

Introduction to Taking Children Seriously (TCS)

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 30 July, 2003 - 10:13

Sarah Fitz-Claridge (<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>).

“Look, I don't have much time, Sarah. Could you tell me what TCS is *briefly*? Just give me the short version for now. You've got 15 minutes,” said Wendy, checking her watch. She had just had her first baby and was anxious to get home.

“I'll try,” I said. “But I must warn you that I find it quite difficult to express a deep idea accurately in just a few words.”

“Try,” urged Wendy, firmly. “Forget the subtleties; just give me a quick summary of the TCS method.”

“The problem is that **TCS** is not an educational method or a parenting strategy, and if you think of it as a method, you're likely to get a wildly inaccurate impression of what it is like.”

“Not a parenting strategy? Well what is it then?” asked Wendy.

“It is a style, a way of thinking about human situations, a philosophy.”

“Whose tenets are...?” prompted Wendy.

“TCS holds that all human beings are **fallible** and can make mistakes. You can feel 100% sure that you are right, when actually, you are mistaken. We think that there is such a thing as truth, and right and wrong, and that through **conjecture and criticism**, human beings can come to know and understand truths about the world, including moral truths. But what we can never get is authority, or proof, that any particular idea or belief is one of those truths.

By thinking of family interactions in particular with that in mind, TCS addresses a very important problem: the problem of people in families hurting each other.”

“Hurting each other?” queried Wendy. “Oh I don't think that many parents are into corporal punishment these days, Sarah.”

“I wasn't particularly talking about corporal punishment, I was just referring to the idea many people have, that for one person to get what she wants, another has to suffer – in other words, *not* get what she wants. What I am saying is that we can all get what we want. No one enjoys making loved ones suffer. But it doesn't have to be like that.”

“Hmmm... that sounds interesting, if a trifle difficult to believe at the moment.” said Wendy. “Tell me more.”

I continued: “TCS holds that **improvement is possible** and that the best state to be in is one in which you are **solving problems and effecting improvements**.”

“OK, but how?” asked Wendy.

“When TCS families have a disagreement, instead of one person imposing her will on the others, they try to solve the problem in such a way that no one gets hurt.”

“Not even the parent?”

“Not even the parent. *Parents are people too, m'kay?*”

“Glad we got that straight,” said Wendy, with a wink. “But if you think we're going to solve all the problems in this world, Sarah, I hate to break it to you, but that ain't gonna happen this lifetime.”

“Yes, there will always be unsolved problems and unresolved disagreements in the world,” I said. “Scientists haven't solved the death problem yet, and probably won't in our lifetime. But what is relevant here is that they might well have found successively better states of mind in regard to that problem, each the result of successive failures to solve it. The aim is not zero problems: the only individuals who have zero problems are dead ones. The thing to avoid is not so much unsolved or even unsolvable problems, as **a state in which our problems are not being solved** – where thinking is occurring but our theories aren't changing.”

“Oh, so what you're really advocating is mental progress.” said Wendy.

“Yes,” I said. “Solving a problem means **doing whatever it takes to cause those involved to adopt states of mind which they prefer to their previous states, and which do not cause them to hurt each other**. This might involve taking some visible action, or it might just mean making a change in your mind.”

“But how exactly do you solve problems? If you have some ideas about this, tell me quickly, Sarah...”

“I can give you a few ideas, but the answer is that you do it however you can,” I replied. “Solving problems and making improvements can't come from any formula. It requires creativity and thought, though not necessarily conscious thought: most of it is unconscious or inexplicit.”

“Inexplicit?” asked Wendy.

“Expressed only in the brain's internal code, not in words. For example, a child who is learning to speak is improving her knowledge of the grammar of the language despite not being able to express in words her knowledge of grammar.”

“I don't know any grammar. We never did that at school.” said Wendy.

“You don't know it explicitly but you must know it *inexplicitly* or you would not be able to speak or understand English sentences. Similarly, when you are driving a car, you you might be thinking about what to cook for dinner tonight, and not consciously be thinking about driving at all, but your driving is nevertheless controlled by your mind...”

“I wouldn't be so sure about that. Have you seen the way I drive?”

“Of course even when you are thinking consciously about a problem and you solve it, creating a preferable state of mind, you might be mistaken in your theory of what the problem was or how you solved it. As fallible human beings, we are often mistaken even about our own minds.”

“Especially if we've had one too many beers,” said Wendy.

“Yes, that certainly doesn't help,” I said. “But even when stone cold sober, we can still be mistaken. All we can do is to try to correct errors as best we can and keep improving things. To do that, it helps if you think that is possible. If you think that there is no possible solution to a problem, or no way to improve a given situation, you might not be applying enough of your creativity to do any good. So if you want to improve things or solve a problem, **assume that a solution to the problem is possible and seek truth**. It helps if you desire truth and are open to both the possibility that there is a solution and possible solutions. If you aren't open to criticism, then even if someone comes up with a brilliant idea, the chances are you won't be able to take advantage of it. TCS people try to remain open to other people's proposed solutions, even if those other people are young children. To increase the likelihood that you will solve a problem, **actively try to solve the problem**. And instead of complacently taking the view that a particular situation is unproblematic and that no improvements can be made, **actively seek possible improvements**. Don't miss a delightful improvement that would have created an even better situation. One improvement leads to another.”

“But if there was no problem in the first place, why would you want to change anything?” asked Wendy. “If it ain't broke, don't fix it! Trying to improve something that doesn't need improving seems a bit negative to me.”

