



MAKING CHILDREN MIND WITHOUT LOSING YOURS

*How to Bring out the Best in Kids
by Doing What Is Best for Them*

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Chapter 3

BE THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE!

Maintaining Authority without Being an Authoritarian

In order to have the maximum positive influence in your child's life, you will want to apply reality discipline in a variety of ways. Being an appropriate authority figure is one of those ways and is crucial to leading children to learn and grow into mature, well-balanced adults. If you are committed to being the best that you can be, just imagine how the children in your life will benefit!

THREE TYPES OF PARENT/AUTHORITY FIGURES (See chart on next page)

AUTHORITARIAN— The authoritarian says, “You will do what I tell you to do no matter what!” or “As long as you're under my roof, you'll do what I say when I say it!” as though he “owns” the child. It is impossible to “own” children in an effort to control and influence the things they do. Authoritarians try to make children's decisions for them, but this is not the same as having real authority. It may seem to work, but children often see themselves as the equals (or even the superiors) of their parents and teachers, so they are not well programmed to receive constant unilateral decision-making opportunities. You may believe that your decisions are best, but chances are good that your children are going to disagree with you, and they may eventually rebel.

PERMISSIVE—Being permissive may make you popular for awhile, but children are apt to rebel when they lack boundaries. Permissiveness breeds rebellion, for children become angry when they do not receive boundaries and rules. People in general, not just children, do better with order and structure; and when order and structure are missing, situations are bound to unravel. Love does not mean constantly granting permission or giving your children whatever they want or ask for. A permissive attitude such as “Oh, you don't want to take the quiz today? Okay, you can take it tomorrow.” represents a weak authority figure who will eventually disable children instead of enable them.

AUTHORITATIVE—“Authoritative” and “authoritarian” do not mean the same thing. It is important to take a healthy, balanced approach to reality discipline. As Josh McDowell says, “Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.” Without establishing some kind of relational bond between you and the children in your life, rules are nothing but mere words. Instead, they should be guidelines that can improve relationships and the quality of life for a family or classroom.

In the authoritative classroom, the teacher has just announced an assignment that must be worked on and completed by Friday. A student raises her hand and explains that on Friday over half of the students will be gone for a band competition. Would it be

THREE TYPES OF PARENT/AUTHORITY FIGURES

AUTHORITARIAN	PERMISSIVE	AUTHORITATIVE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Makes all decisions for the child 2. Uses reward and punishment to control child's behavior 3. Sees himself as better than the child 4. Runs the home with an iron fist; grants little freedom to the child 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is a slave to the child 2. Places priority on the child, not on his or her spouse 3. Robs the child of self-respect and self-esteem by doing things for him that the child can do for himself 4. Provides the child with the "Disneyland" experience; makes things as easy as possible; does homework for the child; answers for the child, and so on 5. Invites rebellion with inconsistent parenting 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gives the child choices and formulates guidelines with him or her 2. Provides the child with decision-making opportunities 3. Develops consistent, loving discipline 4. Holds the child accountable 5. Let's reality be the teacher 6. Conveys respect, self-worth, and love to the child and therefore enhances the child's self-esteem

Chart from MAKING CHILDREN MIND WITHOUT LOSING YOURS by Dr. Kevin Leman, Revell Publishers

possible to make the assignment due on Thursday the day before or the following Monday? The authoritative teacher immediately recognizes that the student has voiced a valid concern (instead of waiting for the day before) and has offered a reasonable alternative. By recognizing the win-win solution and granting the student's request, the teacher instantly avoids what could have been a potentially frustrating situation for both the students and the teacher.

**Permissiveness and authoritarianism have one thing in common:
both lead to rebellion.**

DANGER! SUPER AUTHORITY AT WORK!

1. I own these kids.

We cannot "own" kids in the sense that we control every single thing they think, feel, say and do. We are entrusted with the children in our lives so that we can guide and encourage them along the path to adulthood. Sometimes we become so emotionally wrapped up with them that we forget that they are not "ours" over whom we are to exercise absolute control. Reality discipline is about guidance, not ownership.

2. I am judge and jury.

Homes and classrooms are not courtrooms where the person in authority gets to decide everything. Again, a healthy balance is key here. The judge-and-jury syndrome focuses on punishment and reward instead of on discipline and encouragement. Be tender and empathetic with children, rather than harsh and judgmental.

3. These children cannot fail.

All people fail at certain times in their lives, so it is inevitable that the children you are working with are going to fail at some point in time. Children have a tremendous opportunity to learn from the mistakes they make. If we rob them of the freedom to fail, then we rob them of some of life's greatest learning experiences. Not only do children have to deal with and manage failure, but they also have to tackle the fear and anxiety resulting in disappointing an authority figure who won't tolerate failure. Naturally, we want children to be successful in every area of life, but we also want to teach them that to be successful they must consider their mistakes and failures to be temporary and learn from them.

