perspective, children's behavior can often seem to be irrational and unproductive. If you ask him to explain the reasons for his behavior, and really listen to what he is telling you, you may discover that the behavior is actually quite rational and productive.

A head counselor at a summer camp relates:

We used to take the campers on trips three times per summer. On the morning of the third trip, the keys to the van could not be found. A ninety-minute search ensued, but to no avail. Our excursion to the amusement park was canceled.

Later in the day, the missing keys were found. They were hidden in the cubby of a boy named Dovid, a seventeen-year-old camper.

⁹This led to the "Parents. The anti-Drug" campaign, urging more active involvement and listening by parents.

Dovid suffered from a certain syndrome that caused distinctive facial features, a very short and stocky stature, and a speech impediment. He was generally well-behaved and compliant kid, popular with others. As far as I knew of this young man, this behavior was out of character.

I called him to my office. After telling him how disappointed I was with his actions, I made sure he understood that, by hiding the keys, he had spoiled a much-anticipated outing for his friends. I confronted him with a barrage of guilt and disappointment.

Only after this onslaught did I ask WHY he had done this.

With eyes cast downward, he told me, "I had to."

"I am the oldest kid at camp . . . and the shortest. Every time we go to the amusement park, the lady doesn't let me go on the rides. 'You're not tall enough!' she tells me."

"Even some of the ten year olds are allowed on the rides! But I'm always told 'no.' It's so embarrassing! I just couldn't go through that again!"

"So I hid the keys. I'm sorry."

I learned much that day. I learned to listen. From my perspective, Dovid's behavior was purposeless. But from his perspective, it had a real purpose. Not only was it productive, but it was successful.

Listening to Understand

It is not uncommon that angry words pass between parent and child. Often, it could be prevented.

Try to understand what your children are trying to say and what they are feeling. To do this, you must listen. And, you must talk.

Working problems out requires asking questions, letting children know how you feel, and trying to understand what they are feeling.

Listening means more than hearing the words someone speaks. It includes actually *thinking* about the things one hears.

Sometimes you listen best when you try to notice the things that are *not* said. Young children, especially, often cannot say what they mean, even when it comes to basic needs. It is not only a matter of articulation, but of not knowing their own feelings well enough. They often do not even know what it is that is making them angry or sad.

Watch your children as they talk. What you see can help tell you how they feel.

If you do not understand what your child is trying to say, ask a few questions. Ask them carefully. Make sure your children know that you are concerned, not angry. If your voice is harsh or if you speak hurriedly, children may feel you do not care.

Make sure you give your children enough time to speak. Do not rush them. When you let children take their time, you are telling them that you respect their feelings. To make sure you have understood, repeat the feelings your children have expressed: “I know that you are angry because we can’t visit grandma.” “You feel left out when your brothers go to their friend’s house, don’t you?”

Words like these tell your children that you understand.

- **Initially, ACCEPT what the child says WITHOUT judging the content.**

Child: “I don’t want to go to Bubby’s house.”

Bad: “No way! You’re going to Bubby’s house even if I have to drag you, etc., etc.”

Good: “You would rather stay home than go to Bubby?”

➤ Listen for the feelings behind the words:

Child: “All Bubby ever does is talk about how well my cousins are doing in yeshiva.”

Bad: “If you really loved your Bubby, you would be willing to go, etc.”

Good: “It sounds like you’re a little embarrassed that you don’t learn as well.

Maybe you could tell her about your little league.”

➤ Reflect back what you hear the child saying and feeling:

Child: “Sometimes I think that Bubby likes my cousins better than she likes me.”

Bad: “That’s ridiculous! What an awful thing to say! She buys you presents all the time etc., etc.”

Good: “It sounds like you’d like to have a better relationship with Bubby... .”

QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION

Let Empathy Be Your Guide.

Empathy is the ability to identify with feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of others. Try to take the time not just to understand, but to experience your children's perspective. It's a key ingredient to being helpful.

Empathy is an important component of emotional intelligence; it facilitates communication. Ask yourself: "Do I speak and act in ways that is likely that my children will relate to what I'm saying? Is this the best way for them to learn from me?" Think about the way you speak to your child. Ask yourself, "Is this the way that I would want someone to be speaking to *me*?"

When parents consider these questions, they are more likely to assume a helping rather than a fixing posture. They are less likely to lecture and more likely to actually *teach*.

For example, if a child is struggling in school, many parents will insist, "Try harder" and "Put in more effort." This is generally not successful. For, children usually experience "Try harder" as accusatory and judgmental.

Adults who are having difficulty with a task would not appreciate being told, "Just try harder!" Why should they then think that children are any different?

Try instead, "I can see that you are having trouble with your schoolwork. Maybe we can figure out together what would help to make it easier."

Empathy is the place to start. One can then better help children locate areas of competence, develop problem-solving skills, responsibility, compassion, and a social conscience. It facilitates communication that they can actually hear. And, it sends the message that we are listening to, and actually understand, their opinions.

Having empathy does not mean that we are supposed to agree with everything our children think, believe, and do. It only means that we acknowledge what they are saying.

Bite Your Tongue, Watch, And Listen.

Too often, we jump at every opportunity to tell our children what to do. Instead, we should remember to watch and listen, for it demonstrates that we are attempting to appreciate the world through their eyes. Simply being present and supportive is often the most helpful thing we can do. Too much advice, even if well-meaning, may easily be interpreted as criticism or may rob our children of developing self-reliance and resilience.

Let's say that a five-year-old is working with blocks, creating a building. The blocks keep falling over. What should be our response? To rush in and build the thing for him? To chastise, "You're just not being careful!" "You're always rushing through things!"?

All of us realize that it would be far better to tell him, "It's not so easy getting blocks to stay up, isn't it? Do you think you could think up some way of doing it better?" Of course, we all recognize that by speaking this way, rather than as before, we're letting the child know that we

appreciate that the task is difficult. We then help him realize that other possible solutions exist, for him to consider.

Understand Before You Respond.

Sometimes our children don't want our help. They perceive it as an intrusion into their lives, an indication that we don't trust in their abilities. Or, it could just be that, from their perspective, the help we're offering bears no relation to the problem.

Then, when our attempts are met with anger or rejection, we become annoyed. We'll then either withdraw from them or tell them once again what to do, this time more forcefully.

Instead, if we were to understand what they are experiencing, we could say instead, "Is there anyway I can be of help?" or "If you need me, I am here." or "If I'm misunderstanding what you said, please let me know."

Our children are more likely to approach us for guidance and support when we create an atmosphere where they feel that we are genuinely interested in understanding their point of view. Like anyone else, they don't like hear others coming across as telling them what to do.

And how are we to create this atmosphere? We must think before we act. And, we must understand before we respond.

Compliment and Be Patient. Opportunities Will Present Themselves.

We all know someone who, when looking back on his childhood, has the feeling that he grew up in a home where his parents seemed more like his prosecuting attorneys than his defense attorneys. "They always

seemed to focus on what I did wrong and almost never mentioned what I did right.”

How, as parents, could we avoid our children’s looking back on their childhood in a similar way?

One way is to avoid being the type of parent who seeks to help rather than “fix.” Experience shows that the “helper,” rather than the “fixer,” are more likely to focus on offering realistic positive feedback and encouragement.

When the emphasis is on fixing, even well-intentioned parents can easily fall into a pattern of communicating what has been done incorrectly rather than on emphasizing their children’s accomplishments.

Let’s look at the common scenario of what happens when children are learning how to put their toys away. Invariably, one or two toys will remain on the floor. A positive approach would be to say, “You did such a great job putting away so many toys! You know, if it’s okay with you, I’d like to put these last two away!” It’s no different than the way we should react to a child’s spelling having improved from 50% to 70% on a test. Should we focus on the 30% that were spelled wrong? Or, should we comment on the improvement?

REALITY

One of the most important rules to bear in mind regarding all interpersonal relationship is: **People do not see reality as it is -- only as they perceive it!**

Just because something is not true doesn't take away from the fact that it still might be someone else's reality.¹⁰ Especially with children, one must be aware not only of their feelings, but how they perceive that the authority figure (parent, teacher, etc) feels towards him. Remember, think about how the child is seeing the situation. We might think that his perceptions are distorted. But, they compose his reality.

When Rav Pam was an elementary school Rebbe, the mother of one of his students told him that her son says that Rav Pam hates him. Needless to say, the Rav was shocked. Of course, he loved all of his students and worked hard to convey it. Why would this boy think he hated him? The mother continued, "He said you call on the other boys in the class more than you call on him."

Rav Pam later related that from the incident he had an answer to a question that had long bothered him. The Torah states that Hashem saw that Leah was hated and so He 'opened her womb' and granted her children. What does it mean that Leah was hated? Is it conceivable that Yaakov Avinu, our holy patriarch, hated anyone? Surely not his righteous wife Leah! The answer is that the "hatred" did not reflect the way that Yaakov truly felt, but, still, it was what Leah perceived. Because Yaakov loved Rochel more than he loved her, she felt disdained.

¹⁰ *"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."* - Albert Einstein
"Everything you see or hear or experience in any way at all is specific to you. You create a universe by perceiving it, so everything in the universe you perceive is specific to you."
- Douglas Adams

Rav Pam noted that although he loved all his students - including that student -- the bottom line was that this boy FELT hated, because of his perception that Rebbe called on other boys more than he called on him.

There is an important difference between discounting a child's logic and discounting a child's emotions. Our emotions connect with our inner self. When a child is told that he doesn't feel the way he claims to feel, or is told that he should not feel the way he feels, he may begin to wonder what is wrong with him. Why does he "feel" inappropriately?

Although children often need to be educated about showing their emotions appropriately, we cannot do so by negating their emotions. We can move a child towards change and maturity only when we are understanding and empathetic first.