“I don't mean that you should be approaching life with pessimistic glasses on, always looking for trouble,” I replied. “On the contrary, **optimism** is very important. What I am saying is that good situations can be even better situations, and that effecting such improvements is worthwhile and, for that matter, a source of joy. A child can be perfectly happy playing on the climbing frame in your back garden, but might well be thrilled and excited when you suggest going inside and making her own ‘climbing frame’ or a ‘house’ out of some tables, upturned chairs, and a blanket or two. And yourself might realise that yourself actually prefer to be indoors instead of outside, even if you had been quite happy outside until that moment.”

“Oh, OK, I get it,” said Wendy. “So, what were you saying about how to solve problems?”

“I was saying that to solve a problem, you have to be truth seeking and open to criticism, and you have to assume that a solution is possible and throw yourself wholeheartedly into trying to solve it. We try to come up with **bold conjectures aimed at solving the problem** or making the good situation even better. Then we **subject all the candidate solutions to criticism** to eliminate any that don't stand up to scrutiny. **Ideas should be judged by their content, not by their source**, otherwise you might miss a really super idea from a young child. It is important to **drop refuted conjectures** rather than doggedly hanging on to them. If you are having a discussion about where to go for dinner, and the Indian you had all wanted to go to is full, and you think that a great solution would be to go to the Chinese one over the road, but one of your party doesn't like Chinese, you might point out that the Chinese place also serves non-Chinese food, but if the person also doesn't like the smell of Chinese food...”

“What's wrong with them?! I *love* Chinese!”

“Well, if you tell them this they might be ready to change their opinion of the smell, and re-interpret it as a lovely smell, but if they aren't, it is probably time to think of another restaurant or some other solution to the dinner problem. To put it simply, you keep making bold conjectures and subjecting them to criticism until you have a solution that **everyone involved wholeheartedly prefers to any other candidate solutions any of you can think of at the time**. (We call that a **common preference**, the preference you have in common.) You enact the solution tentatively.”

“Why tentatively? You all agree wholeheartedly, right?”

“Yes but lots of people can agree, and still be mistaken. Everyone used to agree that the Earth was flat. You might all wholeheartedly agree to go to a particular restaurant, but when you get there, it turns out to be very smoky and one of you hates smoke. Or even if the restaurant is exactly as you were expecting, it may turn out to be the wrong place to go, because you yourself weren't as you were expecting. Remember, we can be mistaken about ourselves too.

“But even if it seems to solve the problem, that is just the beginning!”

“Is it? How? Why?”

“Because when you have solved a problem, that implies that there is a new state of affairs, and although it may be a great improvement over the preceding state of affairs, progress doesn't stop there. As I said before, there is always another improvement to make, a new problem to solve. There are then new and better problems to identify and solve.”

“You keep making problems sound like a good thing, but surely they feel bad!” said Wendy.

“It is not *having problems* that feels bad; what feels bad is *being stuck, unable to solve them*. Solving problems, growing as a person, and improving your life feels wonderful. And that is what TCS people do: they improve their lives and the lives of their loved ones, both on an individual basis and jointly, and they keep on doing so, always. And the more you do this, the better you get at doing it. The more you improve your life, the better your life is, and the more able you are to improve it further. The same goes for the improvements you make with your family, jointly.”

“So let me see if I've got this: you're saying that TCS advocates solving problems and making good situations better on an on-going basis,” said Wendy, “And the way you do this is by thinking laterally to come up with possible solutions or improvements, checking whether any of those ideas are actually a solution or improvement, and if not, you keep thinking until you find one that is, then you drop all the duds and go for it with the surviving idea, and then see how that solution works out, and start trying to find a way to make this new and better situation even better.”

“Yes. And all improvement happens through this process, whether the improvement is in a single mind, or in an entire culture. We have been talking about how it works individually and in a family, but the underlying logic applies in all problem-solving, evolution and improvement. ”

“Could you help me get a better handle on this?” said Wendy. “I am just wondering how it all translates into practice. Like, what happens if you and your child disagree about something, and then even after a lot of talking you don't come any closer to finding a solution you both prefer? You just disagree and that's that?”

“Would you agree that if two people disagree, they can't both be right?” I asked.

“Does it have to be a question of being right? Am I actually wrong for wanting to go to a Chinese restaurant, or is that just my taste?” countered Wendy.

“It is not the fact that you like Chinese food that is the problem, it is that you are not taking into account the fact that the smell of Chinese food makes me feel physically sick. Let me put it another way: if neither of us changes our mind and we don't resolve the disagreement, is it not the case that at least one of us is going to get hurt?”

“Well, it depends. One of us might change our minds. Like if my baby was restless, I might want to go somewhere quieter after all,” said Wendy.

“Yes, exactly, and solving a problem like this is likely to involve just this sort of change of mind. There could be many ways to solve this restaurant problem. We could go to a Chinese takeaway to get your food (while I wait at a safe distance outside) then take your takeaway to another restaurant or home, getting a takeaway for me elsewhere en route. Or we could come up with another restaurant that you have been wanting to try for a while and whose smell would not make me retch. Or I could tempt you to come to my place for one of my famous Cordon Bleu soufflé omelettes – the possibilities are endless. It doesn't follow from the fact that you like Chinese food, or even from the fact that you want to eat Chinese food now, with me, that there is no solution. We both want to **find a solution having the property that we have changed to states of mind which we prefer to our previous states and which don't involve us hurting each other**. We both want to get what we want. The secret is to realise that with a bit of thought, we *can!*”

“Actually, with the baby, it is kind of nicer to be at home anyway, because it's more relaxed, so I like your idea of getting takeaways,” said Wendy.

