

Parental Aversions

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 20 July, 2003 - 11:56

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

A poster on the **TCS List** wrote:

*Let's say a parent has a deep aversion to violence ('pretend' or otherwise) – even the sounds of violence (again, pretend or otherwise) causes the parent physical and emotional discomfort. How would a child who wants to play violent video games and a parent who experiences this sort of discomfort reach a **common preference**?*

I sympathise, and I have in the past experienced something similar. But what we have to realise is that this is a special case of the following question:

“Let's say a parent has a deep aversion to certain forms of innocent enjoyment and learning on the part of her children – such that even the sight/sound of that innocent enjoyment and learning causes the parent physical and emotional discomfort. How would a child who wants to learn and enjoy herself in those ways and a parent who experiences this sort of discomfort reach a **common preference**?”

Eeek!

In other words: “If a parent thinks that children should not enjoy themselves and learn in certain ways that are, objectively, innocent and harmless, and her children want to do that, how can they find a common preference?”

Or: “If a child loves Brussels spouts and his parent feels very distressed and sick at the thought of her child eating this accursed vegetable, how can parent and child find a common preference about the eating of Brussels spouts?”

Or: “If a child likes playing chess, but her parent has such an aversion to chess that even the mere sight of a chess board would send her into extreme distress, how could they find a common preference?”

Or: “If a child loves books and reading, but her parent has an aversion to them, how can they find a common preference?”

The answer is, to the extent that you are not open to criticism, you can't. Your child might still find one without your help (or indeed, with your hindrance),

but you will not always be that lucky, and you are even less likely to be that lucky if it is a recurring situation.

If you are a parent in a situation like this, you might find the following tips helpful. This is what I myself did anyway:

Recognise that you have a psychological handicap – a hang-up, an area of irrationality in your own thinking. It can be very liberating to realise that this is what it is. I remember when (thanks to a TCS friend) I realised that I had a hang-up about violent films. Until that moment, I would feel very bad whenever there would be a violent film on TV, but somehow, when I realised that I just had a hang-up, that realisation in itself lessened the amount of unease I felt in connection with violent films.

See that it is your own problem, not your children's, and that it would be immoral to spoil your children's lives by making them bear the consequences of your own hang-ups. Once I could see that my thing about violent films was, well, *my* problem, and that it would really be a lot better if I were able to enjoy them like normal people can, I realised that it would be a terrible mistake to spoil my children's enjoyment of these films in any way.

Instead of making yourself miserable by beating yourself up for not being Perfect Mr Saint, concentrate your energy and creativity on not passing it on to your children. Seek help on the [TCS List](#). I find that there is nothing better than a good rational argument or three (thousand) to help me think my way out of hang-ups.

Realise that it would be a very bad thing to pass on this handicap to your children. When I thought about it, I wanted to avoid causing my children to grow up feeling the unease I felt in connection with watching violent films. I could see that it was a handicap rather than a good thing. At the risk of sounding like a real case, here, I also had (well all right then, still have, to some extent) a hang-up about spiders and other creepy crawlies, insects, and small flying creatures, and again, I wanted to avoid passing that on to my children.

Strive to overcome this hang-up on an on-going, wholehearted basis, while supporting your children in doing the things that trigger your irrationality. TCS friends of mine helped me enormously. They would watch films with me, talking me through them and helping me learn to understand them. I still have some way to go – whilst violence per se no longer upsets me, I still don't really enjoy horror films – but in recent years, I have often found myself wanting to watch a horror film, so I think I am still making progress.

Perhaps find other adults, who do not share this handicap, to engage with your children in this sphere, to make it less likely that the children will become 'infected' by your irrationality. I did this and I strongly recommend it.

Think about the handicap, talk about it as a handicap to your children, and try to think your way out of it. For example, in the case of a hang-up about violence, you could start trying to distinguish between violence and pretend/play/acted violence. You could think about the fact that in a play fight, the parties are all *enjoying* themselves. You could think about what fun the actors in a violent film were having when they made the film. You could ask yourself why you have an aversion to pretend 'violence' but not to the coercion you feel compelled to engage in in this connection with your children! (Well when you put it like that...!)