TO A CHILD, LOVE IS SPELLED T-I-M-E

It is not an exaggeration to say that our generation is probably far busier than any before.

Given the speed of our lives and its pressures, we often wonder, "How can we afford to spend time with our children?" We know as well the answer: "How can we afford not to?" We also know the compromise position: "Quality time."

Every child deserves that his parents devote a certain amount of unhindered and undisturbed time to him, on an ongoing basis. This means not merely schoolwork and chores, but enjoying one another.

The child's being able to direct the conversation and the choosing of a special place are especially meaningful. The goal is not simply for the

sake of enjoying each other, but also to get to know one another more intimately.

A mechanech was trying to get a group of chassidishe parents to understand how important this concept is. They were skeptical of the idea that they can have an effect on their children by spending a small amount of quality time with each one. In a family of multiple children, they did not believe they could have much effect.

The mechanech asked them to describe their relationship with their Rebbe. They explained that they went into the Rebbe every second or third month. Although the time spent with him at these intervals amounted to no more than a few minutes, they nevertheless felt a tremendous sense of closeness, care, and love.

They said that they came away feeling that their Rebbe knew so much about them! They marveled at the care and concern he showed each of them. This, despite the fact that the Rebbe has thousands of Chassidim, not just themselves.

In other words, quality over quantity!

A Rebbe/teacher who is able to spend time with a student, even three minutes at recess once every other month, will also see great benefit.¹¹

¹¹ A great counselor in camp will also make sure to have a private conversation with each of his/her campers once or twice a summer. I still recall such conversations that I (DS) had with counselors many years ago.

“In the faint light of the attic, an old man, tall and stooped, bent his great frame and made his way to a stack of boxes that sat near one of the little half-windows. Brushing aside a wisp of cobwebs, he tilted the top box toward the light and began to carefully lift an old worn out journal from the box.

“Hunched over to keep from bumping his head on the rafters, the old man stepped to the wooden stairway and made his descent, then headed down a carpeted stairway that led to the den.

“Opening a glass cabinet door, he reached in and pulled out an old business journal. Turning, he sat down at his desk and placed the two journals beside each other. His was leather-bound and engraved neatly with his name in gold, while the old worn out journal was his son’s. His son’s name, “Jimmy”, had been nearly scuffed from its surface. He ran a long skinny finger over the letters, as though he could restore what had been worn away with time and use.

As he opened his journal, the old man’s eyes fell upon an inscription that stood out because it was so brief in comparison to other days. In his own neat handwriting were these words:

“Wasted the whole day fishing with Jimmy. Didn’t catch a thing”

With a deep sigh and a shaking hand, he took Jimmy’s journal and found the boy’s entry for the same day, June 4. Large scrawling letters, pressed deeply into the paper, read:

“Went fishing with dad. Best day of my life.”

[Excerpted from ‘To a Child Love is Spelled T-I-M-E: What a Child Really Needs From You’

by Mac Anderson and Lance Wubbels.]

THE TOOL BOX: DO'S

PRAISE

The deepest urge in human nature is the desire to be important. Everybody is hungry for appreciation words. Praise is food for soul and self-esteem.

Praise makes us feel good. When we feel good, we do good. And when we do good, we feel good. Words of praise set a wonderful cycle into motion which keeps producing good results. Praise by gestures also produces same effects as verbal praise does.

Praise opens our mind and heart, lowers the resistance and sets us into acceptance mode. We're naturally more biased towards those who praise us. They make us feel better. We are therefore more receptive to what they have to say.

As always, children are no different.

Hearing positive words of encouragement and praise make a child feel more important. He walks on air... He's in listening mode for whatever you say.

Keep this in mind, if your goal is to have him continue to do good things.

When you praise him for the good things he does, he is more likely to do good things again. It helps him know good things about himself. And this is the first step towards developing those good things.

To a child, seeing a parent's appreciation is invaluable. If they see no interest and approval in the things they do right, it is as if they are being encouraged and conditioned to not do anything right.

Nothing kills ambitions like harsh criticism. Replace criticism with appreciation. When criticism is minimized and praise is emphasized, the good things children do will be reinforced and the poorer things will eliminate.

Almost all of us are conditioned to be quick to criticize and slow and reluctant to praise. Praising seems a burdensome task. Even if we notice good things about others, we avoid mentioning it to them. Perhaps this is because we feel that we are "better," smarter, and sharper when we criticize.

This impulse is universal and ubiquitous. Expect that whenever your child steps out of home, he will encounter a whole world out there, just waiting to let him know *exactly* what is wrong with him. This is why, especially why, it is our responsibility to tell him exactly what is *right* about him.

We spoke earlier of the "emotional bank account." Praise is one of the best ways to make a deposit.

The deposits that are most valuable are the ones that the recipient is not getting from the rest of the world. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to criticism. This sensitivity usually lasts for much of adolescence.

Praiseworthy Praise. Avoid giving praise with a sting. This sort of praise starts off well but ends with an implied criticism that wipes away the

positive comment. For example, “Binyamin, you made your bed very nicely. It’s a shame you don’t do it everyday.” Or, “Yehuda, you *finally* did well on a test, that’s great.” A child intuitively rejects the subtle jab and may say to themselves לא עוקצם ולא דורבשם (not the honey and not the stinger), I would rather not get the praise altogether.

Catch a child doing something right. We are often so quick to notice a problem. We should aim to balance this tendency by creating opportunities to accentuate the successes¹². Highlighting the positive in this way is rewarding for the child and adult.

THE PERILS OF PRAISE

As important as praise might be, it can also be deleterious when overused or misapplied. This is because children who are praised constantly, or who are praised without regard to whether the behavior was truly deserving of praise, will often find themselves unable to perform without being showered with praise. Also, when a child senses that the praise is not genuine, the praise may cause resentment and be experienced as sarcasm.

Children are very sensitive to, and aware of, hypocrisy. Fakeness turns children off in a very powerful manner.

Praise conveys your values to your children and sets expectations for them. A lack of praise conveys the message that you don’t believe in them. Reasonable praise statements, like “good thinker,” “hard worker,”

¹² This is an important principle to bear in mind when constructing a behavioral chart with a child. At least one category that is being monitored should be an area of competence for the child.

“smart,” “creative,” “strong,” “kind,” and “sensitive,” set high expectations that are within children’s reach. Words like “perfect,” “the best,” “most beautiful,” and “brilliant” set impossible expectations. Children internalize those expectations, and the expectations become pressures when children find they can’t achieve those high and impossible goals¹³.

Similarly, praise of intrinsic qualities, or only responding to success as opposed to the effort in meeting challenges, may unwittingly reinforce a pattern of avoiding challenges.

One caution: A teacher cannot be both artificial and effective. Nothing defeats him more than phoniness. No one can fake respect and care and not be detected. Skill divorced from genuineness is soon unmasked. In teacher-child relations there is no alternative to congruence. False praise leads to feelings of “badness” rather than its intended goal.

ONE-SENTENCE INTERVENTIONS

Jim Fay, founder of the Love and Logic Program strongly encourages the following technique:

Use **one-sentence interventions**. For example, a teacher might catch a student at an appropriate moment (recess, etc.) and nonchalantly say, “I’ve noticed that you really love to ski.” Noticing the special interests and strengths of a student sends a very poignant message: “You are an interesting and worthwhile person.” It also tells the child that the

¹³ This way of thinking is often found in children (and adults) who are perfectionistic or highly critical of themselves or others and setting an all or nothing attitude.

teacher recognizes that he has a life beyond the classroom and that the child is not ‘just’ a student.

At times, a brief conversation should follow a one-sentence intervention. The teacher must remember to keep it brief. This is not an attempt to be effusive. Avoid adding judgments, “That’s great!” or “How wonderful!” The purpose of the one sentence intervention is simply to notice what is unique about a student, not to offer praise for it.

For many students, it is particularly appropriate to note strengths and interests not academic or school related.

Following is an example of some one-sentence interventions:

“I’ve noticed that you take good care of your friends.”

“I see you just got new sneakers.”

“I noticed that you like super snacks.”

“I noticed that you can really hit a ball far.”

“I noticed that you stopped wearing your watch at recess.”

I remember visiting a Rebbe in an out of town community some years ago. On Motzei Shabbos, he took me to watch his yeshiva’s basketball team play against another school. Many of his students were on the team.

He admitted that he felt very uncomfortable going to the game, which was often a social scene, and didn’t plan on stay more than a few minutes. However, he knew that the message his talmidim would get from his showing an interest in something that was important and valuable to them was worth more than twenty speeches telling them how much he cared.

I was able to see how their faces lit up when they saw him walk in and they all came over to say, “Hi.”

This same Rebbe told me that when his ‘guys’ let him know they are anxious about an upcoming drivers’ test or state exam, he would call them later that day to ask them how it went.

It’s no wonder that his students adore him and will perform better for him than for most of their teachers.

POSITIVE NOTICING

“No one cares how much you know, until they know much you care!”

Educators can use specific positive noticing related to school-work or social behaviors in school:

“I noticed that when you tell a story you can describe a scene so clearly and even imagine the sounds in that place. How did you learn that?”

“I noticed that at recess you can run and run and never seem to lose energy. How do you have so much energy?”

“I noticed that when Baruch was upset you went over to him to talk to him. How did you learn how to be such a good friend?”

Noticing specific behaviors and asking a student to tell you how he learned a behavior is a powerful way to help children recognize their own strengths. Often a student will not know what to answer. But it still helped the child realize and think about a skill they demonstrated.

As we suggested earlier, educators should avoid excessive praise when using these techniques. The child may see it as unfounded or exaggerated.

TEACHING COMMUNICATION

All of us, especially children (but not excluding adults, by any means!), could use a great deal of assistance in consciously realizing what messages we are sending. “When you didn’t pick that boy to play on your team, what message do you think you were sending him? What message were you sending to everyone else who knows about it?” “When you fouled that boy during the basketball game, what message do you think you were sending?”

