

Snapshot

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 13 November, 2003 - 22:24

Larsy



I spent some time with a friend of mine the other day. It was the friend who introduced me to the TCS philosophy. She was musing

over a set of proofs from a recent photo shoot with her extended family.

“I look awful in all of them,” she commented, “but I have always hated this sort of formal posing and smiling on cue for the camera. And I’m not good at it.” She passed the pictures over to me, one by one.

The large group picture showed your typical extended family grouping: a pleasant tree and garden setting, grandparents in the center with the adult children and their respective families ordered around the patriarch and matriarch of the clan. Everyone was grinning fixedly at the camera – except for my friend and her family and the other small children present. This last group were in various stages of blinking or watching someone else or looking glum.

“The photographer kept saying ‘Here, just let me position you.’ and we didn’t want that,” she explained. “Disapproval was thick in the air. I doubt my folks or my sibs will want a copy of *this* family shot.”

Looking at the family photo in my hand, I saw the dynamics of my friend’s family, frozen as a snapshot of that moment of history, on that day, in that year. My friend’s partner was gazing benignly at the camera with a slight smile. Seated next to him, my friend was grinning at her middle child, who was standing against her knees with his hands on his forehead, imitating a bull. The pre-teen was standing behind the group, detachedly looking up at the sky. The youngest, the twins, were pulling up handfuls grass to sprinkle on each other.

“It looks just like you,” I said. “Can I have a copy?”

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Comments

who says it's rebellion?

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 5 December, 2003 - 19:11

Who is paying the photographer? Who is paying for the finished product? Who should have the say in how they pose for the photograph?

Are the members of such a family being rebellious? Or just being themselves?

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photo nightmares

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 6 December, 2003 - 22:37

I've seen children being browbeaten into smiling for the camera. Is that right? By the time the picture gets taken, no one has a natural smile and there is lots of bad feelings all around. Lots of people aren't interested in being in a large family photo, and they get railroaded into doing so. It's not the case for everybody, but it often is especially for younger folks.

Is it right for people to take pictures of children without their consent? How many people actually think about talking to children ahead of time about it? Other than to inform them that they must put on such-and-so an outfit as there has been an appointment made for a photographer and where to sit and how to look when the time is right.

The most interesting and pleasing photos I've seen have been the sort that are not posed and rigid groupings. The best photographers know how to work with people to get what they want in a picture. But that requires the people involved to agree on what sort of picture they want. If half want the formal posed everyone-in-thier-place-and-smile-for-the birdie, and the other half want a more spontaneous and expressive picture... they could do both and see which turns out better. My guess is that many of the proponents of posed smiles will be unable to be spontaneous about it, not knowing how to strike a different pose.

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reply to "sigh"

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 8 December, 2003 - 12:34

If you were in the middle of doing something really interesting, how delighted would you be if some officious relative interrupted, demanded that you cease the interesting activity forthwith, and forced you to stand in a straight line with friends and relatives in order to smile in an apparently spontaneous manner at a camera?

How would not being prepared to be coerced into that activity be "rebellious"? Anyone wanting to capture a family moment would surely be better off making like David Attenborough, and photographing you in the middle of animated conversation with Aunty Mabel, no?

As for family meals, which is the preferable scenario?:

1. children forced to sit at table bored out of their brains by dull conversation

OR

2. children wandering in and out as they please, eating some food, joining in when the topic is fun, playing under the table, giving granny a hug... (which might well lead to 3. children wander in and are so excited to be talking to

Uncle Jimmy about traction engines, or whatever their common interest is, that they stay and talk to him well after the rest of the grown ups have left the table)

Emma

www.rationalparents.blogspot.com/ (<http://www.rationalparents.blogspot.com/>)

to post comments

rebellion

Submitted by canyonstar on 8 December, 2003 - 15:26

how does one know if it is rebellion? imo, there are bad feelings involved in rebellion. it is a pushing back against coercion. it might be a totally appropriate response.

if a person is offended by another person's actions, what do they do? they can be honest about it- "i find that offensive. could you knock it off?" if there is mutual respect all around, the offender can be helped to find better outlets for their actions.

what is missing from forced group pictures and the like, is the mutual respect. if the "poor kids" are "forced to smile", you can bet that is not the only thing they are forced into.

when children are forced into things they don't want, they will push back at every opportunity. how do you force a child to smile? or eat? or sleep? or use a potty?

if a child doesn't want to smile for a picture, why not? solving that problem will require creativity, not force.

to post comments

snapshot

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 14 December, 2003 - 01:00

Sheesh! If it's important to you that your professionally taken portrait reflect your family's sense of fun and informality, then you need to research photographers in advance to find one that specializes in the kind of shot you want. If it's a large group event, and you weren't the one who put in the time and effort of organizing this part of it, then for heaven's sake, be gracious and accomodating. But getting angry at some poor working bee who's trying to do his/her job as s/he understands it, and making his/her life miserable so that you can act out your oh-so-enlightened personalities, seems not very empathetic and just a little self-righteous to me. In the words of my teen, get over yourselves!

to post comments

Maybe...

the family members in the picture were doing their best to cooperate with the whole scenario, under the circumstances. If we consider that people act on their best theories, such a picture is a reflection of everyone's best theories in that moment.