Of course to do all this, you have to be aware that your aversions are your own problems, and sometimes that is not easy. One way to check whether an aversion you have is reasonable or not might be to ask a few TCS friends what they think. The chances are, they won't all have the same hang-up, and you will be able to get some helpful feedback from them. I very much doubt I could have overcome my hang-up about violent films without the help of my TCS friends, because until I talked to them, I did not really realise it *was* a hang-up. All this assumes that you can recognise the hang-up as being a hang-up, but many disguise themselves.

Even if you can't change your psychological reaction to something, you can sometimes change your *behaviour* in connection with that thing. You can try to act *as if* you do not have the hang-up. This in itself can feed into positive changes in your psychology. My psychological reaction to spiders – and all living creatures likely to crawl on me, fly into my hair, bite me or (horror of horrors) make a home in my knickers – used to be little short of terror. (Glad I don't live somewhere there are actually dangerous creatures... It was jolly scary spending time in Sweden where there were potentially fatal disease bearing ticks.) Anyway, I was so determined not to pass on this ridiculous irrationality to my children that I succeeded in changing my outward behaviour in front of my children. To my surprise, I discovered that

over time, I actually felt inwardly less phobic. Aren't children wonderful?! Who would have thought they could effect such a 'cure'?

To anyone who is struggling with hang-ups: you are not alone. Unfortunately, everyone has them. Instead of beating yourself up about it, just try to take steps to avoid passing them on to your children. I find it helps to laugh at myself. This is a lot easier *after* the spider has just crawled over you than *while* it is, but having a laugh about it with your children can make it all seem easier the next time. And if you can't laugh at yourself as such, well, you can be a bit proud of yourself for your bravery and for doing the right thing.

I do not mean to imply that all this is easy, merely that it is worth doing if you can. With many hang-ups, you are completely unaware that you have them.

to post comments

Comments

Hmm...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 20 July, 2003 - 20:55

I shrivel at the thought of parents letting their toddlers in front of the TV with violent movies, because they read your article and now think, "it would be coercive to turn the TV off".

Violent images, pretend or otherwise, are powerful and make a print on your mind. And a small kid wouldn't tell the difference. And I rather have my kid see joyful and pretty things. There are so many things to learn, there's no harm in leaving the violence for later.

I have no hangups with pretend violence, and I played violent games with my kid watching, always caring to explain it was a game, it's just cartoons, etc. My kid didn't like them much, too scary, noisy, aggressive images, so I play more cutie games for him now. If he liked the violent ones, there wouldn't be a problem because he doesn't hit other kids. Kids that hit other kids shouldn't watch violent movies.

I think violence, even pretend one, it's a very special concept and you can't compare it to Brussels sprouts. It's not a specific form of a general situation, it's a specific situation. I think it would be neglectful to let a kid watch a violent movie without being certain the kid was helped to understand certain concepts. Like: the concept of pretending, of actors, of cartoons, of real violence, of pretend violence, etc. The kid also need good moral foundations, to know why real violence is bad, etc.

I also don't like the thought of people having to hide their hangups from their kids. My mom was phobic of spiders and would yell when seeing one, but I didn't get her fear. Parents should be allowed to express their true feelings with their children (in a non-violent manner of course).

to post comments

logic

Submitted by Elliot Temple on 20 July, 2003 - 21:05

a reader, who did not sign anything, wrote:

I think violence, even pretend one, it's a very special concept and you can't compare it to Brussels sprouts.

violence and brussel sprouts *were not* compared. rather, the *logic* of a situation involving violence, and the *logic* of a different situation involving brussel sprouts were.

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

to post comments

Discussion

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 20 July, 2003 - 22:40

A reader commented:

I shrivel at the thought of parents letting their toddlers in front of the TV with violent movies, because they read your article and now think, "it would be coercive to turn the TV off".

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to clarify a few very important points. I did not say, nor did I intend to convey any such idea as this one above. In this piece, I was not addressing the question of young children watching violent films, or of what to do in terms of helping/guiding children whom you think might not want to see violent films, or who might be upset by them. There are of course many important things to say about all that, but that was not what I was talking about.