Some phrases are repeated so often and are so non-specific that the listener has long ago become desensitized to them. “No Loshon Hora!” is often one example. Consider what would happen if we convey that very same message by saying instead, “When you speak Loshon Hora, what do you think that does to someone else?”

I (YS) conduct social skills groups. When the topic of *loshon hora* comes up, of course, the girls are quick to say that they surely don’t speak loshon hora! After all, it’s so terrible! However, upon discussing it with them more fully, they soon realize that as recently as the day before, they had indeed been speaking *loshon hora*.

I have no doubt they were sincere when telling me that surely don’t speak *lashon hora*. What made the difference in their being able to realize it only after we discussed it? For one thing, it had to do with the way we talked about it.

Pasukim, halacha, ma'amarei Chazal, and stories can penetrate more deeply when they are presented as something more than mere dry words. But, simply relating the story is not enough. It's important to discuss what was going on there. Ask about the experience, not just the details. Rabbi Akiva Eiger spilled the wine so that the guest who had spilled wine wouldn't be embarrassed. Very nice. Now, discuss: "What would this guest have felt like, had he not done this?" "What message was Rabbi Akiva Eiger sending?"

After hearing the above story, one "literal child" asked, "So does that mean that if I see someone doing something embarrassing I should copy him so that he isn't embarrassed?"

Another example is the classic "Don't make a *Chillul Hashem!* Make a *Kiddush Hashem*" speech every time the class goes on an excursion. Does anything really register with the kids? Discuss instead the experience: "What does that mean, to make a *Chillul Hashem*?" "What is the message we communicate by representing Judaism in such a way?"

Communication has two purposes: The *content* of what I am communicating and the *fact* that we are communicating. Sharing the communication is itself a gift. It establishes a connection, even though we often take it for granted. It is sort of like a Shmeni Atzeres of the relationship. (One aspect of the Shmeni Atzeres celebration is that it emphasizes the "being together," rather than the specific communication. It's about being connected. It's the greatest communication, that of love.)

Many parents wonder why their children appear so non-communicative. The answer may often be found by the parents' looking into their mirror. Are they themselves under-communicators: "How was

your day?” “Fine” responders? Or, perhaps over-communicators (intrusive or over responders)?

When we as parents communicate effectively, we set a standard and model how to do it right.

TELL YOUR CHILDREN THAT YOU LOVE THEM!

It may sound simple and obvious, but to many it's not. We think our children know how we feel about them. But if we don't tell them, they don't know. In fact, in some situations, children may truly believe that they are a source of pain and aggravation. They believe that their parents truly resent having them around.

As we said earlier, for many of us, the overwhelming majority of the comments we make to our children are negative or condemning. We must be vigilant to ensure not only to give positive messages but also to give global messages about how much they mean to us.

Even when we think that someone knows the content of the communication, just communicating is itself a gift. This is wonderfully described by Rabbi Akiva (Avos 3:14) that **חביב אדם שנברא בצלם חבה** *beloved is humanity that it is created in G-d's image*, but **חבה יתירה נודעת להם**..., *a greater love is that they were informed of this fact*. This idea is so essential that each new statement of this mishna is followed by **חבה יתירה נודעת להם** being repeated again. Certainly, this highlights the point for Yisrael and the Torah. The fact that something is true does not remove the importance of expressing it. Sharing is itself is a gift.

A Rabbi in Long Island was approached by a young man to have kaddish recited for his recently departed father. The young man made it clear that he would not be saying the kaddish himself but would pay for the Rabbi to arrange for someone else to say kaddish on his deceased father's behalf.

Some time passed and the young man suddenly began showing up in shul and reciting kaddish himself. The Rabbi asked the young fellow what had changed. He sighed and told the Rabbi the following story:

“When I was growing up, my father never showed me any warmth or affection. He was always cold and uninvolved. However, there was one incident that epitomized to me just how aloof my father was. When I was in fifth grade, we had a paper airplane contest in school and I worked hard to make a great airplane. When it was finished I wrote DAD on it with a bold blue marker. The plane won First Prize.

When I came home I was really excited. I ran over to my dad, gave him the plane and told him I won. To my dismay, he showed no reaction. Without saying a word or even cracking a smile, he took the plane and shoved it in his drawer. That incident concretized what I already knew, i.e. that my father didn't care about me. I knew then that he didn't love me.

“When he passed away, I just could not bring myself to say kaddish for him. I knew that I had an obligation so I came to you to arrange for the kaddish to be said by someone else. This way kaddish would be said for my father's soul but I wouldn't have to bear the pain of saying it.

“Yesterday, I went downtown to his office to clean out his desk. His secretary let me into the room and I immediately began clearing away his things. When I opened his top drawer I was shocked to find the paper airplane that I made in fifth grade. I picked it up and held it. I stared at it. When I eyed the word DAD written in blue, a lump formed in my throat. At that moment, his secretary walked into the room and said to me, “Your father used to stare intently at that plane with the exact same misty-eyed look you have now. I

always wondered what was so special about that plane.” I wanted to answer her but I couldn’t speak.

“I realized that my dad cared about me all along, but he was never able to express it. He didn’t show his emotions and I had no way of knowing how he felt. But now I understand that he always loved me. So today I came to say kaddish for my dad.”

An educator related: There was a couple who attended a parenting workshop at which the lecturer stressed the importance of parent’s telling their children that they love them and how much they mean to them. The father was very skeptical and resistant. His wife assured him that if he did it one time she would not bother him about it again. The father waited for a quiet relaxed moment and told his twelve year old son, “You know, I don’t know if I get a chance to tell you this, but I really love you and am proud of you...” The boy got up and ran out of the room. He ran to his mother almost hysterical and cried, “What’s the matter with Totty? Is he dying?”

Quality time means that you are doing nothing else at that time, other than talking to your child. MAKE EYE CONTACT. Show him respect and value. The message will come across.

Explain Your Point of View Calmly

Parents should try to respect their children’s feelings. And children need to understand that parents have a right to their own feelings, too. There’s no rule saying that parents have to like everything their children

do. And there's no reason why you should not be upset by some of the things they say.

The issue is: how will you convey that displeasure.

Yes; tell them how you feel and how what they have done affects you. But try to do so without anger. Not only will you be working at resolving the immediate issue, but, by having them know how you feel, you are helping them begin to understand how their actions affect others.

Working Things Out

After you have talked with your children about a problem, work with them as to how to solve it. For instance, present them with a choice they must make between two options. Tell the fussy three-year-old, "What will it be, juice or milk?" For a slightly older child who does not pick up her clothes, "Pick up the clothes or stay indoors for the rest of the afternoon. Your choice." This helps them to become more responsible and, by making it their choice, you are demonstrating respect for their feelings.

The way you interact with the child will greatly affect the outcome of that interaction, including the degree to which the child will learn new information. From his perspective, the difference between a message of acceptance vs. rejection is the difference between whether he sees the relationship as fatal or faithful.

Children must be allowed to trust their inner reality and not be afraid of it. If they are afraid of their emotions, they will begin to feel that there is something wrong with them. Emotions are natural. How *they* react to them depends on how *we* react to them.

This is why it so important to not negate the feelings of children. **Sanity depends on trusting one's own inner reality. Only if a child feels right can he think right!**¹⁴ We often undermine children's emotions and thoughts without meaning to or realizing it. This stifles their development and their inner-trust of themselves.

The seminal book by Mazelish and Ferber aptly titled "How To Talk So Children Will Listen; How To Listen So Children Will Talk" contains an integral lesson within its title. The premise is that we must truly listen to our children in order for them to want to communicate with us. This does not mean that we must establish that they are always right or justify what they do, but to understand that their emotions are real!

Example: *Little Mordechai begs his Mother to buy him a certain toy. Mother responds, "Nah, you don't want it; it will break so quickly. It's a silly toy. Come on!" The parent leaves the store thinking, "Great, the child doesn't want the toy anymore. I showed him how silly it is." The truth is the child still wants it but he realized he must stifle it.*¹⁵

Example: *Reuven is crestfallen about the one "B" he got on his report card (the rest are "A's"). We respond, "Oh come on, it's a great report card!" But the child may really be upset about it.*

MINIMIZE YOUR WORDS

Teachers should describe what is making them upset in the least amount of words. If we give a lecture, especially when we are upset, we can easily launch into a diatribe and say things we will later regret. Say

¹⁴ Ginott, Haim; Between Teacher and Child

¹⁵ It's the old motherly adage, "I'm cold so you should put on a sweater."

only what you must at that moment. Within a short time of a harsh lecture a child will go into 'automatic mode' and only listen haphazardly. Remember- כל המוסיף גורע.

CHOICES AND CONTROL

Making intelligent decisions is one of life's most important skills. How do we help children attain that skill?

Children often become so accustomed to listening to the direction of teachers and parents that they never develop the integral ability to think for themselves. Those who are granted the opportunity to make decisions, rather than have the decisions made for them, learn decision-making and develop into more resilient and optimistic adults.

Being confident and proactive is vital to maintaining pace in a society as unstable and volatile as our own.

Children who are not granted the ability to make decisions do not learn how to solve problems or how to think for themselves. When faced with situations where decision are called for, they are often unsure of themselves and bound to second-guess themselves.

Parents and teachers often feel that by allowing their children to make decisions and providing them with choices, they are surrendering their parental/adult control. Truthfully however, allowing children to make choices is not a forfeiture of control, but a shift of control.

Control is a curious thing. The more we give away, the more we gain. Parents who attempt to take all the control end up losing the control they sought to begin with. When a parent/teacher gives a child a choice,

he/she is essentially gaining control because he/she has dictated the choices.