“Yes, when people stop concentrating all their energy on imposing their will, and allow themselves to consider other possibilities, good things can happen, including for *them*. The first idea you have is not necessarily the best, and sometimes other people, including the youngest child, can have an idea that, given a moment's thought, you yourself actually prefer. So you can see that in fact, it is not just in the other person's interests for you not to stick intransigently to your initial idea, it is in your own interests too. Had you imposed your will and dragged me to a Chinese restaurant, apart from having the annoyance of seeing me looking ill and rushing to the lavatory every five minutes, you would have been less relaxed than you would be at home.”

“The takeaway solution is not just a bit better than my initial idea, it's a *lot* better!” exclaimed Wendy.

“That's a glimpse of why it is best to find consent-based solutions – wholehearted agreement – outcomes having the property that no one gets hurt – rather than ones in which someone is merely going along with the outcome while really wanting some other outcome.” I said.

“Yes. But realistically, how easy is this in real life? We have barely mentioned children yet. In real life, just how easy is it always to find solutions that everyone prefers? I get the impression that to be a TCS parent, you have to have unlimited patience, time, resources and creativity, and be infallible. How can real people in the real world always find preferable states of mind and never hurt each other? What about those of us are far from perfect?”

“That's just it!” I said. “That is and always will be the human condition. People are fallible. It is not the distance they are from perfection that makes them unhappy, but being unable to move towards it. You don't have to be infallible or perfect to improve things. That is what excites me about TCS. You don't have to get everything right! You don't have to start out right and have unlimited this, that, or the other, all you have to do is to try to set things up in such a way that what is wrong can be altered. As I said before, TCS doesn't mean attempting to create a problem-free state, it means simply actually starting to solve problems rather than being stuck. Happiness is not being without problems, it is being in the process of solving your problems.”

“Sarah, this is very cheering. I have to get going now, but next time we meet, be ready for a list of questions as long as your arm. I haven't even asked you how this applies with a baby... You may live to regret having started telling me about this.”

“On the contrary, at least I can be pretty sure you're not going to make me go to a Chinese restaurant with you.”

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Are you anxious to understand the philosophy better? Are you wondering how this applies in practice, with real children? Are you wondering what this means for your child's education? Are you puzzled about the implications for how to treat babies? Are you just plain puzzled? I'd very much appreciate your questions and comments. Write to me at sarahtakingchildrenseriously.com. And lookout for future articles on the [TCS web site](#).

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to post comments

Comments

sleep

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 30 August, 2003 - 12:03

I like the idea of TCS , which I just stumbled accross. I t strikes me as being reletively similar to PET care to comment on the difference? I am curious to know what you think about my childs sleep (he now 19 months) bc everyone seems to have an opinion. I had to night wean him recently because I had mastitis. Now he doesn't sleep. We can't seem to reach an agreement (we've tried everything!!) because he wants parental input (sleep in our bed, hould his hand all night, give a bottle every few hours). It's not practical. Mummy and daddy going nutty with tiredness. Is crying it out a reasonable option?

[to post comments](#)

Sleep

Submitted by Ingrid Seger-Wo... on 31 August, 2003 - 07:20

I have found that sometimes parenting and tcs is not necessarily about trying to find a solution to a problem, but evolving as a person; growing beyond where you are today as a person, from within you. You say, "We cant seem to reach an arrangement" and that may be because for whatever reason, you may subconsciously have your *ideal* solution and thus what is happening, your baby is picking up your vibes and communicating to you "I dont like it" and fighting these 'whispered' vibes. What are your *whispered vibes*? "Is crying it out a reasonable option?" you ask - your baby is picking up your unspoken *solution* and does not like it...I found it very hard at first, to accept the personality of my baby boy. I found it hard to give to the degree that he needed and I had to ask myself what is it about his needs that bother me so much? TCS is about everyone being happy, thinking laterally, but it is also about accepting individuality and individual needs. I need lots of hugs as an individual, I need lots of body contact, that is my unique makeup, that is what makes me who I am. My needs can be ignored, and I do adjust, because being who I am, I am also flexible, but my needs simply become unmet. The needs of a child are vastly different to an adult, because if my friend does not want to meet my needs, I simply can go over to another friend and communicate my needs - eventually, I will somehow verbalize my needs and someone will listen or on the otherhand, I will vocalize my unhappiness at not being listened to. The result being that my friend and I may have a conversation and being an adult, my words will be respected. I think adults struggle to really listen to a baby's cry because often it means looking into ones own soul.

I also think it is wrong, to equalise the needs of a baby to that of an adult...because, I have to respect the fact that my child and I are equals in terms of humanity and rights, but I can not ever ignore my sons limitations...its like not respecting a person with special needs and saying to them "if you really wanted, you can walk", you can not will another not to have their limitations. Babies need their parents, and many feel a deep insecurity not feeling their parents presence. I do not feel comfortable willing my child to be more independent at night; I had to learn to relax enough to evolve and learn something from my child...because what he was trying to communicate to me, was in fact natural, intuitive, it was wise...I am very happy I listened to his voice and not my own...sometimes, I have found, the solution is in evolving as a person, and accepting the journey.

