

Bedtime question

Submitted by Maxine on 21 April, 2008 - 15:57

Sorry to ask a question that's probably been asked a hundred times before, but I'm new here.

Suppose a parent comes to the realization they've been parenting all wrong (coercively) and that their very strong, self-assertive child is not responding well to that at all (battle of wills). So the parent reads, thinks, and decides to change.

Bedtime rolls around. Or what would be bedtime. But now the parent has NO idea what to do. Usually she gets the child in bed with a mix of "tactics" and now she doesn't trust any of them. But the child is used to rebelling. So, he stays up. The parent tries to talk to him and reason with him, but his eyes are glued to the TV and he just mutters, "I'm staying up" and completely stops responding after that.

What could the mom do- she doesn't want to be just permissive, but the child gives her no opening to discuss it or come up with some mutually acceptable solution. People seem to say, well a child raised with TCS will reason and discuss with you. But what about a child who hasn't, to this point, been raised that way?

to post comments

bedtime

Submitted by [emmaagain \(not verified\)](http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) on 26 May, 2008 - 16:41

One idea is that the child HAS to go to bed at a certain time in order to be well rested for the next day. Parent will impose that bed time, for child's own good, either in a directly coercive way or, if possible, in a more sugar coated way.

But another idea is that the child has the ability to learn for themselves how much sleep they need, and the ability to recognise their own signals of tiredness. If they have never gone to bed when tired, but always on the parent's agenda, then it might take some time for them to learn to schedule themselves and to trust their own signals. Maybe for a week or four they won't go to bed until the wee small hours. Maybe they will fall asleep in front of the TV. Maybe they won't get enough sleep for a while because they've been up late doing things they preferred to do. Their body, their mind, their call.

to post comments

Independant

Well, I think there is a flaw in the reasoning. The flaw being that each individual will automatically learn to do what is best within the spectrum of choices mentioned in these two posts. What do we assume? The child needs x hours of sleep depending on his age? Let's assume this. Maybe he has school the next day, badly rested he will not be able to attend to the tasks at hand and this situation will if repeated over time lead to a situation where his teacher will more or less abandon him and maybe even subject him to ridicule in front of his peers thereby creating a negative environment for him. Take the child out of school, let him get up whenever he wants. Well, he has to compromise because if he believes stubbornness to be the only result bearing quality he will be unbearable to all other people.

At some point limits can be useful. I have bedtimes as a child, there were non-negotiable until I was about 14 and then the sort of blurred until they disappeared. I think i am fine. Put the kid to bed, tell him he is welcome to read in bed, he doesn't have to go asleep.

to post comments

Michael Hardiman, am I right

Submitted by [emmaagain \(not verified\)](http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) (http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) on 4 June, 2008 - 15:29

Michael Hardiman, am I right in thinking that your post can be summarised as "Adults know better than children what is best for them"? That message is completely counter to TCS philosophy.

There is an assumption in my post that children will work out how best to live in society, with parents offering guidance where tolerated, yes. What are the alternatives? That a child is incapable of learning how to interact successfully with the world around him unless someone forces them to? Or that a child must be forced to comply with societal norms because they won't see them as worth while in their own right. Which of these do you subscribe to? Child as stupid? Child as wrong headed? Child as insufficiently provided with information? (then provide the information for them to make their own reasoned decisions, don't keep making the decisions on their behalf!!)

One cannot assume that all children of certain ages need the same amount of sleep. Or even that the same child will always need the same amount of sleep - it's going to depend on what sort of day they've had. In fact, the only person with sufficient information to know that a child needs to go to sleep is that child themselves, and the very best gift their parents can give them is to read their own cues of tiredness. And you don't do that by overriding those cues and sending someone to bed at your own parental convenience.

The lucky children have parents who have let them sleep whenever they want from a very young age. When tired, they lie down and go to sleep. Those parents who have forced bedtimes over the years have to step back at some point in order for their children to learn for themselves what their cues are. And parents can do that stepping back when their children leave home, perhaps to go to college. That's the classic where students stay up really late and miss classes, not because they don't want to be at the classes ,but because this, aged 19, is the first time in their entire life when the only thing telling them to go to bed is their own cues of tiredness, and they are having to learn to read those cues. The bedtime imposing parents have done a pretty rubbish preparation for life course for their children there, wouldn't you say?

I also think you overstate the importance of school. If one's own activities at home in the evening are much more interesting and engrossing than school, then it should be a question of finding ways not to have to go to school, or not to have to go to school full time, rather than curtailing those activities. It is quite common, I believe, for

children of TCS families not to go to school - because so much learning on someone else's agenda is simply not effective or efficient. And there is no freedom of association in a school. So the "you have to go to bed because you have to get up for school" argument doesn't wash. If there are better things to do tonight than go to school tomorrow, then the problem to solve is how to get your parents to allow you to be home educated, not how to motivate yourself to get into bed and shut your eyes.

Your final point "I think I am fine" boils down to "I was coerced and it never did me any harm", which is the same in spirit, though of course not in seriousness, as "my father beat me with a belt strap every Friday night and I turned out ok". It's not a question of "how much can we coerce our children and still have them turn out ok?". It's a question of "what is the morally right way to interact with our children?". Respecting their wishes about when to go to bed, and taking them as seriously as our own, is a good starting point.

"limits can be useful" - not in TCS philosophy. Parental "limits" are parental blind spots, where there is no acknowledgement of parental fallibility, and are thus inimical to consensual family living.

[to post comments](#)

De-ruling

Submitted by Willow on 22 August, 2008 - 17:05

"she doesn't want to be just permissive" Why not? Is there a problem with being permissive, particularly with an issue where there is so little risk of harm? I think perhaps the child needs some time to get used to the change in parenting, as does the parent. What better way to do this than to explain how you came to change your mind about how you parent? That would also give you both something to talk about while you stay up 'til the wee small hours.

[to post comments](#)

bonding time

Submitted by Loretta (not verified) on 7 October, 2008 - 00:06

babies and young children can enjoy a sweet time with mum cuddled together for awhile, way too late to be proper. night time parenting as a time to build some trust back up and respect. most of us can remember (dream) of how good it feels to be told about unicorns and made to believe that the sound of the wind is really the sound of the stars breathing. some kids can be invited to stay up all night (if it might make you closer).

[to post comments](#)

More articles

- [Unschooling and Karl Popper](#)
- [The Education of Karl Popper](#)
- [TCS and Fallibilism](#)
- [Enacting a Theory](#)
- [Feeding The Family: Some Tips For the Cooking-Phobic](#)

- Optimism
- Do the Kids Rule?
- Lying About Lying