Study: Hawthorne Effect

An electric company did a study: Are people more productive in more light or less light? Their conclusion was less light was better.

A few years later they did the same study in a different part of company. Their conclusion was that more light was better.

After a while, they finally concluded that level of light was irrelevant. What mattered was if they were allowed to offer their own opinions and were made to feel like they were important contributors to the success of the company.

Whenever we give choices, it is important that we are comfortable with both options. If one of them makes us slightly more uncomfortable, our child's radar will detect it. Guaranteed: That's the one he will be sure to go for.

This does not mean that every choice presented to the child is a bona fide choice. A teacher's telling the pupil that he has the "choice" either to do his work or be sent to the principal's office, is not a real choice, as one of the options is clearly distasteful. All the teacher has done is rephrased a threat.

A better approach would be to tell the pupil that he may do the first few examples in the book or the last few. "The choice is yours."

True choices require that a child think for himself and weigh two alternate outcomes. One choice might clearly be a poor one. But, we must be ready to allow the child to make that poor choice and allow him to

suffer the consequence of that decision. It won't be for naught. Rather, it will be an invaluable lesson.

Allowing them these choices sends the covert message: "The all-powerful and wise adult in your life trusts your ability to make a decision!"

How much control should we give children? Psychologist Sylvia Rimm, PhD. notes that people naturally compare the amount of control they have in a relationship with the amount of control that they used to have, as opposed to the amount that they feel they actually *should* have.

We resent it when control that we are used to having is cut back. In fact, we prefer to see that our level of control is *increasing* with time, not even that it remains static.

This is highly relevant when raising children. Many parents grant almost unlimited freedom to children in their toddler years. Then, as the child reaches adolescence, and the consequence of total autonomy gets a little scarier, they try to "pull back the reins." The stage has now been set for the infamous battles of the teenage years.

Parents who maintain a level of control even from the toddler years, but grant increasing control as their children mature, generally find that they have offspring who are less likely to rebel.

Another strategy is to empower the child by involving him in the decision-making process, especially when the decisions whose outcome will affect him. This is particularly effective with adolescents who resent being 'bossed around.' When they feel that they have a partnership in the rules, the desire to resist them is mitigated.

When it comes to major issues, however, control need not and *should not* be ceded. Needless to say, this especially applies to situations that are potentially dangerous: “Would you like to put down that candle? Or, would you prefer to burn your finger?”

As we mentioned earlier, regarding the teacher’s “Do you want to do the assignment or do you prefer being sent to the principal?” question, choices should not be presented as threats. When your voice is angry and condescending, or when one of the “choices” is nothing more than a warning, the benefits of the child’s making a personal decision is lost.

Jim Fay, founder of Love and Logic offers the following five rules as helpful guidelines to bear in mind when giving children choices:

1. Select choices that you are happy with.
2. Allow the child to live with the decisions he/she makes.
3. Never give choices when a child is in potential danger.
4. Only give choices when you are willing to make a choice if the child does not choose within five seconds.
5. Offer choices in a calm, non-obtrusive manner.

Offer choices; don’t issue commands. When children refuse to listen, it is often because they feel that they have no control. Granting even a small amount of control can often go a long way.

<p>The family was sitting around the table for supper, all except for Dovid who was being his usual obstinate self. When his Mother asked</p>

Dovid to join them at the table he responded with an emphatic and defiant “No” and continued playing by himself.

Exasperated, Dovid’s mother felt herself becoming increasingly angry. As she was about to let fly with her, “You get over here this minute or else...” she stopped herself and took a deep breath. “Dovid”, she said sweetly, “which chair would you like to sit on? Next to me or next to Rochel?” To her great relief, Dovid immediately got up and selected the chair right next to her.

The Mother later explained, “I thought about what happened and I decided to try the same approach again later. The next morning, instead of ordering him to drink his milk, I asked Dovid if he wanted plain milk or chocolate milk. Since the chocolate milk was diluted with milk anyway it didn’t make much of a difference, but he had the prerogative.

“To say that giving choices transformed Dovid into a model child would be inaccurate. However, when I do give him a choice, whether it’s picking which book to read or which toy to play with, he is far more cooperative.”

Examples of Choices

- *We must have a test next week. On what day would you like to have it, Tuesday or Wednesday?*
- *Please do twenty problems from page 26. You can choose to do the even ones or the odd ones, whichever you prefer.*
- *Would you like to wear your coat or carry it?*
- *Are you going to clean the garage or mow the lawn this week?*

- *Will you have these chores done tomorrow? Or do you need an extra day to get them finished?*
- *Are you having peas or carrots as your vegetable tonight?*
- *Are you going to bed now? Or would you like to wait 15 minutes?*
- *Are you going to put your pajamas on first or brush your teeth first?*
- *Will you be home at 10:00? Or do you need an extra half hour with your friends?*

Providing choice is even relevant in regards to the discipline process. We can ask the child what he can suggest to ensure that his negative behavior does not continue. When the child has a voice in the process he owns that much more.

“ENFORCEABLE STATEMENTS”

Children have an uncanny ability to getting us pulled into trying to control that which we really cannot.

We can avoid this trap by using enforceable statements. Enforceable statements tell children what WE will do or will allow, as opposed to trying to tell THEM what they have to do.

The benefits are that, when we can't get them to do as we say, we avoid looking like fools in the process. And, because we are sharing control with them, our children are much less likely to resist. For, they don't feel compelled to wrestle us for control of the situation.

In short, we avoid getting sucked into trying to control something that we practically can not.

Examples of Parental Enforceable Statements:

- I give treats to kids who protect their teeth by brushing.
- My car is leaving at 8 a.m.
- I'll listen as soon as your voice is as calm as mine.
- I'll take you guys the places you want to go in the car when I don't have to worry about fighting in the back seat.
- I'll do all of the things I do for you around here when I'm feeling respected.
- I give allowance to those who finish their chores. .
- I keep the toys I have to pick up. You can keep the ones you pick up.
- I'll be happy to buy you the clothes I feel are appropriate.
- I'll be happy to listen to you as soon as your father and I are finished talking.

Examples of Teacher Enforceable Statements

- "I will begin when everyone is quiet"
- "I listen to students who raise their hand and are called on to participate"
- "You may join us outside as soon as you complete your work"

COMMUNICATION & DISCIPLINE

It is obvious that discipline and consequences are an essential feature of effective communication and a critical component of parenting and education.

Discipline does not entail angry words. It does not have to mean hurt feelings. It does not have to mean physical punishment. It does not have to be a struggle, an argument, or a battle that someone must win. Discipline does not have to happen out of anger. Discipline means teaching children, caring about children, and trying to prevent problems before they happen. It means loving children and helping them grow into responsible adults.

Every educator knows that discipline is a necessary component of educating and raising children. However, there are some guiding principles to bear in mind that will help us be as effective as possible, and minimize the damage and resentment that often emerges after any discipline situation:

When we become irate and angry, children become very attentive. Most of us can easily recall an instance when a significant adult in our life lost his temper. Years later, we still remember the event. Why should it still be in our mind? Wasn't it over something trivial, a long time ago?

We recall it because our brains process emotional stimuli more intensely than they do non-emotional stimuli. Accordingly, they are more securely stored on our memory banks.

This is why any message or ideal conveyed with feeling, ardor, and passion, is longer remembered than if it is taught without feeling. If something is conveyed with passion – be it negative passion (e.g. anger) or passive passion (e.g. excitement), it is more potently processed.¹⁶

¹⁶ This is an important part of why *Torah sheba'al peh* must be taught from Rebbe to student. No book can convey the passion and ardor that a Rebbe/parent can. When one studies Torah they must see it as a vibrant living experience and not ancient discourse.

We must also remember that children are generally more focused than adults. At any given time, an adult is thinking about many different things -- even while seemingly engaged in only one focused activity. Children, however, have much less on their mind. They are therefore far more focused than the adult, as a general rule. They are also far more perceptive than we would like to believe. We often do not even realize the extent of the messages they are picking up.

TALK TO THE SITUATION NOT THE PERSONALITY OR CHARACTER!¹⁷

There is an obvious yet important difference between saying, “There’s a mess on the floor that must be cleaned up” versus “You slob; why are you always making messes. Go clean it up this second!”

At their best, educators address a SITUATION.

At their worst, educators judge a student’s character and personality.

Also, we can be far more effective when we describe our own feelings than when we define the child’s personality based on what occurred. “I am annoyed” and “I am appalled” are far more effective than “You are so careless” and “You are so irresponsible.”

FANTASY GRANTING

¹⁷ This is similar to the gemara’s derasha,

דכתיב: יתמו חטאים (תהלים ק"ד), מי כתיב חוטאים? חטאים כתיב!
(ברכות י"ע"א)

“sins should be destroyed from the world” as opposed to the sinners themselves...

We can grant in fantasy what cannot be granted in reality. “I wish I could listen to you right now but I can’t at the moment. Maybe you can ask me again in a few minutes, okay?” It tells the child that he was noticed, even though you can’t address his issues at the moment.

ACCEPTANCE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Disciplinary messages should always spare feelings; they should only seek to deescalate the conflict.

“I would like to finish my statement!” is far more effective than, “You are extremely rude and you are interrupting me!” (The second statement arouses resentment and increases tension)

RESPECT:

Try, always, to maintain and foster the child’s dignity and self-respect.

We sometimes rationalize that it might be a good idea to give the child a little jolt by embarrassing him. “Surely, that will send him the message, loud and clear.” No question about it, the embarrassed child will certainly find himself jolted. However, the resentment, anger, and damage left in its wake can have severe repercussions later on. This is especially true if this approach is used frequently.

FEELINGS:

As mentioned, it is critical that we recognize, and not negate, the emotions of children.

