

How Would You Like It?

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 31 July, 2003 - 10:27

This guest column, by homeschooler, **Marti Gardner**, was first published in *Taking Children Seriously*, the paper journal (TCS 20).



Our homeschooling support group meeting was last night and we had a lovely couple there who have home schooled all four of their children, three of whom have gone on to college, the other of whom is in high school. We broke into smaller groups of five to six people, in which we discussed our different methods and ideas, then our group spokesperson shared the general ones with the whole group.

It was great until we reached two areas. Before I touch on those, I'd like to ask a few questions that are related.

Suppose that your household chores are to make your bed (spouse is up before you so it's your job),

clean the house, do laundry and dishes, feed the kids breakfast and lunch – whatever your list looks like. Now, suppose come dinner time, the laundry isn't done yet. Maybe you got a call from your sister/neighbour/friend and you got side-tracked, or just flat out didn't feel like it. Now, suppose you were told that because you didn't finish your chores for the day, you don't get dinner. Your spouse says, “Forget it, you get to eat when it's done.” Excuse me, but mine better start running and ducking cause this girl eats dinner despite her chores being incomplete. What about you? Do you have to go without your meal because of this?

What about the other things maybe the other spouse is responsible for, like mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, working on the car, weeding the flower bed, going to work? Now suppose for a minute the yard is only half mowed at dinner time and the trash is still sitting by the door to go out. Okay, do we tell them they can't eat dinner until it's done (who cares if it's dinner time and they are hungry)? Mine would probably tell me that if I really thought I could keep him from his plate to go ahead and stand there in front of the stove and watch him reach around me or pick me up and move me.

Now, suppose your husband decides one day that the answer to the clutter in the bedroom is to dispose of some of your things. Suppose mine just didn't understand that I have three pairs of black shoes because one pair is flat, one low heeled and one high. In his eyes it's only necessary for one pair of black shoes. Or maybe your spouse decides you have too many pairs of gym shoes so he disposes of all but one. Never mind that one is for yard work (you know the pair),

one for walking and so on and he just disposes of them?

Or maybe he thinks you have too many books, magazines, pairs of frillies, or whatever. He decides that you are too messy and disposes of your ‘mess’. Or maybe you decide he has too many ties in his closet, or too many pairs of dress shoes, or too many white shirts, or whatever it is of his, and you dispose of it.

Well, I know at my house, the bananas are falling off the palm trees in paradise about now because those things are mine and I decide what I keep and what I throw away. Same with his. That is ordinary respect for someone else's things. Now, why is it any different then for children?

We were discussing keeping our homes clean and motivating our kids to their school work. Nearly everyone said the same thing: if the kids don't finish their chores or school work, they don't eat!

Excuse me, but isn't food and drink a necessity for sustaining life? Going to the bathroom and breathing are necessary too, but we wouldn't dream of saying, "Here, put this plastic bag over your head till your chores are done," or "No you can't go potty till your school work is done." So why in the world would we deny them meals if they aren't cooperating? Like I asked, how many of us go without meals because we didn't finish something? Just let Pete try to stop me from eating because I didn't finish the laundry and I'll be serving him steamed sweat socks for his next meal.

These same people dispose of their children's toys to avoid clutter. They've made their children decide what thing they like most, Barbie dolls, Hot Wheels, or whatever, and that is all they get to keep, the rest being thrown away.

I'm no pack rat but I have a lot of things that while they are not important to others (figures my sister gave me, little trinkets etc.),

they are *mine*. They take up space but they belong to me, and I expect that no one will throw them away. They are to respect that those are my things.

These same parents would not allow their spouse or anyone else to decide suddenly that they are too clutter-minded and pitch their precious things. How can they do this to their kids? My children have toys, and while we aren't a toy store or anything, they do have a lot of things. They have lots of uncles, aunts, and grandparents who buy them things. Some are really important to them, some so-so. But those belong to them.

Don't we learn respect by having respect shown to us? How could anyone do these things to a child? I believe in discipline, but not denying basic necessities of life or taking what doesn't belong to me because I think it should be. There are better ways.

It all seemed rather cruel to me when I put myself into their little shoes and imagined my reactions to Pete denying me dinner for not finishing laundry, or taking my things and throwing them away because I'm a bit messy.

