Raising Children with Choices
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An all-pervasive mental disease has come to the planet. It started in the West and is spreading worldwide. It is the modern way parents talk to their children by stating a question when giving direction or instruction, such as "Why don't we all get in the car now?" "Why don't you put on your coat?" "Would you like to wash the dishes after dinner?" "Don't you think it's time you children turned off the TV and went to bed?" These kinds of phrases are used in family homes and offices throughout the modern world. Children given the choice Why don't you? before the instruction of what to do are disadvantaged. They have to make a yes or no decision before performing the request, and sometimes it is no. When undecided, children perform reluctantly. Giving these kinds of choices to children, which is being done now at the five-year-old level, is a new way of raising them and also puts parents at a disadvantage. They are beholden to their child's mood, thoughts and preferences.

It does not take long for children to understand that they are permitted, indeed expected, to make a personal choice in all that happens. An aggressive few will take over the home and begin giving orders to the parents, unkindly, abusively and most often with no choices included. "No, we are not turning off the television until this program ends." "I am not getting in the car. You all go. I'm staying home." Are these children being disobedient? Yes and no. Yes, by responding in opposition to the expected answer and no because the very question invites a possible disobedient response. Such questions from adults tell the child that each one in the household is an independent entity going his own way. Parents should be careful not to make the "why-don't-you" philosophy the core of home life and relationships.

This ideal of making decisions for children and refraining from giving them choices changes when they are educated and about to leave the home. Up until then, it is the parents' duty to set the patterns, make the decisions and give no - or certainly very few - choices to kids.

Offering children freedom with money has similar problems. By giving adolescents financial independence too soon, parents breach the protective atmosphere of the home and invite exploration of who-knows-what in the world. It begins with an allowance that they can squander any way they want. They soon learn that by putting heavy demands upon parents they can get more. Then they add gifts for good behavior, a parental form of bribery not recommended. In training adolescents, any money they handle should be accounted for and the change returned and counted by the caring parents. This teaches honesty, accuracy and cooperation with the core group, the parents.

Many times I have seen an allowance lead to a desire for a summer job or to work after school. More independence. More time away from home and family. The summer job taxes the child when he or she should be playing, resting or going to school. The early-morning paper route or the job after school takes time away from education. Adolescents should not be allowed to handle their own money or to earn an income until their education is nearly complete. Any money earned should be given, the full amount, to the parents and all spending money accounted for. This will mold the young adult into a frugal, income-producing person.

"Why don't you" put some of this advice into practice?

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