If we are telling a nervous child that he has nothing to worry about, we only compound his nervousness. In addition to his original fear, he will also become more anxious because he is being afraid when you told him not to be. He will add to his fearfulness, as he won't be able to hide this fear that he now believes is "unnecessary." (Nothing to fear but fear itself....)

When a child expresses a certain emotion it is best to acknowledge and respect the emotion. It is also helpful to discuss with him why he is anxious.

Our initial reaction is to negate the child's feeling in order to protect him. We believe that we are helping, mitigating his anxiety. Such efforts are actually counterproductive.

When a student conveys his fears about taking tests, the educator's most effective response is to say, "Tests can be scary, especially final exams." It may be easier to use a quick consolation: "It's not so terrible. If you have done your work, there is nothing to fear." However, such a statement would probably make the child even more anxious. His inner response will be: "If I fail the exam, the teacher will think I didn't do the work."

BREVITY:

The Gemara (Pesachim 3b) instructs that one should always teach in the shortest manner possible. If this is true regarding lessons, it is surely true when we need to chastise or rebuke. A classic comic depicts an adolescent boy sitting on his bed, with his mother standing in front of him

looking annoyed, and ready to lash out at him. His first words are, “If this is going to be a lecture, how long will it take?”

Nagging does not motivate!

A veteran educator suggested, “Talk like a reporter writes: headlines, main points, specific details. Look for brevity...Whenever possible, start at the end.”

If we really want to get our message across we should speak in words, not in sentences. Speak in a manner that is simple, direct, and specific.

If your goal is to have the child clean his room, simply say “Please clean your room.” You are far more likely to achieve success that way than if you would let fly with, “*Why is this room such a pigsty!?!? You know, I do your laundry, make you supper, drive you to gym. How could you be so ungrateful? Do you think you’re going to become a successful adult this way? It’s the same thing with schoolwork. You just don’t care! You think everything is coming to you. Well I got news for you; I had enough! I mean it!*”

The child will hear almost nothing; he will walk away with resentment and a headache. And, quite likely, the room will not be cleaned.

REFERENTIAL SPEAKING

In her book, How To Parent So Children Will Learn, Sylvia Rimm writes about a concept called “referential speaking.” It describes the conversation that takes place regarding a child, not necessarily in the child’s presence, but within his earshot. Specifically, it occurs between

parents, between parents and other relatives, between parents and teachers, and amongst teachers themselves, within the children's hearing, but as if he were not there and not able to listen.

The conversational topic is the child's activities, behaviors, and misbehaviors. These conversations sometimes have the effect of empowering them, but sometimes have the effect of causing serious problems and feelings of limitation.

As with praise, referential speaking can encourage children to have a realistic self-concept, may cause them to feel pressured, or may result in discouragement.

Rimm asserts that *all* parents, relatives, and teachers sometimes speak referentially, and it's not necessarily due to insensitivity or a lack of intelligence. **“Referential speaking is not all negative. Referential speaking about children can set intentional expectations that are positive and can provide a sense of positive control for them.”**

For example, you say to your spouse, “I notice that Ari is really persevering in his efforts to show initiative. He is really doing more than what is expected.” If Ari “happens” to be hearing this (let's say, from another room, and “happens” to have his ears peeled for what his parents are saying), he will be encouraged. He will feel that his perseverance and effort is being noticed and appreciated.

Referential speaking can also be harmful. **Referential speaking that makes children feel inadequate or incapable is *always* harmful.** Referential speaking that empowers children to manipulate adults is also harmful.

Referential speaking has a great deal of impact; it truly sets expectations. When you see the positive, tell someone. When you see the negative, limit it or ignore it. But, if you *must* talk about it, make sure to do so only when you are children nowhere near a thousand feet from the conversation.

Upon hearing mention of their names, children have extraordinary abilities to home-in. Rimm explains,

“Here’s another example from my personal experience: While I was writing about referential speaking for a previous book, I thought I’d better experiment with Sara, our youngest daughter....Sara didn’t know about the experiment, nor did my husband. He was sitting across from me at the kitchen table in conversation after our day at work. Sara was upstairs in her bedroom doing her homework. I knew that Sara could hear everything upstairs that we talked about in the kitchen. So as part of the conversation with my husband, I simply injected a bit of preplanned referential speaking. I said, ‘Sara’s been working so hard lately. She’s getting so much homework done.’ We continued our conversation. It wasn’t ten minutes before Sara came downstairs, saying in haste, ‘I just came down for a quick drink of water. I’m going right back up to do my homework. I’m really getting a lot done.’ The experiment worked, and I knew that our positive referential speaking inspired Sara’s continued hard work that evening.“

You can make a difference in a day by speaking referentially to another adult about your children. Just give a positive message about their efforts or behaviors. Make sure you’re honest and realistic. Your children are listening. Even when the doors are closed, they can hear through the walls. Even when we think they are not listening, they seem to absorb our words.

HEAR THE MESSAGES KIDS SEND US

Children generally do not express their inner feelings, premonitions, and fears overtly. Educators need to pay attention. They must tune in to the messages children send us. If a child express his admiration for the way another boy acted, that is the child's way of expressing what he values. When a child asks a parent a nonchalant question about some topics, "Totty, did you ever smoke?" that may be an indication of the fact that the child recently tried or was offered a cigarette.

Mishlei 27:21 says, **וְאִישׁ לְפִי מִהֲלָלוֹ**, which literally means *every person according to his praise*. If we want to know about a person, we should listen to what others say about him. What people say about a person tells us a lot about that person.

Rabbeinu Yonah offers an alternative explanation, "Each person according to what he praises."¹⁸ A person praises that which he feels is valuable and praiseworthy. In other words, you can learn a lot about a person by listening to what types of things he lauds and gets excited about.

¹⁸ ונאמר (משלי כז, כא): מצרף לכסף וכור לזהב ואיש לפי מהללו", פירושו: מעלות האדם לפי מה שיהלל, אם הוא משבח המעשים הטובים והחכמים והצדיקים תדע ובחנת כי איש טוב הוא ושרש הצדק נמצא בו, כי לא ימצא את לבו רק לשבח את הטוב והטובים תמיד בכל דבריו, ולגנות את העבירות ולהבזות בעליהן, מבלי מאוס ברע ובחור בטוב. ואם יתכן כי יש בידו עונות נסתרים, אבל מאוהבי הצדק הוא, ולו שרש בבחירה, והוא מעדת מכבדי ה'. והמשבח מעשים מגונים או מהלל רשעים - הוא הרשע הגמור והמהלל את עבודת השם יתברך.

We must pay attention to the things our children praise and are enamored by. If we just tell them to be quiet, or don't allow them to express those feelings, we will lose out on a key window into the *p'neemiyus* of the child.

THE TOOL BOX: DON'TS

SARCASM

Adult use of sarcasm around children can cause the children significant psychological damage, as children tend to be strictly literal in their thinking. Although they may begin to 'detect' sarcasm at about age of six, they may not begin to see the intended humor until around age ten.

As we all know, sarcasm can be very acerbic. A child may not comprehend the nature of the comment and may be extremely humiliated by the laughter of others. If he does understand it, the effect may be even worse.

“A teacher with a critical disposition and a gifted tongue has a grave responsibility: He must protect young children from his deadly talent, either by learning new ways of communicating or by choosing another calling.”¹⁹

Sarcasm and disparaging comments – If there was a potent virus attached to an email, would anyone knowingly open it? That is what the negative message is like for the child. An educator who has a sharp tongue is a danger to children.

מוֹת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד לְשׁוֹן Death and Life are in the hands of the tongue (Mishlei 18:21) is not an exaggeration.

¹⁹ Ginott(1972) Between Teacher and Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers

AVOID COMMANDS AND DICTATION

Like adults, children abhor infringements upon their autonomy. Saying in a calm voice, “That noise is distracting me” is far more effective than “CAN YOU PLEASE CUT OUT THAT OBNOXIOUS ANNOYING NOISE?” It’s helpful to state the issue and set your request without the emotional reactivity and to give a choice, “That noise is distracting me. Would you like to stay here and stop or would you like to go down to the basement and continue”

It’s also more effective for a teacher to say, “The assignment is on page 60” rather than “Open your books to page 60!”

FLIMSY RESPONSES

We expect certain things from others, but are often not clear about our expectations. Then, when that individual doesn’t do as we [thought] we told him, we become frustrated and upset. It happens in the corporate world and it happens at home.

The rule is: If you want something done a certain way, you have to be clear about your expectations.

LABELING:

Avoid labeling at all costs.

Diagnosing children is dangerous and labeling is disabling. Often, a diagnosis becomes a self-fulfilling, evil prophecy. The teacher expects certain negative and predictable behaviors -- and the child then lives up to those expectations.

Do not tell a child “how he will end up.” Teachers and parents bear extraordinary power to plant seeds of doubt in a child’s mind as to his fate.

As we said earlier in this booklet, “Children do not become what we think they can become. Children do not become what they think they can become. Children become what they think we think they can become.” In other words, the vibes and expectations that children sense we feel about them has a very strong effect on their development.

Tragically, many children leave school believing that their predestined fate precludes scholarship, enlightenment, or even happiness. In other words, many children leave school convinced that they will be nothing but failures their entire lives.

How would an adult feel were he to feel like a failure at his job day after day, all day long? Imagine him leaving for work day after day, dreading the string of embarrassing moments and mishaps he is inevitably going to have. He anticipates facing endless frustration and disappointment all day long, then returning home, feeling like an utter failure. For many children, this is what their day looks like, throughout their school years.

One of our most important tasks is to infuse children with the HOPE that life can be different and that failure in school is not failure in life.

They need to be able to appreciate their non-academic capabilities and talents. The more a child is able to feel competent and appreciate a talent, the more of a chance we have of helping him to overcome his lack of academic success.

Academic challenges can be overcome later in life, as was shown in the May 13, 2002 edition of Fortune Magazine. The cover article was entitled, “The Dyslexic CEO”.

