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Authority-Based Parenting encourages the spirit of kids and discourages willful defiance while Power-Based Parenting stifles the spirit and by doing so, actually create willful defiance.

It is not uncommon for us parents to confuse the will of our kids, with their spirit, and to use both terms interchangeably, as though they were synonymous. Actually, the spirit of our kids and their will are quite different from each other and are not necessarily related.

Their spirit

The spirit of our kids' refers to the attitudes they develop regarding themselves, as well as those they develop about life in general. A healthy spirit reflects an attitude of self acceptance and a well balanced and realistic assessment of their worth and value. A healthy spirit is also reflective of the enthusiasm, energy and excitement they hold for living life;

Their will

The will of our kids' refers to what I believe is their (ours too!) natural tendency to be defiant, self serving, and demanding. While it is certainly a debatable issue, I hold the opinion that a strong will-a bent toward a selfish and demanding attitude-is for the most part, an innate tendency that must be shaped to take into consideration the needs and desires of others.

Our kids may develop a healthy and vibrant spirit toward themselves and the life they are living-full of confidence, energy and enthusiasm. Or, their spirit may reflect other characteristics such as having less energy, excitement and enthusiasm for life and living, as well as a lower opinion of themselves and what they have to offer. Toward which direction they develop while under our care depends on a number of variables, the most important being the influence we parents and others exert on them. While predisposition and genetic

make-up may play a part in determining their level of enthusiasm for life I believe it is a minor influence compared with the impact our shaping has on their spirit.

Authority-based parenting

One characteristic that differentiates authority-based parenting from power-based parenting is the consistency with which they are willing to consider adjusting these all important guidelines they have established for their kids. While most parents adjust to some degree along the way, there are some important differences that set authority-based parents apart from power-based parents.

It is important not to confuse flexibility with inconsistency that seems to change with the wind and for no apparent reason. Since consistency is one of the ingredients that foster safety, predictability and an understanding of cause-effect, it is an important characteristic found in successful parenting. The key is to be willing and able to be flexible and at the same time, consistent.

So in terms used here, flexibility that is an earmark of authority-based parenting refers to fairness and the willingness to reevaluate decisions and circumstances based on new information that comes to light.

The goal of the authority-based parent is to help shape the spirit of their kid's in such a way that they develop a reasonable level of energy, enthusiasm and excitement for life. In addition, these parents put effort into shaping their spirit in such a way that they have a sane and well-balanced view of their importance and self-worth.

This does not mean that they train and encourage their kids to bounce off the walls, or to be constantly full of boundless energy. Nor does it mean that they expect them to be constantly happy and full of life and energy regardless of their circumstances.

Authority-based parents also know that raising healthy and well balanced kids means shaping them in such a way as to avoid a haughty, puffed up attitude that can lead to an exaggerated view of

their own importance. Realistic and balanced are the key words in describing our task as parents who want to raise kids who have a healthy spirit and a will that is under control.

Authority-based parents shape the spirit of their kids by challenging them to enthusiastically reach for their potential and then encouraging them in the process. They also recognize the importance of supporting them regardless of the outcome their efforts bring.

Through their challenging and shaping, authority-based parents teach their kids to appropriately push themselves in order to accomplish and achieve. And it is through encouraging them, regardless of the outcome of their efforts that they learn to feel safe in the process. And because they feel unconditionally supported, they learn to accept their best as good enough.

All of this then helps establish an attitude and outlook that translates into a healthy spirit. They learn to like and respect themselves because Mom and Dad have liked and respected them in their efforts. And just as importantly, they will learn to be excited and enthusiastic about life because we have taught and encouraged them to get involved, to show an effort, and to be enthusiastic.

Authority-based parents also recognize the importance of shaping the will of their kids as well. Many books and countless articles have been written on the subject of the human will. Scholars in this area take various and contrasting positions on the notion of whether we come equipped from birth with a rebellious will, or whether it is developed after birth and through the many experiences in life. Personally, I believe that we are born with the tendency toward a defiant will, but that nurture-what parents and other significant others do-plays a very significant part in shaping that will to be either healthy and constructive, or destructive.

Power-based parenting

So how do the efforts of the power-based parent differ from those of the authority-based parent when it comes to the will and the spirit of their kids? Power-based parents tend not to make the distinction between the spirit and the will of their kids. As a result, qualities in their kids that should be nurtured and encouraged are actually viewed as something that should be discouraged and stifled altogether. Too often, their reaction then is to punish rather than discipline (for more on the important distinctions between the two, refer back to "Seven Key Differences Between Discipline-Based Parenting and Punishment-Based Parenting").

What's a parent to do?

Parents who want to raise great and healthy kids are able to make a clear distinction between their spirit and their will. They then make it a priority to nurture and strengthen their spirit, while at the same time putting effort into shaping their will in such a way that, finally, their kids are able to exercise a proper and appropriate control over their own will.

Some tools that authority-based parents use to influence the will of their kids are:

- 1) Reasonable and appropriate expectations for their behavior;
- 2) clear and reasonable consequences that are a result of willful defiance;
- 3) an unconditional acceptance of them, regardless of their behavior.

Provide expectations for your kids that will help them distinguish between right and wrong, what is acceptable, and what is not.

Establish clear and reasonable consequences in order to develop in your kids a feeling of security. This sense of security will develop as a result of knowing what to expect as an outcome to their behaviors.

Unconditionally accept them and make the distinction between their worth, value, and acceptability, and their behaviors and attitudes. Make it clear that you do not like or appreciate their behaviors or

attitudes, but that you still love them nonetheless. As a result of reasonable expectations, fair and appropriate consequences, along with unconditional acceptance, you will be well equipped to shape their will and by so doing, minimize defiance and self centered behaviors.

Discussion questions

Looking back on your childhood, did your parents do a good job of positively shaping your spirit while at the same time, affectively confronting your willfulness?

How did their efforts in this area of spirit and willfulness affect you at the time?

Are there current affects that remain in your life today that either serve you well or cause problems in your life?

Using the definitions suggested here to distinguish between a child's spirit and his or her will, how would you say you are doing as a parent to encourage your kids' spirit and to discourage their willfulness?

What affects in your kids do you see that are directly or indirectly related to how you are doing in this area?

Are there ways you could possibly adjust or fine tune your efforts that could make a positive difference in both the spirit and the will of your kids?