[to post comments](#)

Helping kids to sleep

Submitted by Alice Bachini on 1 September, 2003 - 17:11

A reader wrote: "We can't seem to reach an agreement (we've tried everything!!) because he wants parental input (sleep in our bed, hould his hand all night, give a bottle every few hours). It's not practical. Mummy and daddy going nutty with tiredness. Is crying it out a reasonable option?"

To minimise parental night-waking, parents can either ignore their children's distress or help them with it as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to a) re-settle to sleep as fast as possible, and b) build confidence and relaxation in the child's state of mind, moving towards better and more relaxed sleeps.

Ignoring the distress of children is cruel and dangerous. It can lead to ever-worsening problems throughout childhood, and sleep=problems in adulthood as well. And it's wrong and bad.

To minimise disruption: have the child near and able to get to whatever resettles him as quickly as possible at night. Be able to help him fast, then get back to sleep, as easily as possible.

"Crying it out" does not work. It just entrenches terrible negative feelings in children. And unless you can sleep through crying, it doesn't get you anymore sleep yourself.

[to post comments](#)

cooler full of bottles

Submitted by surfmom on 3 September, 2003 - 18:14

How about a cooler full of bottles beside your bed? When babe cries for a bottle, pull one out.

Also, it is developmenally normal for a babe of this age (breastfed or not) to experience night waking.

When he wakes at night, give him his bottle, snuggle up and think of how much you love him and how much you are going to miss his little 19 month oldness.

[to post comments](#)

Self Love

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 7 October, 2003 - 11:31

Just stumbled upon the site, and forgive me if I'm still confused about TCS. I'm concerned about the very negative attitude to school and also to the reluctance to ask children to help around the house. We've all met bad-mannered people and life as an adult is so much more difficult for people who don't understand or use politeness or generosity.

As for the school thing, the many negative memories from parents leads me to suggest that the excesses of TCS are no better than 'tennis-dad' syndrome. Aren't you forcing on your kids the experience you had of being a child who found it hard to adjust? School is hard at times, but nowadays it's more likely to be because of the other pupils than some dragonly teacher. If there is plenty of love and understanding at home, the child should find they can face and overcome the obstacles life throws at them when you have the support of people who love you.

TCS has many fine qualities, but is just as susceptible to any other doctrine to excessive extremes. It's not a fool-proof system, like organised religion or other philosophies, I think it should just be used as a guide to living - not a black and white we're saved (or rather our children - the ultimate extension of our selves) and you're not (nor your children).

Just a thought - interested to see the responses.

[to post comments](#)

jumping to conclusions

Submitted by JDR on 14 December, 2003 - 16:23

I have been involved with TCS for many years and I do not consider myself a political libertarian. And I know of others also who are not libertarians.

On the other hand, I think if a person is looking for a reason to be anti-TCS, it is quite easy to come up with just about any reason. Over the years, I've heard so many.... but I must admit this is the first time I've heard this one!

JDR

[to post comments](#)

Not true

Submitted by Alice Bachini on 17 December, 2003 - 23:23

It's not true that most TCS people are libertarians. I can only think of two who would actually describe themselves as libertarians, one of those with many misgivings. TCS people are all political colours, actually.

[to post comments](#)

PS

Submitted by Alice Bachini on 17 December, 2003 - 23:25

Also, of all the libertarians I have met and read about, approximately none whatever hold the views you ascribe to them anyway.

[to post comments](#)

not caring about others?!

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 19 December, 2003 - 15:32

"For libertarians, it is perfectly ok for one to think only oneself and not care about anyone else (besides maybe own kids). "

Libertarian or not, TCS does not have anything to do with thinking only about oneself and not caring about anyone else. The whole point is coming up with common preferences so EVERYONE is happy. If one cared only about

oneself, one probably wouldn't bother with what anyone else wanted or needed and would be more likely to coerce others. How is this anything like TCS?

[to post comments](#)

remarrying

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 6 July, 2004 - 11:40

Hello, I am a divorcee with three kids. I met a man I want to marry. he has two kids. My children do not want me to marry him, they do not like the idea of me being with someone else. They do not want to share me.

How can I make anyone happy?

Desperate.

X

[to post comments](#)

Someone grab Alan Turing's mind and put it under TCS supervision

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 18 August, 2004 - 04:08

I'm nineteen, in college, and I think this is the best thing ever. Thanks TCS, you've confirmed my beliefs 100x.

[to post comments](#)

An Explanation

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 5 October, 2004 - 01:27

A reader wrote:

'I would like to be explained how is it possible to be environmentalist and TCS or conservative and TCS.'

In the same way as any other person can be TCS. An environmentalist or conservative gives their child the best advice, guidance and help they can. This will include talking to their child about what values they think are best, which will presumably be environmentalist and conservative values for those people.

[to post comments](#)

Self Love?

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 29 October, 2004 - 00:31

I was actually stumbling upon the site around about the same time. Perhaps I just read everything you didn't read and visa versa ... as it seemed very far from Black and White (yet 'grey' doesn't describe it.) I found it, so far, somewhat vague. Very strange indeed that you should be cautioning that it's not a fool-proof system. It seems to me, so far, that it is really just saying 'be always open to the possibility of solutions, and to the possibility that they will come from somewhere you may not apply equal value to'. Oh, and perhaps that your needs are not necessarily equal in urgency to those of a child (to whom you owe a duty), and who is unable to get his/her needs met without your help (it was put much better up above!). That doesn't get anywhere near an organised religion etc. It also seemed very anything but "we're saved ... you're not" to me. Hang on, "should just be used as a guide to living"? that is exactly what was proposed in the Wendy/Sarah conversation that introduced 'what's TCS'. By the way TCS is a well used abbrev in our house ... it means toasted cheese sandwich! LOL.