The article begins as follows:

“Consider the following four dead-end kids.

“One was spanked by his teachers for bad grades and a poor attitude. He dropped out of school at 16. Another failed remedial English and came perilously close to flunking out of college. The third feared he’d never make it through school—and might not have without a tutor. The last finally learned to read in third grade, devouring Marvel comics, whose pictures provided clues to help him untangle the words.

“These four losers are, respectively, Richard Branson, Charles Schwab, John Chambers, and David Boies. Billionaire Branson developed one of Britain’s top brands with Virgin Records and Virgin Atlantic Airways. Schwab virtually created the discount brokerage business. Chambers is CEO of Cisco. Boies is a celebrated trial attorney, best known as the guy who beat Microsoft.

“In one of the stranger bits of business trivia, they have something in common: They are all dyslexic. So is billionaire Craig McCaw, who pioneered the cellular industry; John Reed, who led Citibank to the top of banking; Donald Winkler, who until recently headed Ford Financial; Gaston Caperton, former governor of West Virginia and now head of the College Board; Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s; Diane Swonk, chief economist of Bank One. The list goes on. Many of these adults seemed pretty hopeless as kids. All have been wildly successful in business. Most have now begun to talk about their dyslexia as a way to help children and parents cope with a condition that is still widely misunderstood.”

POWER STRUGGLES AND COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS

Breakdowns in communication require time and patience to rebuild. There must be empathy, mature conversation with the child, show of respect, and trust in the child’s judgment and opinion.

Arguably, the most dreaded type of breakdown is the Power Struggle. To be effective in dealing with power struggles, we need to be proactive as well as reactive.

“That noise is very annoying! I told you to stop! Hey!” And before we know it, a power struggle has ensued.

Children excel at creating power struggles and in manipulating their progress. It’s our job to not take the bait.

A child who regularly argues with his teachers in the middle of class generally has three goals.

- Power and control. (The argumentation and carrying on undermines the teacher’s control, shifting it to themselves.)
- Attention from his classmates.
- To derail the lesson. (Perhaps he finds the lesson threatening. He is therefore hoping to prevent it from continuing.)

Parents fall into the same trap that teachers do, expending great emotional energy arguing with their children. Children are inherently brilliant at getting adults off topic, luring them into arguing about irrelevant side issues. By doing so, he has reversed the situation, gotten the adult to go on the defensive, and avoided whatever rebuke was waiting for him.

One of the greatest combative techniques for such a situation is: Broken Record Technique. This technique is also called “Going brain dead.”

We keep on repeating our demand succinctly and in a calm patient voice. “Please stop that!” “But, he did it first...” “Please stop that!” “You always pick on me...” “Please stop that!” “You’re such a mean teacher...” Please stop that!” No matter what the child says, keep repeating the refrain.

A teacher who uses this technique properly will almost never have to say it more than three times, because the child is not being allowed to accomplish any of his goals. By remaining firm and undaunted, you are not letting him gain his classmates’ attention. He has failed to engage (or enrage) his teacher. He has been unable to derail the lesson.

DEALING WITH CHUTZPA

“Young man, let me tell you something! If you think you’re going to speak that way to me, you have another thing coming! You better learn some middos fast, because so help me if you don’t...”

The invariable result of such a harangue is not what the parent/teacher desires. There has yet to be a child who, after hearing such a lecture, jumped up and said, “You know, you’re right! What indeed is the matter with me? Please help me get myself back on track and learn a little respect!”

At a Torah Umesorah Convention, HaRav Aharon Leib Shteinman *shlita* related that every child naturally wants to be mature and respectful and give nachas to his/her parents. Therefore, if a child speaks or acts disrespectfully, it must be viewed as resulting from pain in the child’s heart.

In a sense, chutzpah is the manifestation of the child's innermost negative feelings coming to the fore. Most children (as well as adults) are hesitant to admit a weakness or vulnerability and will cover it with a mask of imperviousness or with a front of macho-nonchalance. In a sense, merely dealing with a chutzpadik outburst is addressing the symptom and not the source.

Viewing chutzpah in this light not only helps the parent/educator understand that there is an additional "deeper" dimension to chutzpah, but it also helps them remain objective. Although it is human nature to take umbrage when feeling personally attacked, remember that a child's chutzpah is merely a cover for some inner turmoil. If one keeps this in mind, in other words, remembers to not take it personally, the adult is better able to remove himself emotionally.

He is then able to view the child's disrespect as a sad manifestation of inner turmoil -- and not merely as external rambunctious behavior.

Does that mean that one should not address chutzpah nor reproach a child who speaks with outward disrespect? Of course not.

If a child is chutzpadik in private conversation with a parent or teacher, the best response is to momentarily ignore the brazenness and calmly respond, "I am willing to talk to you when your voice is as calm and respectful as mine." We may need to repeat this refrain a few times while the child continues his/her disrespectful rampage.

At times, a child is disrespectful simply in order to elicit a response. The child feels angry. 'Misery loves company.' He may want to anger the adult as well. When the adult indeed becomes angry, she is feeding into the child's 'game.'

On the other hand, if a child learns that chutzpah simply does not pay, because it fails to elicit an emotional response, the child will often remove chutzpah from his arsenal.

This approach seems to be consistent with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch. (*Yoreh Deah* 240:19) “It is forbidden to weigh down one’s children with a heavy burden by being overly exacting with them, since this can lead to failure. Instead one should forgive them and ignore their lapses because a father has the option of waiving the respect due to him.”

For the sake of the child’s long-term growth, it is often helpful for the parent to temporarily forgo his honor in order to properly educate his child in a rational, productive manner.

Ask yourself: “Is my response a direct result of my own flaring emotions? Will it ultimately be counterproductive? Will it foster the long-term growth of my child and instill in her the values I want her to have?”

Love and Logic suggests the following: Calmly respond to the child, “You sound very upset and we can discuss your frustration privately. However, we are not allowed to ever talk that way, especially to a Rebbe, teacher, or parent. I am not sure what to do about it right now. I’ll have to think about it and get back to you later.”

By buying time, the adult has enabled himself to seek the counsel of others or, at least, to better consider what the consequence should be. He has also caused the child to worry and fret as he thinks about what will happen next. Because the consequence has not yet been announced, he is

unable to exacerbate the situation. In other words, he has no basis for debating you as to the fairness of the punishment.

This technique, which allows the child and the onlookers to see the disappointment and disapproval of the parent/teacher without an immediate negative emotional reaction, sends an extremely powerful positive message.

Chazal (Yoma 23a) discuss the virtue of **הנעלבין ואינן עולבין**, **שומעין חרפתן ואינן משיבין** - *insulted, but does not retaliate, who hears themselves humiliated and does not respond*. Concerning such an individual, the Navi says (Shoftim 5), “But they that love Him, are as the sun when it goes forth in its might.” Chazal are telling us that one who holds back from responding to others who denigrate him is analogous to the sun which nurtures all of mankind.

It is inevitable that when a student is chutzpadik in front of an entire class, or one child in front of his siblings, the educator feels somewhat angry or hurt. Any response that he/she offers in the heat of the moment will almost definitely not be optimal for the child’s (or the class’s) long-term growth. An educator who is able to swallow his/her pride and not respond to a child’s overt chutzpah surely falls into the category of **עלובין ואינן עולבין** .

The lesson that the rest of the class learns from the educator’s response is far more potent than any retaliatory remark or screaming match will offer.

In fact, if a child’s chutzpah is indeed rooted in some sort of negative pathology within the child, a strong condescending response will only further his negative feelings. An angry, punitive response will at best

offer a short term resolution. However, at the same time, it sends a covert message to all spectators (i.e. the class) that when someone attacks you verbally, getting angry or losing control is a normal appropriate response.

“I am very sad to hear you speaking in such an inappropriate manner. I am not sure what to do about it right now. I’ll get back to you during recess.”

LET CHILDREN BE CHILDREN

Remember that a child is only a child! Sometimes we are too busy parenting our children to allow them to be children. Not only must we allow our children to enjoy their youth and utilize it. We – as their educators – should appreciate and enjoy their youth as well.

Our society is often too quick and too impatient. We want to take children out of diapers as early as possible, start them in school, and get the ball rolling as early as possible. A child who is not yet emotionally or physically developed for the changes forced upon him and he fails in them, can be scarred very badly. His self-image can be dealt a harsh blow before he even stepped foot in kindergarten.

This is true of spiritual pursuits as well. In our love and zeal for torah we can at times, push too much and not realize the limits of children being children. As Rav Yakov Kaminetsky reassured one anxious parent about an immature child, “Don’t worry, he won’t be doing it by his bar mitzvah.”

Like all parenting, it is a balance between competing values each with their important perspective- טוב לגדר פי vs שמח בחור בלדותיך
ישא על בנעוריו

One of the greatest challenges of the Ba'al Teshuva movement is that people who became religious as adults never experienced a 'religious youth.' Many a Ba'al Teshuva has complained that they do not know how much leeway to give their children and what behaviors are acceptable, and even encouraged. This also can become a source of deep friction as children who see their peers act a certain way will resist the efforts of their Ba'al Teshiva parents who want them to take their davening and learning more seriously.

The story is told about a young boy named Yosef who was a brilliant boy. Even as a young child, he displayed an unusual ability to think deeply and learn with great diligence. He would spend a tremendous amount of time in the Bais Medrash learning with the older students.

One day, Yosef's father came by between Mincha and Maariv and noticed his son playing outside, instead of learning in the Bais Medrash. Yosef's father summoned him and reprimanded him, "For someone who is on the level to learn with older students, es pas nisht- it is not becoming for you, to be playing outside with other little children.

Yosef looked up at his father with tears in his eyes and said, "Totty, you know that I am a young child. Just because I learn with the older boys doesn't mean that I am not sill a child."

