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Authority-Based Parenting earns respect by giving it while Power-Based Parenting demands respect but does not give it.

Few parenting principles are more controversial than this notion of parents actually giving their kids respect. In this day and age where there is certainly a shortage of the younger generation showing respect to others, it would at first glance seem to be a misguided notion that we parents need to attend more to the task of respecting our kids. (For more on the importance of respecting our kids, refer to question #2 in PARENTING WITH AN ATTITUDE). It is in fact, this very task of respecting our kids that will provide greater assurance that they will in turn, respect us, and as a result be more open to our influence.

Authority-based parenting

At the cornerstone of authority-based parenting is the belief that respect is an attitude that must be constant-a family attitude that need not be earned by anyone, and likewise cannot be lost by anyone either. Just as authority-based parents expect to be respected at all times by their kids, so too it is their conviction that their kids deserve the same from them. Authority-based parents see a clear distinction between rights and privileges-which must be earned and can be lost-and respect on the other hand, which should be a constant, regardless of circumstances or behavior.

None of us is born with the predisposition to respect others. It could even be argued that our tendency as human beings is in just the opposite direction-that what comes most naturally for us is to disregard the importance of the other until we must all learn otherwise. It is due to this that authority-based parents see the importance of teaching their kids the fine art of respecting others. And their primary vehicle for accomplishing this all-important task is modeling how to respect others by how they respect their kids. They

do not attempt to teach respect by demanding it of their kids. They do expect it, but they do not force or demand it.

At the core of any relationship is the ingredient of mutual respect. It is hard to imagine any relationship that is healthy and growing that doesn't have as one of its key components, mutual respect. Parents who have consistently shown unconditional respect to their kids—even in the face of discipline, challenges to their authority and confrontations—have laid the groundwork for a relationship that is gradually transformed from parent-child, into one that is a true and priceless friendship.

Power-based parenting

The model of power-based parenting is constructed in part on the conviction that respect is something kids must earn, and that it is not their God-given right to be respected just because they are. To the power-based parent, this seems like a reasonable and correct notion because they have heard it and said it so many times. It may also be a reasonable idea to them if they have confused respect, with rights and privileges. While respect is not earned and must not be lost or taken away, both rights and privileges are indeed earned, and can be lost.

These misconceptions, then, may lead power-based parents to treat their kids in a way that would surely cost them friends if they were to behave in like manner in other relationships. It does not take a great deal of imagination to see the impact on any of our other relationships if we were to demand respect, and at the same time, expect them to earn the right to be respected by us. As ridiculous as this might sound, this describes the relationship that exists between many power-based parents and their kids today.

The outcome of power-based parenting that does not see the importance of respecting kids is usually unfortunate. Kids, who grow up having learned to show respect to others out of fear and demand, usually grow up to be adults who do not really respect others. While at

first glance they may appear to respect others, it is often really fear and intimidation of others they are feeling instead.

Yet another possible result of having not been given respect as a kid is an adult who is angry and resentful of authority. And along with the anger and resentment often comes a refusal to comply with authority. Since the authority figures in their lives have always demanded compliance, with no respect given in the process, then it is easy to see how this refusal to respect and comply with authority figures in their adult lives develops.

Still another likely outcome of the power-based parent who does not see the importance of respecting their kids is a failure to eventually make the transition from parent to friend with their kids. This is possibly the most unfortunate result of all. When you stop to think about the link between friendship and respect, it is not difficult to see why kids who grew up having received little or no respect from their parents, do not later value the prospect of being a friend to their parents in their adult life.

What's a parent to do?

In talking with adults who now have a vibrant friendship with their elderly parents, I have heard repeatedly (in addition to other positive factors) that as a child, they consistently felt their parents had an attitude of respect for who they were as a person. I have found that this message of respect has come in a variety of forms, but nonetheless, it has been there. Even in the midst of discipline and other hard times, there was a sense of feeling respected by their parents.

This is evidence and motivation enough to emphasize the importance of giving our kids the kind of respect that we in turn want them to show to others and us. In spite of our role and responsibility as an authority figure with rules, expectations and standards that we expect

them to adhere to, it is essential that we show an attitude of respect toward them for the person God made them, even though we may be disappointed, angry or hurt. If we are able to accomplish this task in our parenting efforts, then we will increase the likelihood that as we both grow older, we will have the kind of friendship with our grown kids that we would like to have.

Discussion questions

Did your parents teach you the importance of respecting others by respecting you, or was it demanded and expected from you even though you seldom received it yourself?

How did their attitude regarding respect in the family affect you at the time?

When it comes to showing respect to your kids, do you believe that you practice authority-based parenting or power-based parenting?

What seems to be the affects on your kids, and in particular, your relationship with them?

If you do not agree with the notion that respect must be given and shown to your kids without strings attached (as opposed to rights and privileges), what is your position?

Do your kids seem to be developing a right and proper respect for others?