

(Not) Doling Out Looks and Latitude

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 24 July, 2003 - 13:54

Here is a [TCS List](#) post by **Robert Donjacour** in which he highlights the fact that a certain sort of look can be just as coercive psychologically as overt coercion. He then goes on to advocate giving children infinite latitude and talks about what happened when he and his wife gave up being “the food czars”. (Posted on Wed, 30 Jul., 1997, at 17:39:52 -0800.)

Hi --- Welcome to the List. I too was thrilled to find this sort of a list which advocates for kids, who so often don't get respect and are bullied and ignored. I learned a lot from the folks here and now want to help share these ideas.

I am lucky. I'm not sure how, but I seem to have mastered a “look” that I give my girls during their “Right Now” moments, that seems to (so far) settle the issue.

This look worries me. What is the look saying? It sounds like a threatening coercive look.

I've never hit them.

Good. Is this look similar to hitting?

I just make an ugly face and they postpone themselves. I have also began to discover that, at times, the softer my stance the more attention I receive from my kids.

This makes sense to me. When I'm in a giving mood and less judgemental of my children, they too are more accepting. Taking your children seriously really does work.

I have no idea what I'll do when these things don't work anymore.

Are they really working? The looks may be keeping your girls quiet while they wait, but what else is it doing? It may be setting up a bad situation for them where they are unable to get what they want.

Each parent is the best judge as to what is perceived as a threat to their children. It may not always be the most objective opinion, but I feel that it is the best. And although our children require our respect and latitude, the responsible parent is the one that assess the situation, expresses the respect, and doles-out the latitude with care.

I don't agree that the parent doles-out the latitude. The best thing is for kids to have infinite latitude. They get to decide what to do. Of course they will over do things. Particularly when they first get the freedom to choose for themselves.

I used to dole-out food to my girls. There was no real problem with their diet or mine, but I realised that treats were being sought for other reasons than just the enjoyment they got from eating them. Some books I read and a friend's experience convinced my wife and I to stop being the food czars.

Our girls ate a huge amount of ice-cream, candy, cake, and hot dogs at first, but now are back eating pretty close the same diet we chose for them. But when we are presented with unlimited candy at a party the kids eat what they want and stop when they are full. It is a much better situation. Whenever I try to stop being in charge of stuff, life with the kids gets easier and more rewarding.

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Comments

looks

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 July, 2003 - 20:13

So now it is looks? While I usually agree, this idea concerns me.

Banish the look. Trying to look expressionless. Now breaking down. It is happening! Oh no, the look! (booga booga booga, but no sound)

[to post comments](#)

The Look

Submitted by Terra on 24 July, 2003 - 21:50

When I was a kid, my parents rarely hit me, they didn't have to, they knew how to make my blood run cold with fear just by giving me The Look. My stomach still knots up when I remember The Look. Have you any idea how frightening it is for a kid when their parents "make an ugly face" that tells you your parent's angry with you? It cut me to the bone. It tore me apart. You want your parents to love you and be pleased with you.... and when you get The Look, it's like you've totally screwed up and they hate you. It felt like the bottom had fallen out of my world every time. You think it's good to make a kid feel like that, "a reader"? If you're not giving them The Look, you're looking **expressionless**? Where did **that** come from? Like, there's The Look or there's **nothing**?

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restricting sweets

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 25 July, 2003 - 08:55

When I was a kid, my family gave me virtually unlimited access to candy, cookies, etc. I don't remember a time when there wasn't some kind of treat available for me to eat.

But the thing was, most of the time I **didn't** eat it, because it was always there. I only ate it when I genuinely wanted some, and I never ate more than a reasonable amount.

I used to have friends and relatives, though, who didn't have access to candy all the time. And whenever they got some, they would gorge themselves to the point where they would get ill. Their parents seemed to believe that if the kids could get candy all the time, this is how they would **always** act. They interpreted it as a cause and not an effect of the restriction, but, judging by my case (and that of other children in my situation) it was the other way around.

to post comments

Good in both points of view

Submitted by Jenny on 25 July, 2003 - 09:22

Two posters have commented in opposite directions about parents giving their kids ugly looks. I feel there is good and bad in both points of view. The first poster is dead right that it's a matter of concern if a mum hides her real feelings from the kid. All too often parents act a part instead of being real with their kids, but their kids need the real mum with her real feelings.

The second poster, Terra, is right too. Parents often take "being real" much too far, and use that excuse for using ugly looks to control and coerce their kids. Terra is right that not giving ugly looks doesn't mean necessarily hiding you real feelings but I think the first poster has a good point that we need to take on board and take care to avoid becoming expressionless.

to post comments

I make ugly faces to my son b...

Submitted by Pokemamma on 25 July, 2003 - 10:18

I make ugly faces to my son but trust me, he deserves it.

to post comments

sweatdrop

Submitted by Elliot Temple on 25 July, 2003 - 18:35

makes ugly face at Pokemamma

What? She deserved it.

-- Elliot Temple <http://curi.blogspot.com/> (<http://curi.blogspot.com/>)

to post comments

Food and weight issues

Submitted by Jess Woodside on 26 July, 2003 - 11:45

My parents let me have cake on the weekends but not otherwise. They wanted to help but what they did was make me never be able to pass a cake shop without going in and buying one. I have had issues with my weight throughout my life and sometimes I binge and purge. Trust me, food czars make their kids' lives miserable and **unhealthy**. Think about it!

[to post comments](#)

I hear that

Submitted by Virginia Warren on 18 February, 2004 - 22:49

My parents were **very** restrictive with sweets when I was a kid--hypocritically so, as typically what would happen was my dad would buy a bag of cookies and sit on the couch and eat them all, after giving me **one**. I sneaked and stole sweets every chance I got. I was amazed by the concept of "dessert" when I first encountered it at a friend's house.

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