I think it would be egregiously negligent of a parent to just leave a child to watch a film that might disturb the child! I think that it is vital that parents sit with their children and converse with them about what they are watching, and that they advise the children against watching programmes and films they think the child would find disturbing. It needs to be possible for the child to start watching something and stop if he wants to, or to watch while doing something else, or to watch with the sound off, or to be in the same room but not really watching it. I think parents should make it possible in practice for their children to watch in unconventional ways, as well as giving them advice not to watch some things.

I rather have my kid see joyful and pretty things. There are so many things to learn, there's no harm in leaving the violence for later.

What I had in mind was not making toddlers watch violent films, or leaving them to rot or be upset by violent films, I had in mind older children who want to watch violent films, and quite reasonably want to watch them with a parent and have a nice conversation while doing so.

I have no hangups with pretend violence, and I played violent games with my kid watching, always caring to explain it was a game, it's just cartoons, etc. My kid didn't like them much, too scary, noisy, aggressive images, so I play more cutie games for him now.

Sounds sensible.

I think it would be neglectful to let a kid watch a violent movie without being certain the kid was helped to understand certain concepts. Like: the concept of pretending, of actors, of cartoons, of real violence, of pretend violence, etc. The kid also need good moral foundations, to know why real violence is bad, etc.

I agree that it is very important to help children understand these things, and to offer them guidance in this respect. But that was not what I was talking about. The only point of my piece was to alert parents to the fact that sometimes, it is possible to realise that you have a silly hang-up, and that if you can recognise that, there are things you might be able to do that will not only avoid passing it on to your children, but might even help you overcome it at the same time. The reason I thought it worth mentioning again was that I am not alone in having had such experiences, and others have found this analysis useful in their own lives. There is a lot more that could be said about all this, but I just wanted to throw out this idea that I think has been very helpful to me and other TCS people (and some non-TCS friends of mine, come to that!).

I also don't like the thought of people having to hide their hangups from their kids. My mom was phobic of spiders and would yell when seeing one, but I didn't get her fear. Parents should be allowed to express their true feelings with their children (in a non-violent manner of course).

I don't disagree with this. However, had I never realised that my violent films hang-up was a hang-up, I think that although there would have been no overt violence towards my children in connection with violent films, I would have exuded distress that would have been psychologically violent and would have caused problems. Had I appeared terrified of insects instead of unconcerned and interested (when my children were very young),

I could be mistaken, but my gut feeling is that they would have or might have gradually acquired the same fear. Now that that danger is past, I tend to scream when I see a spider, but more for fun and to give my children a laugh than because I feel how I used to feel in connection with spiders.

[to post comments](#)

refreshing perspective

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 21 July, 2003 - 22:04

I don't have children, but I find many TCS site columns thought provoking. For instance I like seeing you advise people to think rationally and talk rationally about hang-ups. Most self-improvement (or however you'd classify it) writers seem to take irrational overreactions (hang-ups) seriously and to talk about them as if they are dearly held values, and as if using logic or reason is somehow wrong. It's a little hard to explain what I mean, but anyway, I really like your unapologetic use of logic and reason.

[to post comments](#)

Hiding hangups

Submitted by Terra on 24 July, 2003 - 22:10

All due respect to "a reader" and yeah, there's no need to hide fear of spiders but I sure wish my parents had hidden some of their hangups from me... especially the one that made mom destroy all my "violent" videogames and

Parental Guidance CDs. Yeah, it would of been good if she'd hidden that one.

[to post comments](#)

Violence against violence

Submitted by Jenny on 25 July, 2003 - 09:26

Terra, it's a bit ironic that your parents acted violently against your videogames and CDs, on the grounds that they were "violent".

