

Cultivating Liberty at Home



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I believe the biggest impact that voluntarists can make is within the walls of our homes, among the relationships with our spouses and children. We might be overwhelmingly few in number in larger society, but at home we have a real voice and our actions have real consequences. If we truly value liberty, then we must raise our children in liberty. Cultivating liberty at home requires that we respect our children’s self-ownership, abolish parental aggression, and ensure that our children do not develop the close-mindedness that is the usual result of indoctrination.

Cultivating Self-Ownership

However you arrive at self-ownership, what’s important is that everyone understand that their bodies are their own. They are their own masters. Everyone has the right to decide for themselves what goes into or is put onto their bodies. Children must be taught self-ownership for two reasons: 1) so they know when their rights are being violated, and 2) so they know when they are violating the rights of others. Some ways to cultivate self-ownership in children are to allow your children to decide what, when, and how much to eat, what and how much clothing to wear, when and where to go to sleep, what, when, and where to learn that which is most important and meaningful to them at any given moment, and who they will associate with and at a level of affection of their own choosing. In other words, give children the same opportunities to make decisions for themselves as you give your fellow adults. If they make a poor choice and find themselves hungry without a chance to eat, cold without a chance for warmth, or tired without a chance to sleep, they will learn a more important lesson. They’ll know the choice was theirs, their circumstances were largely under their control, and that the quality of their life is under their determination.

Cultivating Non-Aggression

When parents make the types of choices listed above for their children, the message received is that the parent’s will trumps the will of the child. And when the child receives

this message he will either submit and believe that, indeed, the will of someone else does trump his will, or he will resist this obvious violation of his rights to the consternation and probable aggressive retribution by his parents. In the former, the child is taught that he doesn't own himself, that he is not his own master, and in the latter he's taught that another has the right to initiate aggression against him. And if someone has the right to initiate aggression against him, perhaps the day will come when he will have the right to initiate aggression against someone else. Instead of believing that he'll never have a right to initiate aggression against others, he instead believes he will. Because the aggression that was initiated against him was successful due to him having less power than his parents, he'll believe that having more power gives one the right to initiate aggression against others. He may not ever exercise that "right" against another adult, but he almost certainly will against his less powerful children. And thus the cycle of aggression continues at the expense of his children as well as the prospects for the adherence to non-aggression in larger society. Larger point, let your children make their own decisions and when they make mistakes, find ways of disciplining them with love and reason instead of fear and violence.

Cultivating Open-Mindedness

Having a body free from aggression by others is just as important as having a free mind. Parents have incredible influence over what their children think and believe. When a parent tells their child a "fact," they will accept it by virtue of believing that their parents would never lie to them. Children readily believe in such clear myths as Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, and the tooth fairy. At some point in their mental development they are less easily fooled and their parents decide to "let them in on it." Most kids easily forgive their parents for lying because they're taught that it was necessary and helpful in order to produce "good behavior," but some are shattered by the revelations that not only are Santa Claus and the rest not real, but also that their parents made them all up. These myths are small beans compared to the myths that their parents really believe in. True or not, when children are indoctrinated to believe certain ideas and concepts, which include the reliance on authority figures who themselves are fallible human beings, their lives will come crashing down the moment they are forced through evidence and reason to accept something seemingly contradictory to their long-held beliefs. An authority figure acting contrary to doctrine or tradition, or a moment in history retold differently than the official version can create feelings of betrayal and resentment under the belief that they were previously lied to or misled. This sort of thing happens all the time in and out of, for example, religion. Instead, children should be taught that no matter what they, their parents, or anybody else believes, it *might not* be true. Understanding the reasons for the beliefs that one holds are just as important as understanding that nobody has all the answers and that everyone has only a limited amount of information by which to judge the truthfulness of something. We all live and learn, and all must come to terms with the ever-

changing reality around us. Free inquiry and honest feedback create free minds and open-mindedness, both of which are necessary to protect our children and ourselves from the less-than-honorable designs of others.

Final Thoughts

As important as it is for each of us to come to an understanding and practice of the principles of liberty, it's just as important for us to cultivate liberty within the walls of our homes, among the relationships we have with our spouses and children. Our children have genuine needs to have their self-ownership respected and to be disciplined with love and reason instead of fear and violence. Likewise, they have a genuine need to be allowed to explore the world around them while open to the probability that what they believe is true now might not be true later. Self-ownership, non-aggression, and open-mindedness are as valuable a set of tools for society as they are for parents. If you truly want to bring about a free society, you must start by cultivating a free society at home.