I'd like to take back to my group some alternatives to denying food and throwing things away. Got any?

DISCLAIMER: yes, I feel strongly about this. No, I'm not saying anyone who does this is a horrible child abuser. But would anyone be willing to have someone treat them this way? I'm really shocked at this sort of treatment.



I know TCS folks will have plenty to say on this. :-)

to post comments

Comments

A TCS Comment on this article

Submitted by Optimist on 1 August, 2003 - 08:40

I can see why Sarah said TCS people will have a lot to say about this one. It nicely shows that many homeschoolers treat their kids badly. I'm not sure if Sarah was implying that this post is more evidence of the phenomenon seen in the TCS survey but I'd guess that it is. The writer is obviously not TCS:

:::Suppose that your household chores are to make your bed (spouse is up before you so it's your job),

clean the house, do laundry and dishes, feed the kids breakfast and lunch -- whatever your list looks like:::

Is this "job" yours because this is a common preference with your family? Do you agree that these chores are your job? If so, OK. If not, this is not TCS.

:::Now, suppose come dinner time, the laundry isn't done yet. Maybe you got a call from your sister/neighbour/friend and you got side-tracked, or just flat out didn't feel like it. Now, suppose you were told that because you didn't finish your chores for the day, you don't get dinner. Your spouse says, "Forget it, you get to eat when it's done." Excuse me, but mine better start running and ducking cause this girl eats dinner despite her chores being incomplete. What about you? Do you have to go without your meal because of this?:::

No!

:::What about the other things maybe the other spouse is responsible for, like mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, working on the car, weeding the flower bed, going to work?:::

My husband and I do not apportion household tasks in this way.

:::Now, suppose your husband decides one day that the answer to the clutter in the bedroom is to dispose of some of your things:::

:::Or maybe he thinks you have too many books, magazines, pairs of frillies, or whatever. He decides that you are too messy and disposes of your 'mess'. Or maybe you decide he has too many ties in his closet, or too many pairs of dress shoes, or too many white shirts, or whatever it is of his, and you dispose of it:::

Why do parents do this?

:::We were discussing keeping our homes clean and motivating our kids to their school work:::

"Motivating"? "School work"? This sounds like conventional education, not TCS.

:::Nearly everyone said the same thing: if the kids don't finish their chores or school work, they don't eat!:::

:::Excuse me, but isn't food and drink a necessity for sustaining life? Going to the bathroom and breathing are necessary too, but we wouldn't dream of saying, "Here, put this plastic bag over your head till your chores are done," or "No you can't go potty till your school work is done." So why in the world would we deny them meals if they aren't cooperating? Like I asked, how many of us go without meals because we didn't finish something?:::

That food is necessary to sustain life is only the tip of the iceberg. TCS involves more than merely sustaining life!

:::I'd like to take back to my group some alternatives to denying food and throwing things away. Got any?:::

Yes, finding common preferences. But first they need to learn some morality.

:::DISCLAIMER: yes, I feel strongly about this. No, I'm not saying anyone who does this is a horrible child abuser. But would anyone be willing to have someone treat them this way? I'm really shocked at this sort of treatment.:::

Feeling strongly about this is important. Not to feel strongly would mean you don't see the wrongness of the actions discussed.

to post comments

Forced retention of bodily waste is unfortunately very common

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 2 August, 2003 - 23:45

In your great article you mentioned that parents "wouldn't dream" of denying a child toilet use. Unfortunately, some parents and especially and most notoriously, school teachers, deny children this basic human right commonly. Not only does this sick practice put children at risk for detrimental medical and psychological health risks, it is one of the most cruel forms of human rights violations. To read more, please visit my website: www.childadvocate.org (<http://www.childadvocate.org>) and look for the link to this human rights subject.

Laurie A. Couture, M.Ed. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Counselor Exeter, NH

to post comments

It may not be the "schoolwork..."

