

## Coaching Our Children to Success

Question: I would appreciate your thoughts regarding how one should reprimand their child. I find myself constantly struggling to communicate with my child when I do not approve of his behavior?

Dear Reader,

This is a very important question. Many parents share your concern and struggles. Many times we find ourselves blaming, shaming, accusing, ridiculing, threatening, bribing, labeling, punishing, preaching, and demoralizing our children. The intention is all well meaning and many of us view these tactics as a quality form of chinuch. Yet, we tend to forget or not even realize the destructive power of our words, especially the affect they have on our children. These destructive monologues between parent and child is usually not based on the lack of caring that the parent has toward the child, but rather based on the lack of understanding and knowledge of how to communicate with ones own child. Chaim Ginott, a famous child psychologist, used to say, "Like a trained surgeon who is careful when he cuts, parents, too, need to become skilled in the use of words. Because words are like knives. They can inflict, if not physical, many painful emotional wounds".

In order to become "surgeons" in our communication with our children, we must learn and train ourselves to shift from using language that is critical of our children's behavior to language that is protective of their feelings.

The same way we are not critical of our friend's behavior so too must we respect our children. What do we say to a guest that spills their cup of soda onto the Shabbos table? Do we begin to rant and scream at the guest saying, "What is the matter with you? You are such a clumsy person? Every time you come here you make some kind of mess. Why can't you be like your brother, who is much more put together than you, and never causes trouble when he comes over?! You are 33 years old! You will never learn! My job is not to clean up after you every time you make a mess. If your head was not attached to your shoulders you would probably knock your head over too. Would we degrade the guest himself? Most of us would not. Rather we would politely state the problem: the fact that the drink had spilled. Then we would begin to problem solve for a solution: how are we going to clean it up.

This is the same solution that constitutes healthy communication from parent to child. Children look to the world around them to understand who they are, especially to their parents and important adults in their lives. R Orlowek (1993) emphasizes that a child instinctively perceives himself as others perceive him, for his internal world is still incomplete and fluid. For example, if a parent calls a child "clumsy", their child may begin to believe that they are actually clumsy. These words can have such a strong affect on the child, to the extent that the child may even begin to avoid situations where his coordination will be tested, as he is convinced he is too clumsy to succeed. Therefore, when reprimanding a child, it is important that the parent identifies the misdeed without labeling the perpetrator.

The next step is to supply the child with solutions that the child can implement to the current situation. As the Gaon z"l<sup>1</sup> comments, all reprimands should be attended with constructive advice. In the case of the spilled soda, suggestions would include how the child can clean up the soda. In addition, if the parent feels that it is necessary, the parent can implement a logical consequence by having the child pay for the cleaning bill by means of their own allowance.

By placing more of a focus on our belief in our children and an emphasis on what is right with them as apposed to what is wrong with them, we are sending a message to our children that we view them as sensible individuals who profit from our rebuke and mature enough to improve themselves. As a result, the more respect and belief we have in our children, the more they will believe in themselves. As apposed to having our children become resentful and angry, an emphasis on positive comments can help our children grow up feeling more confident and self-assured.

Ginott, Haim G. Alice Ginott, H. Wallace Goddard. *Between Parent and Child*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003.

Orlowek, N. (1993). *My Child, My Disciple*. Jerusalem: Feldheim

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<sup>1</sup> See the Vilan Gaon's commentary on Mishlei 1:25.