Yosef still needed to play. He turned out okay anyway. His name was Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, better known as the Bais HaLevy.

“Listen, son: I am saying this as you lie asleep, one little paw crumpled under your cheek and the blond curls still wet on your damp forehead. I have stolen into your room alone. Just a few minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the library, a stifling wave of remorse swept over me. Guiltily I came to your bedside.

There are the things I was thinking, son: I had been cross to you. I scolded you as you were dressing for school because you gave your face merely a dab with a towel. I took you to task for not cleaning your shoes. I called out angrily when you threw some of your things on the floor.

At breakfast I found fault, too. You spilled things. You gulped down your food. You put your elbows on the table. You spread butter too thick on your bread. And as you started off to play and I made for my train, you turned and waved a hand and called, ‘Goodbye, Daddy!’ and I frowned, and said in reply, ‘Hold your shoulders back!’

Then it began all over again in the late afternoon. As I came up the road I spied you, down on your knees, playing marbles. There were holes in your stockings. I humiliated you before your boyfriends by marching you ahead of me to the house. Stockings were expensive - and if you had to buy them you would be more careful! Imagine that, son, from a father!

Do you remember, later, when I was reading in the library, how you came in timidly, with a sort of hurt look in your eyes? When I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption, you hesitated at the door. ‘What is it you want?’ I snapped. You said nothing, but ran across in one tempestuous plunge, and threw your arms around my neck and kissed me, and your small arms tightened with an affection that God had set blooming in your heart and which even neglect could not wither. And then you were gone, pattering up the stairs.

Well, son, it was shortly afterwards that my paper slipped from my hands and a terrible sickening fear came over me. What has

habit been doing to me? The habit of finding fault, of reprimanding - this was my reward to you for being a boy. It was not that I did not love you; it was that I expected too much of youth. I was measuring you by the yardstick of my own years.

And there was so much that was good and fine and true in your character. The little heart of you was as big as the dawn itself over the wide hills. This was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me good night. Nothing else matters tonight, son. I have come to your bedside in the darkness, and I have knelt there, ashamed!

It is a feeble atonement; I know you would not understand these things if I told them to you during your waking hours. But tomorrow I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you, and suffer when you suffer, and laugh when you laugh. I will bite my tongue when impatient words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: 'He is nothing but a boy - a little boy!'

I am afraid I have visualized you as a man. Yet as I see you now, son, crumpled and weary in your cot, I see that you are still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother's arms, your head on her shoulder. I have asked too much, too much."

- **W. Livingston Larned,**



APPENDICES

חובת התלמידים

Harav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira ז"ל hy'd (1889–1943), was the Rav of the town of Piaseczno, Poland. He authored a number of tremendous sefarim before he was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Rabbi Shapira's memory is revered, and he is held as an example of faith under enormous duress.

One of his great works was the Chovas HaTalmidim- Obligations of the Student, which is written directly to the student as a guide to help him navigate his way through the process of education and being a student. The sefer demonstrates the great educational genius of the Rav. His ideas about education preceded his time and are as applicable today as they were when he wrote them a century ago.

His opening words in the sefer are a tremendous lesson unto themselves about the proper approach that a pedagogue should utilize in teaching students: “אשריך נער ישראל ואשרי חלקך - Praiseworthy are you, young Jewish youth, and praiseworthy is your portion. The Torah- the Light of Hashem- you have merited to learn, and to be His son of delight and His beloved child. The angels on high are envious of you, and honor you; the Seraphim of G-d wonder about you and honor you. The heavens and all its ministers, the earth and everything in it, rejoice about you and humble themselves before you. They ask one another, “Who is this youth about whom pillars of holy fire spew from his mouth, and the Master of the

Worlds, exulted above all, in the presence of all his myriads and armies of angels, takes pride in and rejoices with him?”

In his introduction to the sefer, the Piaseczner Rav explains many fundamental ideas about contemporary education. There is a tremendous amount of insight and wisdom to be gleaned from his words. It is for this reason that we have decided to include excerpts from the introduction (written in our own words and according to our own understanding) here:

(Note: Paragraphs that appear in italics are our additions)

Chinuch does not entail commanding children and trying to accustom them to certain behaviors. Accustoming and instructing are only techniques utilized in chinuch; but they themselves are NOT chinuch.

Chinuch is an expression of commencement. However, it does not include all beginnings. Rashi (Bereishis 14:14) writes, “He (Avrohom) was mechanech him (Eliezer) in (the performance of) mitzvos: It (chinuch) is an expression implying the entry of a person...into the trait in which he will be trained in the future.”

Chinuch refers to the person who is beginning to learn how to ‘manage’. For example, if a professional builder is building a house, when he begins building we do not view him as being ‘mechanech the house’, nor is it considered as if the builder is doing chinuch, because he is a professional and this is commonplace work for him. However, if someone was coming to learn how to manage an already built house, that would be a process of chinuch. Chinuch refers to bringing to light the pre-existing inner potential of someone or something. It is helping a child learn how to recognize his inner latent capabilities and then to bring them to the fore and practical use.

Chinuch habanim means to help a Jewish child connect to the lofty neshamah (soul) that is within him and to help him realize the G-liness and limitless potential that resides within.

In other words, Chinuch connotes bringing pre-existing latent kocho (abilities that the child may be unaware that he possesses) . In the words of one educator, "All children are gifted...some open their gifts later than others!"

In order to accomplish this level of chinuch, a mechanech must connect to each child on an individual level. Every child has his own unique strengths, his own unique capabilities, and his own manner of connecting to Hashem. If the purpose of chinuch is to bring out the hidden strengths from within, a mechanech must first recognize the uniqueness within. This is the meaning of the verse, **חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעַר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ גַם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה.**

Our goal as a mechanech is to seek the beauty of the soul and spirit of every Jewish child and then to fuse it with a connection to G-d, so that the child pines to serve and be connected with Hashem in the most intimate manner.

It is imperative to realize that each child can serve G-d differently, based on his own personality and uniqueness. We have to recognize that there is no such thing as a child having a 'bad nature' or a negative personality not conducive to growth and learning. If a child is naturally stubborn, we must cultivate his personality and gear him to use his stubbornness to serve G-d. If the teacher of a stubborn child can build within himself enough patience to deal with that child, when the child matures and develops a love for Torah and mitzvos, he will use his iron personality to devote himself to serving G-d and will not allow any impediments to interfere, no matter how daunting.

If a child has a loose temper and is quick to anger, that too must be channeled. Although anger itself is a terrible trait, if one who has an angry personality, it is indicative of fiery and passion within. If one can train such a child to love G-d and Torah, the child will ultimately serve G-d with unyielding passion. His prayers will be with incredible zealously and he will learn Torah with an inner fire. (The Ba'al HaTanya writes, "The heat of anger stems from the fire in one's heart." He continues that, any person who has a natural tendency towards anger has potential to develop a natural passion and desire to serve G-d.)

We, as mechanchim, have a tremendous responsibility. When we hear tragic stories of children leaving the fringe of Torah, G-d forbid, we have to analyze and introspect about our culpability. We cannot be so confident as to declare, "Our hands did not spill this blood."

Why is our generation so prone to such tragedies of children leaving the fringe? We are not coming to explain reasons why this is true. However, the fact is that children today are convinced that they are mentally and psychologically mature, much earlier than in the past²⁰.

It is part of the curse mentioned in Gemarah (Sotah 49a) that in the generation preceding Moshiach's arrival, chutzpah will abound. For a youngster to be convinced of his own sagacity and knowledge and to feel that he is self sufficient and does not need the guidance and assistance of

²⁰ Mark Twain is famous for saying that, "The older I got the smarter my father became". In a similar vein, at a graduation in his Yeshiva, Shaarei Torah, Rabbi Berel Wein shlita once wryly commented, "When you came into the Yeshiva you were shorter and smarter than me. Now you're little taller and I'm a little smarter!"

his parents, teachers, and mentors, is no less than chutzpah. It is mind-boggling to see extremely young children who possess this attitude.

There are two problems that stem from this attitude: Firstly, when an authoritative figure tries to exert his/her authority over someone who feels that the authority is not necessary, the recipient of that authority feels tremendous animosity and resentment toward the authoritative figure.

Secondly, the negative feelings that develop will be far more intense than they would have been in previous generations. In previous generations, children did not have the gall to challenge authority because it was understood that they were immature and needed direction and guidance even if they did not want it. When a child possesses an attitude of humility, then they are like fresh paper waiting for the impression of their teachers. As a child matured, he sought guidance and his heart became ignited from the teachings of his mentors. However, in our time when children, “grow up prematurely” and are convinced that they know it all and have already developed an understanding of right and wrong, they are far more resistant to authority. This is especially true, if the authority admonishes them and challenges their ideas and beliefs.

A child who, G-d forbids, forsakes the proper path, almost universally did not do so abruptly. It is generally a process of anger, resentment, and morbidity that builds within the heart and psyche of the child. It begins with a subtle doubt or complaint, “Like a nega (plague) has been seen on my house”. It is not actually a disease, it only appears that way. But eventually, when the negative feelings are not addressed, they continue to increase until they reach the boiling point. Once that happens,

the inevitable explosion is imminent. Generally, the acrimonious feelings stem from defiance and even hatred against authoritative figures.

To counter this very issue, Shlomo Hamelech exhorted us to be mechanech each child according to his own unique capabilities and inner beauty. It is not sufficient to issue commands and exert one's authority. Rather, a mechanech must speak to the soul of each child. We have to recognize what makes the child tick and we have to learn to speak his language.

How do we speak to the inner child? We must foster within the child an understanding and a belief that he – the child himself- is the real mechanech.