Why assume that they are out to get anyone? And if it were 'rebellion', is that something to be dismissed? "oh, it's just rebellion" (much rolling of eyes) Hmmmm, such facile dismissal might have something to do with the friction in the first place...

If some family members are unhappy, it shows. What is behind that unhappiness is apt to run deep. There is a whole life history of baggage with family members, and sometimes it just can't be stuffed. Is it ever wise to stuff it?

But by all means, keep a good attitude! And while you're at it, make sure the children learn to passively do as they are told. And if by chance cousin Louie is wont to drop his trousers in private with one of those passive children with the good attitude, however will that child know that this order from this adult (= authority to be obeyed) is one to not keep a good attitude about?

Yeah. Who says that a rebellions attitude is bad? Maybe it is the best that could happen! It can help to identify problems that need to be addressed.

to post comments

Authority

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 4 May, 2004 - 20:55

I see a lot of people implying that kids don't need to accept authority. It does concern me a bit. When your kid runs out into the street and you tell them to get back on the side walk, disobedience can be devastating. The trick is to not be over zealous in dictating what your child can and cannot do. You still need to have the final say, but there is no reason to dictate every aspect of your childs life. Let them live their lives, and do as they want. But the fact is they need to learn to accept authority when it is given. Being taught they can run willy nilly doing *anything* they want is not appropriate. When at grandmothers house, they need to know that "don't play with that its not yours" means just that. Same thing in the store, or even at home.

All this in mind, you have to avoid stifling the kid. Arbitrary judgements that your kid is not mature enough to understand need to be kept to the "necessary" ones, not just what you feel is a good idea at the time.

Rebellion is bad, but it should not be *necessary* for the kid to enjoy life. There are other ways of communicating. It is bad because you quite frankly know whats best for the child, and you will for a long time.

At family get togethers the kids run and play, or do whatever their "thing" is at the time.

Take the time to explain to your kids that aunt mabel really wants a picture of the whole family for her living room, and that it will only take a minute. Be excited about helping aunt mabel, and likely your kid will be too. Thus it is no longer an arbitrary rule, the kid can be helped to understand it. Helping your child understand life when able is the best way to handle the situation IMHO.

All rationale is not equal. A 2 year old is just not going to understand the risk involved in playing in the street, and your not likely going to convince your teenage daughter that her boyfriend is ripe with hormones and has primarily sex on his mind. For these cases arbitrary rules they don't understand still need to be in place, and respected.

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arbitrary rules

Submitted by canyonstar on 8 December, 2004 - 15:58

oh, my, i don't at all agree that arbitrary rules must be in place and respected at any point in life.

young children are capable of understanding things. it is the adults that don't know how to explain things so that young children can understand. in the absence of such understanding, it is necessary for an adult to be present and engaged with young children to help them do the things they want without getting hurt. i see children play in the street, who keep watch and get out of the way of cars coming. they know not to do it on busy streets. a young child with a parent who knows these things can learn about them too, along with that there are other places more interesting to play than in the street.

the teenage daughter who has been engaged in communication about sex and everything else with her parents since the beginning of her life can very well understand about the role of hormones in the human body and be aware of that factor in her relationship with other teens.

arbitrary rules are there for a purpose, sure, but taking a look at the purpose and learning all one can about it can help to rationally think about problems and find good solutions that go way beyond thoughtlessly obeying arbitrary rules. i think that is a much safer way to live life, to understand reasons and to learn, rather than to blindly obey.

if aunty mabel is a lovely person who helps the children, then the children are likely to be happy to help aunty mabel get her picture of the whole family in her living room. children are not the only people who 'have to learn' that they will reap the consequences of their actions; so do adults.

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So true...

Submitted by helenahar (not verified) on 11 December, 2004 - 07:14

We got our holiday shots back from the shop not long ago and they reveal so much to anyone who would bother to really look: Dad stares slackjawed and oblivious as mom wrangles two active boys through a pinched smile. The little one is forever gazing with awe at a big brother who avoids the camera while committing some small, furtive act.

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