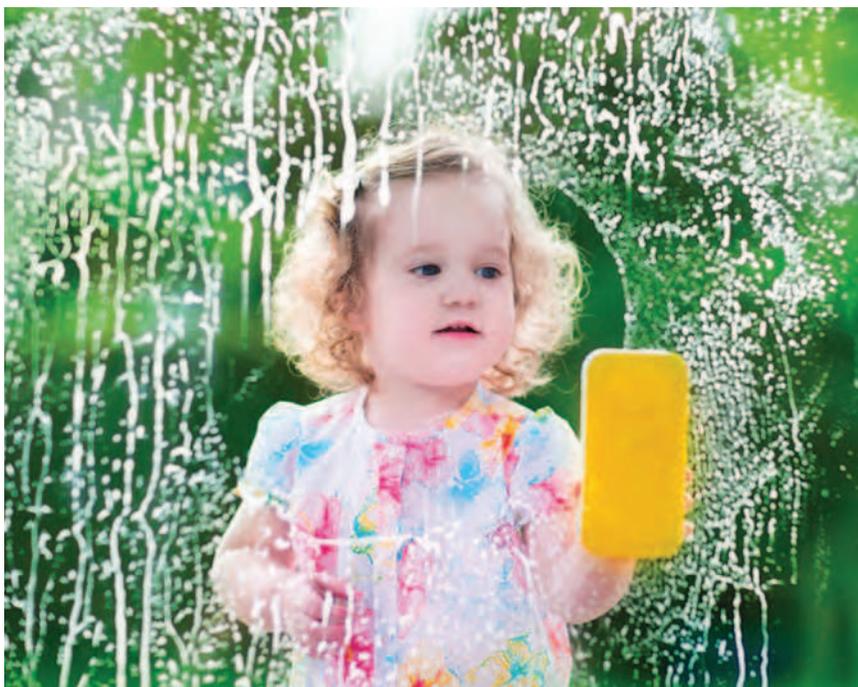




Do as I DO

Some of the fundamentals of a job that comes without any training

BY LEONARD CARR



EVERY PARENT ASPIRES TO BRING OUT GREATNESS and the true potential of his child. The main challenge and the real art of parenting is creating both the optimal relationship and environment for your children to grow up in that will allow them to become the best they can be through discovering and manifesting their talents, gifts, and the unique brilliance with which each individual is endowed. The key to great parenting lies not in the techniques, but rather the kind of person you are and the quality of relationships you foster with your child and the people around you.

Cultivating children is like cultivating trees. When you cultivate a tree, no matter how good you are at pruning and shaping, if you haven't got the tree in the correct envi-

ronment, it will not thrive. If you do all the right things too fastidiously and too intensely then you can end up creating a bonsai. In human terms, you can say that giving too much supervision and protection deprives the child of the opportunity to develop his own strengths and capacities and may even weaken and suffocate him.

Every child needs the opportunity and space to discover his capacities for initiative, self-control, creativity, ingenuity,

autonomy as well as talents, skills and abilities. If you bring children constant stimulation and constantly offer them the world on a plate, what you deprive them of is the opportunity to learn to rely on their own resources or to engage with their innate curiosity and take the initiative to go out and discover the world. Too much direction inhibits the development of a child's reliance on inner guidance and trusting his own innate wisdom and creativity.

People often quote the analyst Donald Winnicott, who spoke about the "good enough mother". His definition of good enough parenting wasn't only that you have to be good enough. More profoundly, it means a good parent knows when, how and by how much to fail his child in order to allow that child to discover and manifest his own power and effectiveness.

Most important to emphasize is that how your child develops is going to depend far more on who you are as a person, as well as the kind of relationships that you foster around you, most particularly your marital relationship, than any "techniques" you use for bringing up your child. Children learn most from what they see and experience. The unintended lessons in, for example, the way you speak to and interact with others or the way you conduct yourself, makes a more lasting

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and persuasive impression on your children than what you actually do for them directly, like discipline.