[to post comments](#)

TCS with values

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 August, 2003 - 05:11

I think TCS is very compatible with values. Yes, in its pure form the author is correct about comparing violence to reading. From the TCS point of view this is correct. But I also think the parent shouldn't ignore their abhorrence to violence, and not qualm to explain to the child honestly why they don't like it. And in the end not feel "guilty" for asking for the violence to at least not be around them. They should also not feel bad for explaining to the child why they specifically don't want the child to be around violence either. If this is done honestly, I do not believe it is coercion, but the honest truthfull trust-building sharing of ones deepest emotions and beliefs. This is what families are for. This is teaching. In the end, whether the kid view violence or not is his decision, but a parent should be honest about their moral beliefs. TCS is not a religion, and therefore should be compatible to our personal religious beliefs. TCS doesn't say there is no right or wrong, but that we should not force right and wrong. It says we should teach what we feel, listen to what a child feels, and then come to a conclusion that we both feel good about in our hearts. If the parent doesn't feel good about the kid watching violence, he should not try to philosophize himself, or make himself pretend to feel good. Instead he should discover why, and share this with his kid.

[to post comments](#)

Parental Advisory on Lyrics and Music

Submitted by kate nelson (not verified) on 14 December, 2004 - 02:35

As a growing human, i find that aggressive music effects me mentally. I notice that listening to certain singers/rappers/country celebrities such as: 50 cent, G-Unit, Eminem, Swollen Members, Tupac, OutKast, Kid Rock, AC/DC and other interesting singers are not only expressing their opinion but also explaining reality. As you may know in our society and culture not to many people enjoy expressing their opinions, or really listening into the news on wars (like Iraq) and they just take in what Peoples Magazine says. Thank God for RAPPERS! CELEBRITIES! SINGERS! These people are the only human beings in our world that can get the message across, why are we banning this music for kids under 18 to listen to. Its crazy!

We are debating at the moment, if vulgar, or music containing coarse subject and language in it should only be sold to a person over 18 years of age. Now i think it should be sold to any child/adult of any age. This is the

communicator in our world, these are one of the only people telling their message standing out not belinding in with the IN crowd. Letting children listen to this is completeing their understandment of certain things, making it easier for the parent to clear it up. who do you think a kid is goin to listen to, his chezzy lame parents, or eminem, ac/dc his role models.

A good singer/rapper to explain this stuff such as the iraqie war is the song MOSH by EMINEM his new CD ENCORE it explains it in opinions and relocates history. thankyou very much yours truly kate nelson

[to post comments](#)

Did you have to watch the films?

Submitted by Julie (not verified) on 6 January, 2005 - 13:56

I'm wondering if you really needed the therapy of watching the films and having friends talk you through them. Certainly, if it was something you really wanted to do, then it was the right thing for you. I just got a hint of self-sacrifice from your description, like you felt an obligation to like or try to appreciate these films, so it made me wonder.

I just don't enjoy these films myself, although I watched some when I was younger. Now most of them (there are always exceptions) just make me feel too tense, and I actually find myself getting mad at the director for manipulating me into being scared. I would attend these films with my child, but at home I'd just walk into the other room. Too many other things to do other than make myself like something I'm not drawn to!

[to post comments](#)

hiding

Submitted by beckycolpack on 15 April, 2005 - 13:16

hOW DO YOU MAKE A CHILD UNDERSTAND THAT HIDING OR NOT ANSWERING WHEN OUTSIDE IS NOT A GAME. OUR 3 YR OLD GRANDSON WILL HIDE WHILE PLAYING OUTSIDE AND IN A MINUTE WE ARE ALL FRANTIC. HE CAN BE BEHIND A SHRUB OR BEHIND THE WOODS AND WE ARE TERRIFIED. WE WILL CALL HIM AND HE WILL NOT ANSWER. HOW DO MAKE HIM UNDERSTAND NOT TO DO THIS.

[to post comments](#)

Parental Advisory on...

Submitted by Abbey (not verified) on 3 May, 2005 - 17:01

Thank you sooooooo much 4 writing this letter I myself luv Eminem and my dad luvz ALL music but my mom being a abuse and sexuall assault consuler does not understand. EVERYONE THINKS THAT EM. IS THE DEVIL HIMSELF, BECAUSE HE EXPRESSES HIMSELF IN A CREATIVE WAY AT LEAST HE IS NOT KILLING PEOPLE!!! Also I skateboard, play PS2, etc. and my mom thinks this is innapropriate for a Pre teen girl...HELP ME!! Also Eminem is not a bad person in reality...I just thought you should know.

to post comments

It sounds like the article

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 17 August, 2005 - 02:08

It sounds like the article is advising on how to raise a "perfect" child. Y'know, one with no hang ups, no fears, and yet a great respect for everyone around them. I find that to be a little disrespectful, myself. The article is putting the parents on a plateau that's lower than the child's by not expressing their dislikes, and instead forcing themselves to submit to all of the child's ideas about a certain thing. Granted, you can take someone else's view for a spin, but you shouldn't have to desensitize yourself to something that you don't like in the hopes of reaching perfection. If you can't teach them self-respect, what can you teach?