4. I am the boss! What I say goes!

Reality discipline is not about bossing children around and telling them how to do things *your* way. Guide the children in your life and encourage them to move forward, but avoid always telling them what to do and how to do it. What is best for you might very well not be best for a child. Instead of saying, "You need to study so

you can get into Harvard,” a parent might say, “All of your studying and preparation will really pay off when you start applying for college.” All kids need to make as many of their own choices as they can without allowing them to place themselves at risk or in harm’s way. Be ready with guidance and ideas, but beware of applying pressure and control.

A super authority is long on control, but short on love and support.

WINNING WAYS

Here are some practical suggestions for dealing with children.

1. Active listening

When your child has a problem, acknowledge it and talk to him about it. Summarize back to the child what you understand his problem to be. This is essential! You will be amazed at how you as an adult will understand what he is dealing with when you voice the problem yourself. Do not lecture, threaten or offer immediate correction. Instead, allow him to share his feelings and let him know that you understand that the problem is real to him and that you understand it. Offering quick, pat answers off the top of your head has a way of belittling the child and making him think you really did not hear what he was saying.

2. Anger

Try to control and communicate your own anger without connecting it to the child with whom you are dealing. It is normal that you as an authority figure are going to experience irritation, frustration and anger; but the important thing is that you direct your anger at the behavior rather than at the child. Children will all make mistakes at some time or another. But so do adults. In the heat of anger, let’s not forget this.

A schoolteacher specifically requested that students arrive on time to class. First period, a few students are late; second period, a couple of more students are late; and so on. By lunch, the teacher has “had it up to here” with tardiness and irresponsibility! When Drew shows up late for his fifth period class, the teacher is ready to hit the roof!

The teacher has two options: get angry about the tardiness or get angry with Drew. If she gets angry with Drew, she might yell at him, belittle him and tell him that if he can’t get to class on time, he might as well not bother coming at all. If she gets angry at the tardiness, she might say, “Drew, your and other students’ tardiness has interrupted my class several times today, and I am angry. Too angry to discuss it right now! Please sit down until I am ready to deal with you.” Or, “Drew, I am very angry that you are tardy. Kids have been coming late to class

all day, and I am frustrated. Can you understand that I am angry and that you interrupt my class when you arrive late?" There are numerous and varied ways of handling our anger, and addressing a child's specific action is much more likely to alienate the child in question.

3. Comforting

When children are disappointed and discouraged, listen to them, empathize with them and respond to their feelings, but do not be quick to accept excuses. Comforting and offering reassurance does not mean excusing unacceptable behavior. Do not tell children that "it doesn't matter" or to "just shake it off" or "be tough." Let children know that you recognize that they are hurting, but do not project your own feelings and experiences onto theirs. Empathize with them and assure them that you share their disappointment and discouragement, but do not allow them to control you.

4. Communication

Communication means opening the avenues of speech and sharing—not telling a child what she is supposed to think or do. Be thoughtful and positive with children and look for ways to meet children in their territories and according to their needs. Stress the positives in a situation and focus on what is going well; and when confronting a negative, do it in a positive, direct way.

For example, if a child grabs a soccer ball from a classmate, the teacher can tell the grabber to return the ball to his classmate and apologize for his rude behavior. In this way, the teacher emphasizes the returning of the ball (encouraging proper behavior) rather emphasizing the taking of the ball (focusing on improper behavior). Communicate that the action, not the child, is unacceptable. Take the time to get to know children, and find out what makes them tick. It takes time and effort to get to know a child's individuality, but the rewards are great.

5. Cooperation

Relationships are a two-way street. If children do not cooperate with you, do not jump to cooperate with them. This reciprocal action can be a very powerful teaching tool. Imagine that a class misbehaves during a reading lesson, and the teacher must ask the students repeatedly to cooperate so the lesson can be completed. When recess rolls around a few hours later, the uncooperative class immediately straightens up so they can enjoy their favorite part of the day. "Sorry," the teacher says, "since you did not cooperate this morning during reading, we will be having another reading lesson during recess today." What is the real lesson the class will learn that day?

