

10 Guidelines for Unconditional Guidance in the Process of Educating & Parenting

Moving from Rewards & Punishment to Love and Reason

- ❖ Our thinking has to move from “How do I get a child to do what I want?” to “What does the child need and how can I meet those needs?”
 - This marks a revolution in thinking
 - It is the difference between “Working with” vs. “Doing to”
 - “Doing to” = Threats & bribes to get compliance
 - “Working with” – Varies by child and situation through negotiation. Ask and communicate opinions & points of view to bring them in on a solution.
 - Bring the child in on the situation. Take the child seriously and try to respond to what s/he needs. This approach is challenging and time consuming, but more humane, useful, and resourceful than any attempt to control in order to gain compliance.
 - This thinking requires that we take kids seriously.
 - Do we see the situation from the child’s unique points of view? Children have legitimate fears, different than ours, with distinctive reasoning.
 - This is a journey without end and a process always in flux.
- 1) **Reconsider your requests.** The problem may be with what you have told or asked the child to do.
 - a) If we have to ‘trick’ or coerce, we need to rethink what it is we are doing.
 - b) Fight the fear of losing control – don’t sacrifice connection with the child for fear of losing control.
 - 2) **Put your relationship with children first**
 - a) Is there a caring alliance between you and the child?
 - b) Is the respect we think children owe us really a fear of us?
 - c) When children have a connection with us and feel safe to tell us, we are better able to solve the problem.
 - d) When they trust us, they are more likely to do what we ask.
 - e) The relationship should be seen as an end in itself.
 - 3) **The love and acceptance has to be unconditional**
 - a) Even when the child makes a mistake or falls short of expectations
 - i) S/he needs us even more in these times
 - ii) Love them for who they are, not what they do or who we think they should be
 - iii) ‘Time Out’ and ignoring the behavior is “love withdrawal”
 - iv) Positive Reinforcement is conditional affection
 - v) Acceptance should not have to be earned
 - (1) The more we praise, the more insecure they become and the more dependent they become on us for approval.
 - (2) Instead of commenting how much you like what s/he has done, ask what the child likes about it, what the challenges were and how they feel about the accomplishment.
 - vi) Be proud of them regardless of what they do.

- vii) Kids don't test limits; they test the conditionality of our acceptance.
- viii) Kids must know that no matter what they do, we will never stop loving them.
- ix) We are conditioned to be conditional in society – it takes courage to fight it.

4) Look at the world from a child's point of view

5) Be authentic

- a) Don't lose your humanity and distance yourself from kids unnecessarily (ex: referring to yourself in the 3rd person).
- b) Admit to children when you make mistakes and apologize to them when you should.
- c) Take ourselves off our Perfect Educator/Parent pedestal (we'll feel vulnerable – giving up control).
- d) Be candid about our limitations and speak to them from our hearts. Show them how in many ways we are still like them:
 - i) Feeling our way, trying to do what is right, struggling in the world to keep learning.
 - ii) The more real we are, the more respect they will have for us.

6) Talk less, ask more

- a) To what extent do we imagine the perspective of, listen to, elicit from, and respond to the child? What is her/his perspective? If not sure, then ask.
- b) Good parenting and teaching is more of asking their perspective than explaining – be a detective.
- c) What is the reason and motives underneath the behavior(s), be attentive to them, and deal with them in a practical way.

7) Attribute to children the *best possible motive* consistent with the facts

- a) Why assume the worst when children act the way they do?
- b) Doing something for attention is not a reason to be dismissed.
- c) Assumptions about children's motives affect the way we treat them:
 - i) The kind of parent & teacher who assume the worst of human nature in general tend to act more punitively or with more control
 - (1) Kids live down to negative expectations.
 - (2) Create an auspicious circle that assumes the best.

8) Try to say yes when you can

- a) Do we say no out of habit, out of convenience to us, or to show who is boss?
- b) Kids don't get better at coping with unhappiness over time.
- c) Do we provide guidance, support, and are we mindful?
- d) Are we on 'auto-educator' or 'auto-parent'?

9) Don't be rigid

- a) Bend the rules, be flexible for different children in different situations.
- b) The same is not fair for everyone. It is not fair to treat different kinds of minds in the same way.

10) Let the child make decisions whenever possible

- a) Bring them in on the process of making decisions.

- b) Guide them to become autonomous.
- c) All humans of every age deserve some control over their own lives.
- d) There are costs to having children feel like they have no say over things that matter.
 - i) When children do feel some power it is a predictor of positive mental health.
- e) Children feel respected when they are included in problem solving and assumed to be well intentioned.
- f) “Give an inch, they’ll take a mile” comes from control of those who have only been given inches in their lives.
- g) Kids learn to make good decisions by making decisions – both good and bad. Knowing that we’ll be there to help pick them up when they stumble, especially early on provides security.
- h) The best teachers and parents ask, “Why did I decide that?” and “Why did I tell when I could have asked?”
- i) A child questioning or even arguing with you (in a respectful manner) is a good sign. The child is taking an active role.
 - i) It’s not who decides, but how you can solve it together

We hear often the questions, “It was good enough for me, why not them?” Consider, ‘Was it really as good as it could have been and allowed you to grow as fully as you could have? Did we really come out as OK as we might have?’ If so, is it because of or in spite of traditional educating and parenting?

If we want children to be happy, well adjusted, confident, compassionate, able to thrive as a result of change and be responsible we will move as far as we can, as quickly as we can toward a “working with” approach.

This is a much more challenging (time, effort and patience required), infinitely more rewarding and much more likely to be effective to help kids to grow into the kind of people we dream they will be.

Excerpted from *Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishment to Love and Reason* (2005)

Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born of another time.

- Hebrew Proverb