[to post comments](#)

I'm a newcomer to this site b

Submitted by Relsqui (not verified) on 3 December, 2004 - 06:34

I'm a newcomer to this site but I had to respond to the bit about being "anti-school." It never occurred to me that people might be so because of a "dragonly teacher," or other pupils (although that can be, separately, an important factor).

I'm opposed to our current system of formal schooling for a simple reason: I love to learn. The only thing school did to further my education was give me access to learning materials: teachers, books, etc. If that same thing were achieved in a much freer and more creative environment, school could easily lose its stigma among those forced to participate in it.

[to post comments](#)

What if my child's needs are dangerous?

Submitted by Liz (not verified) on 15 February, 2005 - 23:58

Wwhat if child has the problem of hitting? Hitting everyone, mother, father, other children... how about biting as well? How do you fulfill his needs while respecting the rights of others? How do you teach him hitting others is wrong without telling him "no" or punishing his bad behavior in some way?? help!

[to post comments](#)

no hitting. that one is easy!

Submitted by zblofu (not verified) on 30 March, 2005 - 05:10

no hitting. that one is easy!

[to post comments](#)

TCS makes sense to me.

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 10 August, 2005 - 12:11

I love the sound of TCS. I'm glad I've found the site. It has put into words how I always felt about bringing up my children.

However, I get the impression that some people are confusing letting the child be entirely in charge (can't think of a better expression) and taking the child's opinions and ideas into consideration within the family group (that's not very well expressed either....).

[to post comments](#)

It all sounds well and good

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 5 November, 2005 - 04:22

I have attempted to use this way of thinking in the past and I had much trouble with it. Perhaps I am not applying it correctly? I have 4 kids who often fight and argue. Things do come to blows between them. The problem lies on the reactionary nature of children. They will strike out in anger BEFORE anyone has a chance to identify what the problem is. I read where you said the answer to hitting is simply no hitting. So how do you do this? If you say to a child, "I do not find hitting/name calling/teasing etc acceptable" (meaning it does not make the parent happy) and they reply with "I don't care " or "I'm right, you are all wrong" or "he deserved it." What do you do when the child hits anyway? If it is not acceptable, but I as parent have no way of stopping the hitting? You wrote simply "no hitting." Do I not allow the hitting? Do I say "hey Johnny, instead of hitting your brother, why not do this?" and present an alternative? What if that alternative or any other is not acceptable to the child because that child really just wants to hit his brother? The only way I can see to just not allow it ,is to just hold Johnny hostage when he raises his fist or make a cosequence. Isn't this coercive and bending the child to my will? If an adult raised a fist in my house I'd tell them to leave or call the police. As you can see this does not apply. Where will the 4,7 or 8 year old go if asked to leave? They don't live anywhere else and isn't locking them out if it's cold child abuse?

We tried identifying the problem on paper (after the incedent happened) then having everyone brainstorm to solve the problem. Everyone found something they agreed on, but as soon as 5 more minutes went by, more fighting and hitting. This goes on all day. So, tell me what you suggest, and don't be vague, be specific!

[to post comments](#)

the "no hitting" issue

Submitted by papajon (not verified) on 24 May, 2006 - 23:37

It seems to me that people are getting confused about who is giving proper information about TCS. Onlookers may be taking advice from people that are just posting comments. As far as the "no hitting" comment posted above, it has no real help for anyone reading. I tell my son that there is no hitting all the time. Does that ever do anything?

No. He usually goes around hitting everyone else. He is exerting his power to get attention in one of the ways that he knows how.

Most of the time, he hits when he is getting tired and ready for a nap or bed for the night. Although, I have noticed that he hits more and more when there is a television on and mom & dad aren't paying direct attention to him. When we say "no hitting" he begins laughing, as if we are playing a game.(hmmm...maybe he wants to play a game???)

I have found that if I ask him if he wants to read a book with me, he would much rather do that than go through the attention getting "no hitting" routine. In fact, he loves to read books.

Shouldn't we be reading with our children more anyway?

As far as multiple children are concerned, sorry, I have no experience there. I do suggest that you not take everyones posts as this sites definitive answer. Including mine.

Peace

to post comments

Kids Learning Materials

Submitted by [a reader \(not verified\)](http://newstrade.org/) on 2 November, 2006 - 10:30

Great post, I see racial self-segregation all the time, and I want to investigate the issue more thoroughly. I always find something new and interesting every time I come around here - thanks.

to post comments

Sorry for being a grammar dragon, but...

Submitted by [IkaTaii \(not verified\)](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Implicit) on 28 January, 2007 - 11:53

... inexplicit isn't a word. I was reading the dialogue above and winced when I read it three times in rapid succession. The word the original author was searching for is 'implicit' (unless they decided to make up a word that already has a pure synonym).

[moderator notes that 'inexplicit' is in hir Mirriam Webster's Collegiate 10th edition dictionary]

to post comments

i couldn't help but notice...