We must guide him to realize that we do not view him as a foolish and naive youth but we see in him the ability to become a great individual. His future success is contingent upon his own efforts and that we are no more than guides along the way. If the child understands that we see in him potential for success, he will seek our guidance and assistance to help him get there. When he sees us as guides who want him to reach the potential that he himself possesses, then he can accept our direction.

But if a child views us as authoritative figures who merely want to impose different ideas on them, they will be more resistant to accept what we want to teach them. In other words, we want the child to realize that although he has potential he needs a great deal of personality and soul 'fine tuning' and our mission and hope is to help him achieve that. If a child has that faith in us, then even if, occasionally, we will admonish the child he may still accept it.

Nobody can change anybody else. At times, a young man or woman who went through a tumultuous period of adolescence will come back from learning in yeshiva/seminary in Eretz Yisroel and their davening, learning, mitzvos are all very intense. They say “Israel” changed them.. Although “avira d’Eretz Yisroel machkim”, ‘Israel’ doesn’t change anybody. The person because the person had an inner desire to change and improve and he was assisted along the way.

The same is true about people who change in marriage. One spouse cannot change the other, unless the other spouse really wants to change and needed a guide.

Mental connection with a child is insufficient and will not stand the test of time. We have to develop a holistic connection with the child, which entails connecting to his whole being, emotionally, physically, and psychologically. We want him to realize the pleasure one feels when serving Hashem. We want each child to appreciate the spiritual bliss one has when he connects himself with Hashem and His mitzvos. Then, we can foster within the child confidence to ward off the lures of the yetzer hara and the impediments that seek to drive him away from spiritual growth.

In days of yore, this task, of seeking to connect with the child on so many levels, could happen slowly as the child matured. Today however, it is imperative that we seek this connection immediately. A child must see the beauty of serving G-d and he must want to be connected to it on his own volition. In the past, we were able to instruct children to do things simply because it was the will of G-d and we cannot question it! Then,

over time the child himself would develop an emotional attachment to the mitzvos.

Today, the opposite is true and we cannot expect the same progression to occur. We must immediately seek to foster an emotional connection and help the child discover how pleasant and sweet it is to engage in Avodas Hashem. Then, we must hope that the child will develop a semblance of steadfast dedication to Avodas Hashem even when it is not sweet and pleasant.

Pedagogy and the art of education with all its techniques are extremely necessary. But they should not be confused with chinuch which is solely to bring out the capabilities from within and to kindle the flame that stems from the soul. For example, the soul of a child cannot deal with sadness. A teacher must never adopt a demeanor of anger and extreme strictness. Neither can a teacher present as a ‘pushover’ who is not worthy of respect. Rather, the teacher must appear like an exalted and dignified person. Yet, he must be a good and pleasant person. Even if a teacher says a light comment he must not allow his ‘dignified appearance’ to be compromised.

The pasuk in Mishlei states, “Do not admonish a mocker perhaps he will hate you. Admonish a wise person and he will love you.” The Shelah Hakodosh explains that the verse is teaching us an invaluable lesson: when one wants to give someone rebuke, he should not put down the person and make him feel lowly by telling him that he is wicked and a mocking person, because if you chastise a person thusly he will hate you. However, if one admonishes someone by extolling the person’s praises and then rebuking him for performing an act not becoming of someone

who is a wise man and an admirable person as he is, then he will love you and appreciate your care for him. This message is especially applicable in our generation when children are so resistant to chastisement. We must build the child and express our admiration for the child and only then admonish him.

Imagine a person who approaches a wealthy entrepreneur and praises him for being so giving and such a benefactor. Then, when that person asks the entrepreneur for money, the entrepreneur will, want to give it because the person has preceded his request by giving the entrepreneur inner fortitude to overcome his stinginess. When we extol the good character traits of a child, we are building the child's confidence and that good trait is reinforced in the child's psyche. The child will want to maintain our positive perception of him.

It is proper for a Rebbe to learn Aggadic portions with his students once a week, such as Medrash or Ayn Yaakov to infuse them with a spirit of Yiras Shomayim.

If a Rebbe wants to learn mussar with his students, he should not emphasize punishment and the severity of sin. Rather, he should speak about the greatness of a Torah life and about the blissful reward that awaits those who adhere to the Torah.

A Rebbe should also be proficient in using stories and parables because they assist a child to relate to what is being taught. One must be particular to utilize parables and stories properly because even if a child knows a story is merely a parable, in his mind he pictures the story as if it's happening and the child will connect far better to the parable than the lesson derived from it.

TEMPERAMENT SCALE

Use this scale to determine where your child falls with regards to each of the nine elements of temperament. These elements are your child's inborn ways of reacting to people and changes in the environment. Understanding these elements will give you insight into how your child will react in various situations or under particular circumstances.

After finishing with your child's temperament evaluation, fill out where YOU fit in each category. Notice the similarities and the differences.

ACTIVITY LEVEL	highly active, always seems to be "on the go"	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	calm and content, inactive most of the time
ADAPTABILITY	adapts easily to change	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	does not adapt easily to change
REGULARITY	eating, sleeping, and bathroom habits are regular	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	eating, sleeping, and bathroom habits are irregular
SENSITIVITY	highly sensitive to pain, sounds, light, and temperature	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	not overly sensitive to pain, sounds, light, and temperature
DISTRACTIBILITY	easily distracted, unable to ignore distractions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	highly focused, not easily distracted
MOOD	overall positive mood, usually pleasant and happy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	overall negative mood, often angry, cries often
PERSISTENCE	sticks with projects until they are done, doesn't give up	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	does not stick with projects until they are done, gives up easily
INTENSITY	emotional reactions are intense, even exaggerated	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	emotional reactions are mild, low-key
APPROACH/ WITHDRAWAL	willing to try new things, comfortable in social situations	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	unwilling to try new things, withdraws in social situations

“Listen and learn,” we tell children. But how well do you listen to your children?

To check your listening skills, circle your answer to the following questions:

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|
| 1. | Do I give my children the impression that I’m interested and willing to hear what they have to say? | Yes | No |
| 2. | Do I put work aside when listening to my children? | Yes | No |
| 3. | Do I look at my children when they talk to me? | Yes | No |
| 4. | Does my body language show that I’m paying attention? | Yes | No |
| 5. | Do my responses show that I’ve been listening carefully? | Yes | No |
| 6. | Do I give all my children equal attention when they’re talking to me? | Yes | No |
| 7. | Do I avoid interrupting my children? | Yes | No |

Key: Seven “yes” answers indicate you listen well.
“No” answers may indicate some areas for improvement.

Adapted from a self-test developed by the Institute for Educational Research.
Reported in *American Teacher*, February, 1990.

Quick Tips on Communicating with Children

- **BE AVAILABLE** -Sometimes children see their parents as being very busy and not having the time to discuss the child's interest or problem. Being available means setting aside some time to be with the child so that the child can open up and discuss concerns and problems.
- **CAREFULLY CHOOSE A TIME AND PLACE** - The time to discuss a serious matter is not over breakfast as the child is getting ready to meet the school bus. It is hard to discuss a serious matter with music blaring. It's also important to have some privacy. Choose a place where you and the child can be together uninterrupted for a period of time.
- **GIVE UNDIVIDED ATTENTION - Make eye contact.** Try not to appear hurried—and above all, be patient. A good occasion to talk may be while driving the child to an event, when no one else is present.
- **BE SENSITIVE TO THE CHILD'S FEELINGS** - Every child who is experiencing a problem or concern has feelings about that concern or problem. Be sensitive to those feelings and realize that the child may be very confused inside or may be feeling much hurt because of what's happened.
- **TRY TO IDENTIFY THE FEELINGS** - Suggest to the child that you know that he is hurt by what someone has done or that he feels very angry about something that has happened. Help him pinpoint those feelings with words.

- **TRY TO SEE THINGS FROM THE CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW** - Try to remember that the child lacks experience in dealing with other people or in dealing with new situations. Be understanding. Imagine yourself in the child's position.
- **AVOID ANY NOTE OF RIDICULE** - We may become a bit impatient when the problem seems quite insignificant—almost silly. As a parent we must realize, though, that the problem is serious to the child and we must treat it as such.
- **ABOVE ALL-** tell the child when you're finished how pleased you are that she shared her concerns with you.

Phrases to use with Children Every Day

1. **Thank you.** It's important to acknowledge your child's efforts to help you or others. "Thanks for helping me look for that missing sock" or "Thanks for erasing the board."
2. **Tell me more.** Words like these show your child that you are listening and that you would like to hear more.
3. **You can do it.** Your expression of confidence in your child's ability to do many things without your help is important. Encouragement can mean the difference between his giving up on a challenging task or seeing it through.
4. **How can I help?** Let a child know you are willing and available to help him accomplish a particular task that may be difficult for him to manage on his own. As your child takes on projects, encourage her to think of specific steps that are necessary to complete a project.
5. **Help us out.** A child is never too young to learn that cooperation and team effort make many jobs easier and speedier. Family activities and group chores can develop into pleasant rituals that enrich a child's life and create fond memories, while building responsibility and self-esteem.
6. **Please.** When you ask a favor of anyone – including children – this "magic word" acknowledges that you are asking for a behavior that will help you and/or make you happy. (P.S.: Don't forget to say "thank you" when the job is done.)
7. **Good job!** Good for you. Self-respect and self-confidence grow when your child's efforts and performance are noted. Be sure your praise is honest and specific. Focus on your child's efforts and progress.
8. **It's time to...** "It's time to get ready for bed," or "do homework." Children need tremendous structure in order to have a sense of consistency in their daily lives
9. **I love you.** We can't assume that children know and understand our love for them unless we tell them. But don't just tell your child you love him – show him. Everyone needs love and affection and a feeling of acceptance and belonging.

A project of



Yeshiva Bais Hachinuch
P.O. Box 991
Monsey NY 10952

845-354-3805