

Chapter 5 – Respect and Obedience

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Raise your hand if you want respectful and obedient children. What a magical place it would be if our children were to obey our every command and never show even a hint of disrespect toward us! On second thought, while perfectly respectful and obedient little robots would be nice, I'm not sure I want my children as such happy slaves (an oxymoron if there ever was one). Rather, I think their respect and obedience would mean more to me if I knew each was a genuine, thoughtful show of love as their caretaker and confidant. Will spanking and punishments get me there? I don't believe so.

Respect

Respect is both a noun and a verb, but their meanings are similar: to treat with, or to have, "deferential regard or esteem", about sums it up. What does that mean in practice? To have a feeling of respect toward something, one regards them, or it, with "kindly feelings which springs from consideration of estimable qualities." Estimable (admirable) is like beauty or worth, it's subjective, a determination made in the minds of those considering said qualities.

Origins of Respect

If respect is the result of kindly feelings, which are a result of considering certain qualities as estimable, which is a subjective determination, then it follows that respect, too, is also subjective. What is considered respectful behavior, like what is considered beautiful art, differs from person to person. As people are social animals, there is likely general agreement on what constitutes respectfulness in a given society, though like people, not every society will consider the same behaviors as respectful or disrespectful.

As respect is felt, people will behave respectfully toward other people if they not only understand what that person considers respectful, but desire to treat that person respectfully. The first is primed through a general knowledge of what constitutes respectfulness in a given society, as mentioned, but the second must be preceded by the act of bonding.

Bonding

Treating someone respectfully, like all purposeful behavior, is a means to an end (which end may also be a means to an end, of course). Which end? Likely, at least, the

maintenance of a valued relationship. How do relationships become valued? Through bonding. When people bond, they get to know one another on a personal level. They learn about each other's needs, wants, and aspirations. They learn about interests they share in common. They become friends and feelings of mutual-admiration and -regard develop. And they become more familiar with each other's qualities, like temperament or intelligence. Each person then assigns worth to those qualities and determines for themselves whether or not the other deserves their respect (to be treated with respectfulness). As importantly, the bonding also serves as a way to communicate, verbally or not, what respect means to each person so that the other has more knowledge with which to work from.

Children

Now, if respect is earned through bonding, then those who've bonded with a person will most likely receive their respect. This seems to start in infancy. As baby suckles mother's breast, their eyes lock, and through both touch and sight, they bond.(22) Thus begins respect. As baby grows and begins to learn more about the world around him, he, hopefully, bonds with others besides his mother. As bonds are built, what the child understands as respectful behavior is developed. Though he's still immature and will likely behave disrespectfully toward others, so long as he's regarded properly as a growing child(23) and treated with respect by others, he will eventually come around to being more mindful of how respectful his behavior is perceived by those he cares about, and soon the rest of society.

So, do children need spanking and punishments to learn respect? Hardly. Genuine respect isn't earned through the use of violence. Instead of earning respect, such practices earn fear and resentment.(24) In my experience, children who are perpetually disrespected in these ways never learn self-respect and have a much harder time developing bonds with others, certainly with their own caretakers (as well as developing other problems(25)). As shown above, bonding, not spanking, is the path a caretaker must take to earn the respect of their children.

Obedience

Spanking and punishment sure can create a culture of obedience within a caretaker-child relationship. But why do such children obey? Is it because they have genuine love and respect for their caretaker, believing such feelings are reciprocated, and desire to make their caretaker happy by being helpful? Or is it because they fear a spanking? Most likely, the latter. Now, you might want obedience on such terms with your children, but I don't. Why not? Because fear-based obedience will only persist so long as children have reason to fear you. As dependent little minions, their survival is a matter of keeping their caretaker satisfied. Once they're not so little and dependent, their incentive to obey withers away, and will eventually disappear. The balance of power is no longer so lopsided. What then?

They go out into the world and want never to return.

That doesn't have to be the case. You can raise children who want to obey you out of love instead of fear, and will want to do so for the rest of your life. It begins with respect, as I went over in length above. When people respect and love each other, they naturally want to be helpful. I probably wouldn't label such helpfulness as "obedience", but the result is the same. When the caretaker makes a reasonable request in a respectful way, his loving child will respond. And to solidify such a culture of respect and helpfulness, the caretaker should likewise respond to the requests of his child. Spanking and punishments are unnecessary.

Seriously though, perfectly obedient robots would be quite nice, but that's not the role I desire for my children, whom I love and want to see grow up as self-respecting, confident, loving, thoughtful people. I want to earn their love, respect, and helpfulness, which can't be done through the use of fear and violence. And just as importantly, I want to always show them love, respect, and helpfulness.

(22) Read "Bonding with Your Newborn" by William Sears at <http://skyler.link/apbonding>

(23) Read "Ten Ways We Misunderstand Children" by Jan Hunt at <http://skyler.link/ncp10ways>

(24) Read "Why Do We Hurt Our Children?" by James Kimmell at <http://skyler.link/evcwhyhurtchildren>

(25) Browse the "Research and Informed Expert Opinion" resource page of Project NoSpank at <http://skyler.link/nospankresearch>

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