Submitted by [wreckinshop](#) on 20 February, 2007 - 11:01

as a parent, i enjoy surfing the net to get tips and ideas for raising my daughter. most of the time i just get bits and pieces here and there but usually go by my own common sense when handling my little girl. this was the first time to this website and i find that the TCS concept is what i do on a day to day basis anyway. it's cool that my parenting style has a formal title now.

i couldn't help but notice that the TCS concept has a lot of the same principles as my chosen religion - buddhism. i was raised in a strict catholic household and as i grew older and no longer feared my parents, i started to understand why i had so much animosity towards them. i've never questioned their love for me nor was i physically abused but the mental abuse was undeniable. i vowed to raise my daughter the way i wish i was raised. i found a lot of comfort with buddhist practices of mutual respect and tolerance. i can honestly say that my daughter and i are constantly laughing and smiling whenever we're together. i'm going to definately recommend your website to all of my friends with kids.

i wonder if the TCS creators knew of the philisophical simularites it shares with buddhism? i'd love to hear back from you guys on this. keep up the great work!

namaste

[to post comments](#)

Help! My son hates to study

Submitted by Faby on 7 August, 2007 - 04:00

I am new to this site. I need some advice. My son is 8 years old, He is studying in fourth standard, He is intelligent but hates to study. this reflects in his handwriting too. He scribbles most of the time and shows absolute disinterest. He can write neatly if he wants. but...

faby

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assumptions

Submitted by Tera on 23 August, 2007 - 11:58

I believe you are still confused about TCS.

Consider, if you will, that you made many assumptions in your comment and that the content of your comment was based on assumptions (chiefly, the assumption that you possess a good understanding of what TCS philosophy actually is all about), for the most part.

Some examples from my observation (not the truth, just something to consider; like a possibility):

1) "the very negative attitude to school"

Can you be 100% positive that this statement is actually a true reflection of the world view of TCS?

2) "the reluctance to ask children to help around the house"

Can you be 100% positive that this statement is actually a true reflection of the world view of TCS?

3) I assert that you made a huge assumptive leaps between "We all know bad mannered people..." to the end of your comment.

[to post comments](#)

A world that works for everyone

Submitted by Tera on 23 August, 2007 - 12:02

I once heard an extraordinary man say that what he was committed to in life was "A world that works for everyone, with no one left out". I like that. That seems to be what TCS aims for.

[to post comments](#)

no hitting

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 5 February, 2008 - 13:45

When a child is hitting, biting etc. a stern 'NO HITTING' or 'NO BITING' should suffice. If the child continues to hit/bite maybe it's time for timeout. I just don't understand why it is so hard to say NO to a child. We, as adults, are told NO all the time and need to deal with it to be healthy responsible adults. We can't always have what we want- if we (or our children) are never told NO we will become/create spoiled brats who have no concept of respect for themselves or others.

[to post comments](#)

No hitting

Submitted by Willow on 24 February, 2008 - 13:38

I think it would be better to say "ow that hurt" and explain that hitting hurts mummy/daddy. This gives an explanation why the behaviour is undesirable.

I strongly disagree that one should tell a child "no" for their own good, or so they get used to it. Surely that entirely undermines the TCS idea that a child's point of view is as valid and valued as everyone else's.

Children who are respected from the start can learn from example how to respect people.

[to post comments](#)

re: no hitting

Submitted by Issa (not verified) on 1 March, 2008 - 21:12

My main problem with the blanket "No hitting" is it does nothing to address the very good reasons the child has for hitting. Someone who doesn't care just says "No hitting" and leaves it at that. But surely a loving relationship with another person demands a more complex response. The other problem is that it just isn't true that hitting is never okay. There are lots of "good" reasons to hit, including consensual hitting for enjoyment of both parties and personal defense. Just saying "No hitting" ignores the needs of the child, avoids understanding, and avoids the possibility for discovering other reactions.

[to post comments](#)

Do not re-marry yet!

Submitted by Carrie (not verified) on 7 August, 2008 - 02:23

Divorce is devastating, whether or not your kids express it to you. You and/or your husband made the decision to divorce the kids, too, not just yourselves. Even if the divorce was your EX's fault... TWO WRONGS DO NOT MAKE A RIGHT. Give your kids the break they so desperately need and WAIT until they are grown before remarrying. That doesn't mean you don't have a life. It just means that you should not make your kids "marry" into another family. They've already "lost" their father and they don't want to lose their mother, too.

Responding with love and understanding, Carrie (mother of 2, child of divorce, totally new to TCS)

[to post comments](#)

TCS Philosophy

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 4 November, 2008 - 15:47

We take children seriously by taking their personal preferences as ONE factor among many – and not necessarily the most important one – that goes into how we make a decision with regard to their welfare. Thus, TCS is useful only as a strategy, not as a fundamental moral position. Trying to encourage children to, say, read books, do house chores etc, in a way that most interests them is certainly the best approach; compromise and negotiation should play their parts. If nothing else, children are taught the skills of compromise and negotiation in dealing with others.

But this is only a means to an end, the end being what the parents, discursing with the wider society, believe is in the best interests of the child. TCS should not fool anyone into thinking that what the child wants is what is of paramount importance. The incredible view that I've seen on some posts here that children should not be forced to do house chores simply because the fact of their births followed from their parents' choice rather than their own, is vacuous in the extreme. This advice purports to be offering a practical solution to the conflicts involved in rearing children, but in reality it is basing its entire approach on a single questionable thesis: it takes an extreme libertarian stance, holding up personal choice as the secular equivalent of holy writ. For this reason alone, it is unconvincing. A child's mind is immature and it is the duty of her parents to guide it as best they can and make decisions on her behalf, where the child lacks the perspective and emotional maturity to do so for herself.