I think it'd be better to teach a child that it's ok to not like doing something, and that fear is fine, as long as they realize what the real dangers of something are, and not just accept a psychological stigma. If they like something that someone does not, it's true that they shouldn't feel suppressed by that person's feelings, but if they truly care about and respect that person, then there is responsibility not to upset them, or to accept the consequences therein.

to post comments

violence

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 14 June, 2006 - 01:00

Parents that let there young children watch violence (wither it be "make-believe" t.v cartoons or real life situations (like boxing) Should seriously consider the potential consequences to the child,and the affects it may have on their personal life. Before accepting that it's normal and acceptable for your child to watch violence, just because all other parents at school let their kids watch it,then its ok, you should consider this.

if children are exposed to seeing people stabbing hitting punching and shooting other people from a young age they could intake it as being a acceptable way of interacting or dealing with their own anger or frustration when it arises, such children if not corrected and re-formed in early childhood may be the child that goes to school with their dad's gun and blow a couple of their friends heads off, because the day before they stole his pokemon card etc... A child's mind is very moldable and it is up to the parents to mould it correctly teaching them morals and what to be done and not to be done. Let children develop positive practical physical self defense skills and along with that they will be taught not only to protect themselves but to protect other people. And to only use violence as a form of self defense and protection. Anyone read the book "who are you" by Chris Butler? it's a great book.

to post comments

violence to be seen or not?

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 14 June, 2006 - 01:05

Parents that let there young children watch violence (wither it be "make-believe" t.v cartoons or real life situations (like boxing) Should seriously consider the potential consequences to the child,and the affects it may have on their

personal life. Before accepting that it's normal and acceptable for your child to watch violence, just because all other parents at school let their kids watch it, then it's ok, you should consider this.

if children are exposed to seeing people stabbing hitting punching and shooting other people from a young age they could intake it as being a acceptable way of interacting or dealing with their own anger or frustration when it arises, such children if not corrected and re-formed in early childhood may be the child that goes to school with their dad's gun and blow a couple of their friends heads off, because the day before they stole his pokemon card etc... A child's mind is very moldable and it is up to the parents to mould it correctly teaching them morals and what to be done and not to be done. Let children develop positive practical physical self defense skills and along with that they will be taught not only to protect themselves but to protect other people. And to only use violence as a form of self defense and protection. Anyone read the book "who are you" by Chris Butler? it's a great book.

to post comments

Feeling an aversion to violence

Submitted by Tracy (not verified) on 18 July, 2006 - 14:33

I enjoyed this article, and think the of fear of spiders is a great example of the author's point. I also think that not enjoying violent films is in an entirely different category.

Feelings of fear, disgust, aversion are guidance (non-religious) that what you are giving your attention to is something **not** wanted in your life experience. If you force yourself to go against a real feeling of not wanting something, thinking it's merely a hang-up, you do yourself and your child(ren) a disservice, IMO.

There are many books written on the subject. A couple of the top of my head are Think and Grow Rich, or As a Man Thinketh. What we focus on, we create in our lives. What we give our attention to, we attract into our life experience.

So I get your point, just wanted to say that how we feel about what we give our attention to *does* matter. Anyone wanting more info on this can do a web search for Law of Attraction.

Many thanks for a thought-provoking website & /blog. I'm thrilled to have found it!

Tracy

to post comments

More articles

- [No Way Out - And Loving It](#)
- [Don't Wait Until You're Perfect](#)
- [Requiring Children To Do Chores](#)
- [Waste Not, Want Not](#)
- [There But For An Internet Post Go I...](#)
- [Optimism](#)
- [Feeding The Family: Some Tips For the Cooking-Phobic](#)

- Taking Education Seriously