The most important leverage you have on your child is learned from the story of Joseph, when he was about to be seduced by the wife of Potifar. What held him back was a vision of his father, Jacob. We can learn from this episode a child's deep yearning and desire for a parent's validation and approval. Children are much more fearful of a parent's disapproval or disappointment than they are of a parent's wrath.

In order to leverage your child's fear of your disapproval and disappointment, you first have to win a child's trust, respect, and admiration. If your child does not hold you in high esteem or perceive you as having moral authority because your conduct is not acceptable, then the child will not be moved by your disapproval or disappointment. In order to win your child's respect and approval, you have to become a person your child looks up to and admires. You need to be a role model your child aspires to emulate.

If you win the child's regard in this way, then the child will see himself as the progeny of a special parent. A child's identity and sense of self is founded on the sense of his heritage and origin. If he is proud and honoured to be born to special parents then he will aspire to be careful in his behaviour because his own honour is tied up with the dignity of his parents. He will be embarrassed or ashamed to compromise the stature of his parents because he implicitly feels and understands that this harms his own standing.

If your children are proud of you then they will also be grateful to you for the legacy that, through your standing, you provide them.

Gratitude is the other important factor to use as leverage with your children. If your children are grateful to you for what you have done for them, then they will feel a sense of reciprocal obligation. Gratitude and appreciation have to be taught. One of the ways to teach gratitude is obviously to teach children to acknowledge the good done for them and to express gratitude through simply saying 'please'

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and 'thank you'. You have to teach them to notice any good that is done for them in order that they do not take the kindness of others for granted or develop any sense of entitlement.

Sometimes it takes withholding certain things in order for a child to understand that the good doesn't just come automatically. Some good has to come from effort and investment, for example, being challenged to save money in order to buy something special.

Another important lesson is that good sometimes flows from showing reciprocal responsibilities, like doing chores. Children should be taught to recognise the good you do for them comes from kindness and because you really love them. They should not grow up to believe that what you do for them is merely a fulfilment of your parental obligation.

The necessity of teaching the child appreciation is not because you necessarily need the appreciation. Rather, it flows from the fact that your child needs to learn to appreciate goodness in order to have successful relationships and be a happy and contented person.

It is very important for parents to realise you are part of your children not only in the sense of having contributed to their genetic material, but also each parent is psychologically and spiritually a part of their children. In other words, the parents are, in many ways, like two halves of a child's sense of identity and inner being.

When parents love each other and treat each other with respect and with positive regard, then a child can feel at peace with himself because the two people that make up the child are in harmony with each other. When parents treat each other badly, or are at loggerheads

with each other, that war between the parents rages inside the heart and spirit of the child, creating a split within the psyche of the child. Practically, this is because the child implicitly feels the need to adjudicate as to which parent is right or wrong, deciding who is the wounded party, worthy of the child's protection, as well as who is the party deserving of the child's scorn. No child should ever be put in a position where he must adjudicate between his parents because, after all, that means accepting and rejecting a part of his very self.

You can also appreciate that, by in any way undermining or diminishing the child's view of his parent, you are compromising the child's trust and respect for that parent. The circumstances in which such dynamics occur inevitably result in the child's respect and regard for both parents being compromised. Since parents represent authority and conventional boundaries, when a child loses respect for parents, he tends to lose respect for all authority, including the ultimate authority from which parental authority stems, namely Hashem. This leads inevitably to the child becoming his own authority and standing up against his parents and society.

Your relationship, particularly with your spouse, as well as the other important people in your child's life, creates the inner harmony and sense of wholeness that allows the child to feel good about himself. A harmonious, loving, dignified and upright home is the ideal environment to enable children to discover their own gifts and feel a sense of inner confidence and nobility that allows them to go out into the world and share their gifts, talents or abilities in the world. ■