Children deserve respect, not a pandering to their every whim. Just like your aesthetic sensibility has to be trained to listen to a sonata or watch a foreign movie or drink your first beer before it's ready to understand what all the fuss is about, a child's mind does not come ready formed but needs to undergo a process of social training. There is a saying in the computer industry: garbage in, garbage out. If you leave all the decisions that affect her solely or even significantly up to your child's uninformed decision making mental processes, you are effectively taking the view that it is better to let chance take a substantial hand in rearing your child rather than your own active participation. Well chance will already play a large enough role as it is; better to get your own in while you can.

This is not to say that childhood is just a stepping stone to adulthood and is not precious in its own right; merely that a child shouldn't get a bye on what she wants just because her parents want to respect her right to be just a child. The hurt of being told 'no' is just smoke-and-mirrors. Indeed, TCS shies away from the growing pains of childhood, as if they were intolerable evils. You know, sometimes life just presents parents with catch-22s and someone is simply going to get hurt: the best you can do is choose the lesser hurt and band-aid the cut. When push comes to shove, any parent in a Western society who does not equip their otherwise healthy child in a timely fashion with important life-skills such as the ability to read, is hurting them more and is thus morally reprehensible.

Sure there are other complex issues at work here. Maybe too tight a focus on literacy means less focus on the child's innate musical talents. Fair enough. Or the flip-side: how is a child to know that she has the potential to be a musical maestro unless she tries her hand at it? But she might hate the piano or guitar at first, only learning to appreciate it when older. The bottom line is this: sometimes parents must impose, as gently as possible, their vision on their child in order to explore what's right for her. Too many people on this site have had bad experiences of controlling parents, of school and organised learning in general, and react with a knee-jerk by slipping into a disdain for any form of parental or teacher control whatsoever.

A human person is not just an individual; she is also part of a community within a network of relationships. The aim of rearing a child is as much about socialising the child as about allowing her to develop her individual abilities and interests. Yes, this does involve a degree of brain-washing and manipulation, even – oh horror! – of coercion. Such is the world. Everyone is forced by dint of our material nature to behave in circumscribed ways. Think I would pay taxes if I didn't have to? I get to choose for the most part which particular jobs I go for but choosing whether to work or not is not an option.

But a further flaw is TCS' unshakeable optimism in human nature, reminiscent of many forms of socialism. There is a faith at work here as well as a logical fallacy – that because some children quickly learn by example, all will; that if only encouraged in the right way, all children will learn proper self-discipline, social behaviour, desire for fulfilment and whatever other virtue you care to mention. The poor advice offered by many posters on the topic of siblings hitting each other is instructive here. There is nothing wrong with the word 'No' and the implicit threat of punishment behind that word in such situations. This is the seedling principle that we all adhere to in liberal democracies anyway. Of course there are exceptions to the rule; which is why they are called 'exceptions' and discussed separately.

No doubt parents should be democratic when it comes to the minor things and should use whatever tools of subtlety and compromise are available to gently nudge their little angels along the right path. But when a nudge just isn't enough – and this is a judgment call – when children are poised to make a really bad decision and no agreement can be reached, the parent must be prepared to overrule them in true dictatorial fashion. TCS suggests that creative approaches should be tried in attempting to coax a child in the desired direction, a middle ground perhaps lying somewhere, well, in the middle. All well and good, but what if the parent simply isn't that creative. Or if, after a hard day at work, they are simply too tired to explore other options. Not ideal, but much in life is like that and we just have to cope as best we can, without resorting to reciting empty mantras.

People on this site would seem, if their methods of argumentation, articulation and penchant for philosophy-101-style analyses are anything to go by, to have received above average education. But rather than building an

approach around an ossified theory – that personal choice is always best – it is better to adopt a more pragmatic approach, and then see if any underlying patterns emerge. Pragmatism has just as noble a philosophical pedigree as libertarianism and has the advantage of being able to adapt its actions to whatever the real world throws at it, rather than circling the wagons around a moribund dogma.

When adults make choices, there is an implicit understanding that responsibility for the outcome goes with those choices. Adults make certain choices on behalf of children because children are not yet adults – they are not ready for the full responsibilities of the adult world. When are they ready? Some parents are stricter than others so there are differences of opinion. But parenting skills can be critiqued successfully without reduction to a banal formula.

My partner and I have a six-month old daughter, our first. I know we are flawed and limited individuals. We will make mistakes with our little girl over the coming years, so I hope we will always be open to critique. Personally, I have an a la carte approach to parenting – if it works, use it. But all my partner and I have is our respective mental and judgmental faculties as they stand at each time we are called to make a decision regarding our daughter's welfare. Unless she turns out to have a disability, our baby will by hook or by crook one day learn to read; whether by coaxing or by coercion she will study. Maybe my own personal failings in life will be my subconscious motivator for gently pushing her toward academic, sporting and other types of success. Who knows? That kind of speculation goes nowhere. In any case, our darling will be the beneficiary, as long as we don't turn out to be monsters. As she gets older and develops a more mature mind, we will cede more freedom and responsibility to her. We will adapt to whatever crises her growing up throws at us and, though we will fall far short of the ideal as parents, we will keep abreast of new thinking in parenting, selecting what seems most appropriate to our situation. Exactly what enlightened parenting has been doing for generations.

[to post comments](#)

Refreshing!