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 25 August, 2003 - 07:46

It may not be the "schoolwork" (I hate that word) that the kids don't like, but the form it is presented in. Each person learns uniquely, perhaps a more natural approach to teaching is in demand, and in that case, "schoolwork" is never done, as learning is continual. Secondly, perhaps parents feel a need to motivate their children to do schoolwork because the child is not naturally attracted to it. Perhaps they aren't attracted to it because their desire to learn has or is being quelled by pressure! If so, STOP, before anymore damage is done! Lastly, if a child truly doesn't want to do schoolwork (not just because of the industrialization done to something as pure and beautiful as learning),

then why are we trying to motivate them to do it?

to post comments

How Would You Like it?

Submitted by Ingrid Seger-Wo... on 31 August, 2003 - 07:24

I often hear that question spoken to children "how would you like it if Billy did that to you?" and I shudder; I know the parent is trying to communicate some moral code to their child and to build compassion in their child, but the question sounds so condescending. I nowadays use "My conscience would not let me do that" or "I could not behave like that to Billy"...I find that much more respectful, or it feels respectful...

[to post comments](#)

Staticity

Submitted by Elliot Temple on 31 August, 2003 - 08:31

The above suggestion communicates, implicitly, a view that morality does not exist. This is manifest in its insistence that what's at stake is what the parent would do, or feel good about, instead of what is right independent of the parent. Logically, if morality does not exist, it is not wrong for the parent to hit his child. And, logically, if morality does not exist, and the parent does not like mowing the lawn, and the parent wants the lawn mown, then... Well, I don't think I'll go there. But I'll suggest that some children may wonder.

BTW, the point is not to assert that amoral parents will hit their children. People aren't perfectly consistent. But what if a child realises that a strand of his parent's personality wants to hit him?

[to post comments](#)

Doing household chores is not

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 25 October, 2004 - 14:56

Doing household chores is not a job, but if an adult doesn't do the job he was employed for, then he'd get fired. The whole forcing kids to chores thing is supposed to let kids have a glimpse of what the adult world is like.

Adults don't have everything they want, they have everything they can buy.

[to post comments](#)

Interesting

Submitted by Edith (not verified) on 3 April, 2005 - 13:07

I don't think that adults have a right to stop kids eating or anything. That is an abuse of their power, and it is basically society that gives adults that power. Its not like a 10 year old can actually get a job and buy their own food.

If a child agrees to do chores though, and doesn't do them because they have done something more enjoyable then the adult has every right to be annoyed. Not to scream and shout, but to express their annoyance and the reasons for it. The child can then respond. I would have the same right to be honestly and genuinely annoyed, and express this to my partner, if he failed to do something that he agreed to do.

The annoyance should not be a punishment of course, just an honest expression of how another person's actions have made you feel.

I do think that kids have an obligation to clear up after themselves and contribute to clearing up communally produced mess (eg from making a meal). Most stuff in our house is owned communally, anyone can use it, but the agreement is that anyone using it will clear it up afterwards, not break it, etc. Only adults and toddlers live in the house (the toddlers don't clean!) and this agreement has been reached through negotiation.

Also there is an obligation to contribute to cleaning up communal mess-washing up, hoovering. The level to which this needs to be done is a compromise between our different needs for cleanliness.

There is no punishment for not cleaning. But if someone does not clean, other family members are entitled to be annoyed and express this. Or better yet, find strategies to help get the job done.

[to post comments](#)

Your posts and comments have

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 31 March, 2006 - 05:49

Your posts and comments have cleared up a lot of the issues going on with my family at this time. My children don't take well to school work, but they love to help do chores, cook, visit other people, shop, go on trips, etc. I feel more motivated to relax now, than I do to try to motivate them to do their schoolwork.

[to post comments](#)

interesting

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 1 August, 2006 - 08:18

very interesting

[to post comments](#)

But what if...

Submitted by Andy (not verified) on 4 September, 2006 - 14:41

So I recognize that coercion, guilt, punishment, and the withholding of comforts is a bad way to treat children. I am not personally a parent, but I can imagine a parent asking this:

"So what if I have a child who I want to treat as TCS as possible, but I also am sick of cleaning the house. I'm not OCD about it, I just like to have a relatively clean counter so I can have room to cook on it...But my child constantly leaves messes and doesn't clean them, and when I ask, as democratically as possible, that they help me keep the house clean, they continuously say they'll 'do it later'. When I was a kid, I would have been put on a guilt trip until I helped. How do I get help without putting them on a guilt trip."

to post comments

It's easy to say

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 28 November, 2006 - 20:06

Denying a child dinner isn't intended to starve the child, it's intended to motivate a child.

