

## **Kids out of control?**

### **Maybe how you were parented factors in.**

Do you cave to your child's tantrums or protests? Does your child out-talk you or hold you emotionally hostage by telling you he or she doesn't love you when held accountable for behaviour? Is your child out of control? Were you yourself harshly or abusively disciplined as a child?

If you answer yes to the last question and most of the first questions, it may just be that your parenting compass is off kilter, the result of your own childhood experience of parenting.

Some parents who suffered harsh or abuse at the hands of their own parents seek to avoid confrontation with their own children having vowed not to parent as they experienced. As such some of these parents adopt a submissive parenting style. In other words, when the child pushes back against parental expectations, the parent backs down. Thus the child is not held accountable to behavior or expectations. The child winds up in control of the parent and situation.

Such parents may be afraid to show when they are upset and so they water down the message that the child's behaviour was truly unacceptable. Other parents may confuse using discussion and talk with true consequences. For children who do not experience meaningful consequences for poor behaviour, talk can become meaningless.

In these situations parents lament that their children do not really listen or are out of control. Parents may try to affect some control and hold the child accountable, but in the long run, these children eventually undermine the parent's authority and problems continue. Hence the child feels even more emboldened in their behavior, the parent feels less in control and the child is eventually in more serious conflict and not following any rules.

Parents in this situation need to learn that the exercise of parental authority in and of itself is not abusive. Rather, how the authority is exercised can be abusive and so, they have to learn appropriate strategies for managing child behaviour. Further, displaying upset is not the same as shouting or losing control of oneself. Kids need to see and understand that their behaviour touches us emotionally too.

There is a big difference between the "authoritarian" parenting style they likely grew up with versus a reasonable "authoritative" parenting style which is appropriate. An authoritarian parenting style can be abusive and often is directed at managing kids for the sake of the parent's needs and wants. An authoritative parenting style is non-abusive and directs children's behaviour with regard to their own well-being.

Rather than submitting to the will of the child, the authoritative parent holds the child accountable for their behaviour and sees that misbehaviour is corrected and that it certainly is not rewarded. Hence, no second, third or fourth chances which to the child really means they can get away with things. Further, it is reasonable for children to view the parent as upset when in fact the child's behaviour is upsetting. Upset is expressed by tone of voice and facial expression. It is not out of control but very straightforward and direct and certainly not humorous or apologetic.

If a parent is having difficulty managing their child's behaviour and if the parent was harshly or abusively disciplined as a child, it just may be worth a counselling session to take a look at this issue to bring their parenting style in line with the child's needs. Parents can gain control without being controlling, harsh or abusive.

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