

## Consistency

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A child can be compared to a horse without a rider. A horse will ride in the direction it so desires, like a powerful engine without a steering mechanism, unless it has a rider to steer it in the proper direction. The child behaves and reacts to its environment based on his immediate short term needs. The parent in the child's life takes the role of the rider, and guides the child until he develops the ability to exercise his power of *bechira* (free will), the ability to prioritize a long term goal over a short term need, to their decision.

The development of a child's executive functioning (*daas*) is not fully developed until he begins to reach the age of early adolescence, approximately 12 years old. Every time a child makes a choice, he is essentially making a decision between two conflicting short term needs. When a child decides not to eat a cookie before dinner, it is not because he has acknowledged the negative consequences of depriving himself of the potential nutritional benefits that he can gain from a good nutritious dinner. Rather, he will refrain from eating the cookie as a result of another, yet stronger, conflicting short term need, such as mom's immediate disapproval.

How does a parent train their child to develop this executive functioning, and increase the possibility that the child will be successful exercising their power of *bechira* (free will) successfully by early adolescence? The key to this success is consistency. Through consistency a child learns self discipline for the rest of his life. When a child begins to develop out of the childhood stage, the child's moral conscious (*yetzer hatov*) takes over the role of the rider. If a child was consistently trained to listen to the instructions and voice of the rider, then it will already be part of the nature of the young adolescence to carry out the instruction of his moral conscious. In contrast, those children who have not received consistent connection between instruction and behavior will struggle with self control. They will consciously know what the right thing to do is, yet will have a hard time listening to their "rider" and acting accordingly. Besides the dangers of conducting behaviors counter to the moral conscious, this can also cause internal conflicts and guilt later in the adolescence's life.

What does consistency look like? Let us take the example of a parent who instructs a child to take their shoes off the couch. Once the instruction is made, the action must be followed through and the training process begins. At first the child may not be conditioned to take the shoes off the couch. Therefore, we must start by showing the child that when the instruction is delivered the following behavior is done, and we take the shoes off the couch with the child. Once we feel that the child has reached the training process where we know that he is conditioned to listen to our instruction but is still not complying, then we may begin to use other methods such as a face of disapproval when he does not comply. However the most important factor is that every time the parent asks the child to follow through on an instruction, the parent must guarantee success. If the child is completely defiant, then the parent himself models to the child by removing the shoes off the couch, which is also considered a successful training interaction. As long as we are conditioning our children with the important lesson that there is always a direct connection between the instruction and the result, we are being successful.

Consistency takes planning and foresight. There are circumstances where we will not be able to ensure 100% success if the child does not comply. For example, we cannot guarantee that our child will eat. If a child refuses to eat after we had instructed them, we will be stuck with an instruction that was not effectively followed by a successful result (unless we are ready to throw the food down the child's throat-which is probably not a good idea). Therefore in such a case we should not demand our child to eat with our instructions. There are many other strategies that can be used to get the child to eat (will be discussed in future articles); however, the importance of consistency is so great that we must be careful before we make a demand with our instructions. There are other times where it will be difficult to guarantee success. Some other examples include when we have guests over, when we are very busy, or where we are overwhelmed and we will not be able to devote ourselves in making sure that the task gets completed. In addition, it is important to note that screaming at the child can destroy this training process. Instead of the child becoming a participant of the training process, he may become angry and will want to rebel against any instructions of the parent.

I believe in positive reinforcements as it has an important role in the disciplining process. However, I believe even stronger in creating self motivated children. Positive reinforcements (the lingo to which all the new parenting programs and school programs are based on) works short term, trains the child to behave only if the positive reinforcement is present, and often needs to be inflated over time; while self motivation is a real life training for the child in becoming an individual who is trained to be self disciplined long term, no matter the adversity, and because they will eventually want to do the right thing. The power of consistency conditions the child to behave and respond to the instructions of those he looks to as the authority; his teachers, his parent, and eventually to himself. This tool will make discipline so much easier for the parent. The more instructions the child complies to, the more training opportunities that are created. Therefore, it is even worthwhile for a parent to give simple and easy instructions that they ensure that there will be success, for the more success the more conditioned the child.

As we discussed the greatness of consistency strengthens our demands and instructions. Consistency also strengthens the consequences we give for the child's behavior and decrease the misbehavior. Consistency gives the child a sense of security, as they know what to expect from their parent. Consistency gives the child a sense of security as they realize their parents are sure of themselves and self-confident in themselves. Most importantly, consistency creates peace between parent and child and the child with himself.

Some of the concepts in this article are based on the teachings of Dr. Ephraim Becker.