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## Authority-Based Parenting Fosters and Encourages Independence; Power-Based Parenting Fosters and Encourages Dependence

We have all known adults who have a difficult time making decisions. I suppose all of us do from time to time, but for some, it is a chronic problem that wreaks daily havoc in their lives. Whether faced with the decision of where to go for dinner, which item to purchase, or what class to take, making decisions can be a difficult and sometimes even painful event. For some, it seems always a better plan to defer to the judgment of others, than to face the difficult task of trusting their own judgment.

### Authority-based parenting

Authority-based parents apply the wisdom of gradually and appropriately broadening the guidelines to allow their kids just enough safety from serious harm (For more on establishing appropriate guidelines for our kids, refer to question #20 in my book, PARENTING WITH AN ATTITUDE). At the same time, they help them to learn how to gather the data and on the basis of that data, take educated risks. After all, isn't taking educated risks what good decision-making is all about?

By encouraging independence, authority-based parents provide their kids with the opportunity to learn and succeed through actually failing at times. In so doing, not only do they learn to reassess and succeed through their mistakes, they also learn that making mistakes isn't the end of the world. Someone once said, "Show me a success and I'll show you a failure". The implication here is that many successes come as a result of having failed along the way and then learning from those failures by evaluating what went wrong, deciding what to avoid next time, and then trying again. Certainly, Babe Ruth, who until recently, held the honor of "home run king", would be an example of succeeding

through his failures, since he also holds the unofficial record of having struck out more than most players as well!

### Power-based parenting

There seems to be two common fears that develop in the emotional make-up of kids who are raised by power-based parents who encourage dependency that is unreasonable and unnecessary. The first fear that is characteristic of over dependent kids is a general fear of failure.

For "decision-phobic" adults, their difficulty often grows out of a childhood where someone was constantly there to make decisions for them—decisions they should have been encouraged to make for themselves. Too often, there was someone who was willing—even eager—to protect them from any possibility of failure. Or perhaps, the motivating factor was not so much to protect, but rather, it was simply easier to make a quick decision for them.

In either case, the early childhood conclusion seems often to be, "why risk failing if someone else will do it for me?". While they do indeed avoid possible mistakes and failures by being protected from decision-making, these kids also grow up less able to think and work through the very important process of decision making. In addition, by being protected from the possibility of failure, they are likewise deprived of the good feelings that accompany successful decision-making.

A second fear that seems often to emerge from excessive dependency is the fear of rejection. Kids that are raised with the dependency that often accompanies power-based parenting, tend to grow up excessively needing the approval of Mom and Dad. While seeking our approval might in their early years be healthy and desired, eventually what must become most important is not our approval, but their own assessment and self-approval.

When this motivating characteristic of self-approval does not evolve and develop, then it becomes more likely that as they grow up and

away from home, Mom and Dad, that they will simply learn to transfer that dependent need for approval to others in their life. Since making the wrong decision, they reason, could lead to disapproval and even rejection, they choose to remain passive and dependent".

So power-based parents run the risk of creating in their kids an unhealthy dose of dependence by not allowing and encouraging them to practice their decision-making skills within the safety of well placed, but sufficiently broad, guidelines.

What's a parent to do?

In order to avoid both a fear of failure, as well as a fear of rejection, it is essential that we instill within our kids a deep sense of independence. In order for us to do so, we must offer them a healthy portion of support and encouragement, along with our ever-expanding guidelines within which they may freely and with safety take the risks of being independent from us. While independence is a personality characteristic that most of us parents want for our kids, it is easy to fall into patterns that reinforce and encourage the very opposite.

Discussion questions

When you were growing up did your parents encourage you to be independent within guidelines that provided some safety, or was being independent discouraged?

How did their attitude regarding independence/dependence affect you as you were growing up? How are you affected today?

Is your attitude regarding independence/dependence with your kids today similar to the attitude your parents had with you?

How do you see your kids doing with regard to practicing independence within the guidelines you have set for them?

If inappropriate dependence on you is a problem with your kids, what are some changes you could make?

Do you have some fears you must face in allowing your kids to be more independent?