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 21 December, 2008 - 04:30

I was browsing to find an article on the pressures of early childhood reading and found your website. I'm impressed. My soul is comforted. I'm not crazy. I think I've been a TCS person all my life. I treat life TCS-style. What I'm reading speaks to my soul; it's like second nature to how I live life. And yes, it's a philosophy, not a dogma or some sciencey shmieny pediatric imperative...Nice to see I'm actually in the state of solving as I "felt" I was...not convinced, but I felt I was...and that's important...I'm a very intuitive person and a perceiver. I'm often accused of refusing to "take stands" on issues when really I'm not willing to support something because it simply flatters egos and keeps the status quo. This kind of play-it-by-ear mentality can really put people off who like everything cut and dried, but I think it's not healthy to be too rigid. Here is really useful information for parenting. It's gentle yet involves all the potentialities for teaching clear boundaries and moral virtues. Bravo! Something smart in the 21st century:)I'm filled with hope!

[to post comments](#)

I'm trying to grasp the

Submitted by Jett T (not verified) on 21 January, 2009 - 23:22

I'm trying to grasp the meaning behind TCS- am I thinking correctly that it's really all about being creative and thinking outside the box so that when you have a problem, you figure out a way to solve it so that no one is hurt?

If so, and I think I'm only half grasping it, that's a wonderful idea! We get so caught up in a our little bubbles day to day, that we forget that the sky is the limit. To use a very stupid example, my wife got the exact same tooth brush as me...I told her that this was a problem, and we would have to figure out a way to mark one of our brushes to make it distinguishable. She responded, "Or you could get a new toothbrush." The idea had completely escaped me, as I was obsessing over whether to use a marker, piece of tape, etc. On a larger level, how often does this happen with even more important problems? Like in marriages for example? Maybe people are so obsessed with divorce being an option, that they forget the limitless creative solutions to their problems.

Hey, even if I'm completely misunderstanding TCS, you've got my mind going!

[to post comments](#)

Tired parent

Submitted by Caplin on 27 January, 2009 - 13:53

Oh my reading all these comments leaves me feeling extremely confused. My son seriously HATES school, with just one semester left of completing highschool he still refuses to go (he'll just barely attend just enough to possibly scrape a pass). I don't know if I've been a bad parent or good parent. [moderator has snipped personal detail] It's been a very traumatic time and I could go on forever. We try our very best to support what he wants even if he decided he's had enough of school and wanted to drop out (secretly I would be relieved but we leave the decision to him) he's determined to finish but will do less than what is required of him. [snip personal detail]... I see a lot of improvements but he has a lot of anger. He still has a relationship with his girlfriend I did not nor would ever try to come between that at the same time I don't encourage it either. Oh dear this is sooooo much and I've just as much or more to say. Wish I had someone to understand.

[to post comments](#)

No hitting

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 16 May, 2009 - 19:50

I fully agree that children will gradually learn respect for other's feelings but only if their feelings are also respected. I would add that aggressive or destructive behaviour is not the problem but the symptom of a small problem (i.e. practical : "he took my toy!!") or big problem (i.e. not being treated as a valid individual or being talked down to by adults/others). The same response applies to both: help the child by showing them their feelings are valid and respected but equally they need to respect the feelings of others.

We say to our children : hitting hurts. How can we let the other person know how we feel without hurting them? It does not work every time but just as adults, over time children make the connections and start to form a better understanding of themselves and their world.

[to post comments](#)

Problem Solving Does Not Advance Us

Submitted by [Steve \(not verified\)](http://www.seoexpert-uk.co.uk) on 20 January, 2011 - 14:57

Hi

As an ex School Governor I have often wondered at this state mandated thing we call education. I was asked to leave mostly because I asked too many questions about the role of Governors in supporting a kind of myopic violence on our and in this case my children.

The term "problem solving" gets trotted out in education and just about every part of human life. Schools even teach problem solving and is in the school curriculum in various subjects.

My concern is that solving problems seems to assume something about the underlying structure IE It's sound and we must fix that which is broken.

Problem solving can be applied to anything if we wish to maintain the status quo EG My car won't start and through a problem solving analysis we find out it has a flat battery. Charge the battery and off we go.

If we try and solve life's so called problems like; children and education I wonder whether we are starting with a premise or idea that is not structurally sound.

We might assume for examples that we need places or boxes to place our children and ask them to sit for x hours whilst we drum into them something that is vital for human survival... This is how I remember my school years:-)

Another way to approach this is to start with a vision or goal and then work backwards. This would necessitate understanding current reality in response to that which we wish to create but it's not problem solving ... it's creativity.

I realise that I may have gone off on a bit of a tangent here but think it's worth exploring and understanding. This approach has stood me in good stead. Some of my learning has come from Robert Fritz and some of it is based on how I see and experience the world.

All the best

Steve

[to post comments](#)

Problem solving

Submitted by Willow on 7 February, 2011 - 12:52

Steve, I see where you are coming from. I find myself agreeing that there is a problem with the semantics, but problem solving in itself does not have to be with a view to maintaining the staus quo. If you car won't start, maybe it is an oportunity to walk, cycle or stay at home. If problem solving involves working out how one can keep everyone working to the plan, then it has failed. Problems can be solved by changing the plan or changing the institution. This can be radical or subtle. Willow.

[to post comments](#)

I like the idea that I see in

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 29 May, 2011 - 13:27

I like the idea that I see in this page- that we are encouraged to think creatively - to learn as adults how to become better version of ourselves so to speak, how to grow beyond what we thought was even possible. I like the idea that the kids are taught how to think themselves - and surely, I don't think there is a danger that there will be ever any person alive in this planet that has never been told "no". Really.

to post comments

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