The logic in this argument is flawed to begin with...

1) The first time a child doesn't finish their school work, then no, they are probably not going to be denied dinner, it isn't a problem yet. Despite different tactics, rewards, punishments, etc. if a child doesn't complete their tasks, then going to bed hungry might work.

If my spouse consistently left a mess, and I was consistently cleaning up after her, one of 3 things would happen:

She would pick up after herself I would get rid of the clutter or I would leave

If it's something that I can't deal with 24/7, and she doesn't have the respect to try and help find a solution to the problem, then there is an issue.

2) I see comments with no other suggestions. Denial of dinner would be way down the list of other attempts to solve the problem, but in and of itself, there is nothing wrong with it. The point is not to starve the child. Even as adults we face situations where we may have to skip meals to get something done. For example, if I need to send in the mortgage because "I didn't feel like it" before, and the only time I had to do it was my lunch break during work, and there isn't enough time to do that and to eat lunch, guess what, I'm missing a meal. Natural consequences.

3) Touching on consequences, if the cop told me not to park in a parking space otherwise I will get towed, and I park there, my car gets towed. In a similar analogy, if you tell a child to pick their toys up off the floor and put them in the toy chest otherwise they will lose them, then they lose them. There is nothing mean about this, it is how the world works.

I stumbled upon this site and even read the philosophy before I posted. While I agree with the philosophy, there are studies that prove most children do not have the cognitive reasoning, or empathy for some of the suggestions to work. Discussions with punishment are, in my opinion, are the best option when discussion doesn't work. The post about "why make them do school work" lacks weight because in life, there's always something that you don't want to do that needs to be done.

to post comments

Outrageous

Submitted by [a reader \(not verified\)](http://In5an1ty.blogspot.com) on 11 September, 2007 - 09:37

The problem with such practices is that they assume that the child is always wrong. Never mind if your teacher assigned you a 40-page report and didn't tell you the deadline, you can't eat until you finish it, even if you don't finish it before midnight.

My English teacher lets us go to the toilet whenever we want as long as she isn't talking. I am thankful for that. But in many other classes, drinking in class - plain water from your waterbottle - is forbidden, no matter how thirsty you are. We don't care if you've got a terrible sore throat and ran out of lozenges two days ago, you can't drink in class. The very idea that drinking affects concentration is outrageous; isn't it far more distracting to spend the rest of the lesson, sometimes a good hour and a half, coughing loudly into your handkerchief?

Much of this coercion is pointless. The problem is that they take students' bodily needs as an affront to their dignity, which makes zero sense.

[to post comments](#)

My Views

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 25 September, 2007 - 20:20

I agree withholding food is not a proper way to punish. I disagree that it is wrong to clear out the toy box on occasion. Both of my children have rooms full of toys and there are toys in every room but the kitchen. I do on occasion use the opportunity to teach the children generosity by having them help me sort through toys to give to the local church store or a kid we know if they need something. I let them help me pick things and I make it clear they don't have to give away anything they still want and to not give away anything they miss. My three year old is not interested in his baby toys anymore and my nine year old prefers creating her own games. We do the same with clothes. Otherwise our house would be packed full and we couldn't find anything.

[to post comments](#)

I agree that food should not

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 14 December, 2007 - 02:46

I agree that food should not be withheld from a child, or anyone.

However, how does a child's wish to not, say, pick up her Lincoln Logs (or have the Lincoln Logs put up for a few days) override my wish to not have to trip over the Lincoln Logs (or not have to pick them up for her several times per day)? Does taking children seriously negate taking adults seriously? Is my child's preference for playing with her toys in the living room and then leaving them there somehow more important than my preference to not have them strewn all over the floor?

I don't understand.

And if this is the case, who is going to explain to the child that the world no longer revolves around them once they become an adult/parent? After all, once they have their own children, they need to start taking THEM seriously, and the child might decide that he wants something different than his previously-pampered mama, right?

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