6. Encouragement

While many parents and teachers find it difficult to differentiate between encouragement and praise, encouragement reinforces the child by acknowledging an accomplishment or action, while praise focuses merely on the child. Suppose little Caroline cleans her room without being told. She might hear, "You are such a good girl for cleaning your room," or "It looks like you missed a few spots." These statements send the message that Mom somehow judges Caroline's value based on the cleanliness of her room. Some encouragement such as, "Your room looks lovely" or "It looks like you worked very hard to get your room looking this good," are statements that focus on the value of the effort, rather than the value of the child. Look for ways to encourage children based on who they are as individuals and their accomplishments and achievements, rather than offering hollow praise that focuses merely on the child.

7. Love

Don't just tell children that you love them. Show them. Express an interest in their interests; discipline them and encourage them as you look for ways to build relationships with them. Let them know that you care deeply about them, are interested in them personally, and want the best for them. Love is not about giving people things, but giving of yourself, your time and your energy.

8. Mistakes

Allow children to see your humanity and your imperfections as you make mistakes. They need to be permitted to learn from your mistakes. All of us err along the way, and when we let children see our acceptance of our own failures, they will see that mistakes are not fatal, but rather are an important part of life. In our attempts to be the best authority figures we can be, we will make some errors and hit some obstacles. As a result, children will learn a good deal about how to handle their own mistakes by watching us handle ours.

In our attempts to use reality discipline, there are three important things to remember. First, do not push a child to excel beyond his own ability, for a child will generally work within his own capabilities. Make sure that you are meeting a child at his own level, rather than forcing him to meet you at your level of expectation. Second, hold your child accountable, but do not apply an undue amount of pressure. As you are getting to know your child, you will learn where the pressure or breaking point is. Each child will have weaknesses and strengths that determine the amount of pressure and influence he can withstand. And third, remember that reality discipline works two ways: even though it is important that children understand the *reality of consequences*, it is also important that they understand the *reality of your love*.

9. Nagging

Parents and teachers frequently wonder about what they should and should not remind kids of. What is the difference between reminding and nagging anyway? Should you just leave kids to their own devices and let them pay the consequences?

I want to suggest that you resist the urge to *remind*. It is easy to let reminding develop into full-blown nagging, so just cease altogether. When children are held accountable, they will quickly learn to be responsible. Children should know the boundaries of your requests. If they do not respond to your requests, they should also know the consequences of their choices.

Again, reality discipline emphasizes action, not empty words and warnings.

Example: The teacher asks the students to take out a pencil and paper for a quiz. (Teachers have been known to repeat this five to ten times!) Mrs. Baker notices that Susan isn't ready, and it's time to start the quiz. Instead of reminding Susan again, Mrs. Baker simply starts the quiz. By the time she is giving question #2, Susan is raising her hand asking for question #1 to be repeated. Using reality discipline, the teacher says, "Susan, I need you to respond properly when I ask the class to do something. I'm sorry, but I cannot repeat question #1 for you." Susan will be prepared next time.

10. Quality time

Don't just send your kids off to watch videos or engage in some other passive recreation. Interact with your children and share yourself with them. Down deep that's what they really want anyway. They want a relationship with you. Quality time can be as simple as walking around the block, chatting about the neighborhood sights or talking while you run errands together. Look for possibilities of common interests with your children and create time to spend together just as you would schedule other important appointments.

IN CONCLUSION

As authority figures, we are charged with being the best we can be in guiding and supporting our children. When we seek a healthy balance of encouragement and discipline, we will be able to know our children better. In so doing, we allow children to be themselves, yet they will still understand that they are accountable to our standards and rules. Building solid relationships with our children is the key to being the best authority figures we can be, and "making children mind with our losing yours" will be a whole lot easier!

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Envision yourself in your current role as an authority figure over children. What are

you like? How would children describe you to their peers? Does your description of yourself match the way the children would describe you? What do you think your role as an authority figure should be? Share with your group.

2. Which type of authority figure do you feel you most resemble? Do you lean toward the authoritarian style, the permissive style, or the authoritative style? Why?
3. *Mackenzie constantly tattles on her siblings and classmates, and sometimes invents stories to get others in trouble.* How might different authority types handle this situation?
4. How do you distinguish between encouragement and praise? Which do you tend to do more often, encourage or praise? Discuss ways to use encouragement rather than praise with the children in your life?
5. Parents want their children to be “happy, happy, happy” all the time! Think of a time as a child or teenager when you learned a valuable, but “unhappy” lesson. Share together.
6. As Josh McDowell says, “Rules without relationships lead to rebellion.” What is your idea of “rules” for the children in your life? Do you value them more than the relationships at stake? Discuss authoritarian, permissive and authoritative styles, and how they differ from each other.
7. How do you build relationships with children so that your rules do not lead to rebellion? Share specific activities and actions you use to build relationships. Do you think the “rules without relationships” principle applies to relationships other than parent/child and teacher/child? If so, how?

