

The Problem With Obedience: Why You Really Don't Want An Obedient Child

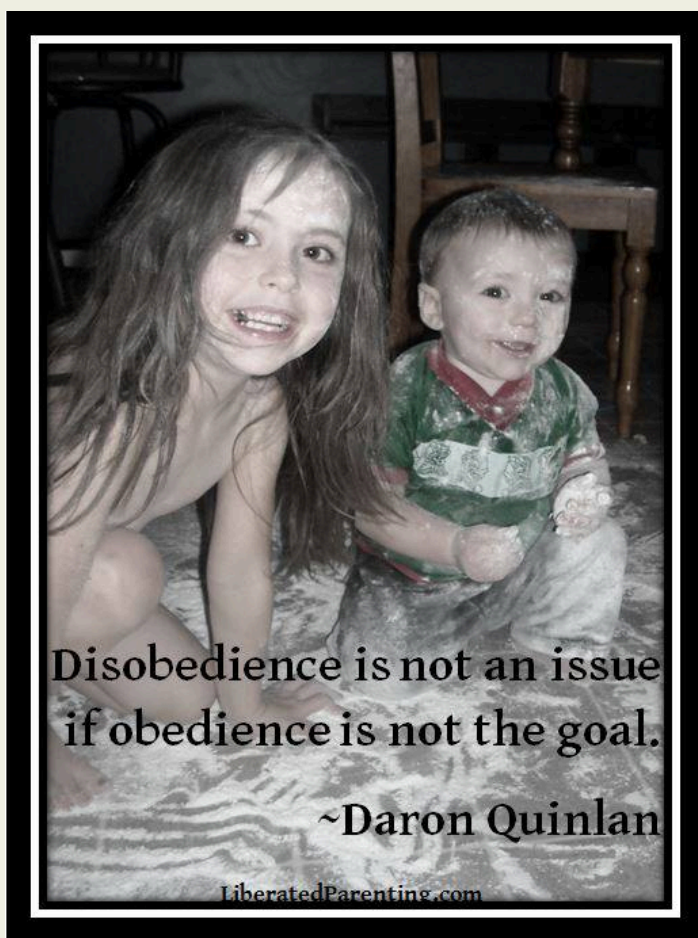
Wouldn't it be nice if your children just did what you asked all the time? Do you ever have this thought? Of course you do! You have children. It would be so much easier just to learn where to locate the very best dental clinic in Calgary and they will gladly go to see a doctor. No objections, crying and screaming, they just go because you told them it is necessary. I have had the same thoughts (trust me), but when you really think about the long term consequences of obedience and how that looks in a relationship, you start to really question our culture's parenting methods.

Have you ever heard anyone admiring another adult for being obedient? Or how about someone talking about their partner or husband or wife being obedient. Now it isn't sounding so awesome, is it? I would think that another word for an obedient adult would be a pushover, yet when we see children being obedient we praise them and their parents. "What obedient children you have! You must be doing something right" or "What a good little girl/boy listening to your parents." My guess is that most adults think that obedience = respect, and as parents, let's face it, blind obedience is easier in the moment. We don't have to compromise, understand, or negotiate because "I am the parent, and I said so!" (Who here has heard/said that one?) My question is, if obedience isn't a quality that is admirable in adults, why has it become such a focus in raising our children? What is the problem with obedience, and what should we aim for instead?

Alfie Kohn, author of *Unconditional Parenting*, asks the parents he works with to take 15 minutes and list the long term goals they have for their children. "What would you like them to be able to do, want to do, to feel, and to be like in the years to come?" He goes on to say that during this exercise most parents listed things like being self-reliant, responsible, socially skilled, caring, succeeding, critical thinking skills, confidence, and an unshakable faith in their own worth while still being open to criticism. Not a single parent listed obedience. Kohn admits that compliance can actually work against the child as a teenager saying, "If they take their orders from other people, that may include people we may not approve of. To put it the other way around: **kids who are subject to peer pressure at its worst are kids whose parents taught them to do what they're told.**"

The obedient child is unable to think for himself, is susceptible to peer pressure and is at risk for being mistreated by untrustworthy adults.

~Alyson Schafer



The ugly truth about demanding obedience in our children is that it silences their own inner voice to determine what feels right for them. It is difficult to determine what we want for our lives when someone else is constantly making us do things we don't choose for ourselves. **Children need to be given the opportunity to make their own choices when they are young and under the guidance of their parents, rather than waiting until they are free enough from them to do what they want without regards to anyone or what is safe for them.** Demanding obedience doesn't build trust, or make them want to cooperate with you, nor does it build a critical thinking child. I know this sounds odd, but having a child question your authority and your requests is actually a sign of a healthy

human being.

A more appropriate goal for our children would be cooperation. Cooperation strengthens the underlying fabric of relationships through balanced interchange, open communication and mutual understanding. Demanding obedience damages the relationship as well as the self esteem of the child. A child that is cooperated with tends to want to cooperate in return. The child who has no will to choose has no room to develop self discipline and becomes the child you were trying to avoid in the first place.

So where is the balance? As parents, there are time constraints, certain dangers, and certain things we would really like our children to do, or not do. For starters we can give our children more choices throughout the day. Things that are within their grasp to understand and do on their own is a perfect place to start. **Say yes as much as possible!** Allow your children to make as many of their own decisions as they can. Children are very quick to learn natural consequences, so if they want to go out in the cold without a jacket why not let them try it? Being cold isn't the worst thing that can happen to them, and maybe they really like being cold! Be mindful of the situations that are truly dangerous and use your own discretion as to whether or not you should intervene. **We need to decide whether the compliance we are after is worth the**

strain on the relationship.

Find more opportunities to include your children in your chores so that they can see it as a bonding and fun experience. When you do decide to clean up after them, try to do so joyfully and mindfully. Children learn from what they see, not from what they hear. Make sure that you put everyone's needs on the table equally, and include them in your planning if it involves them. What your children want is just as valuable to them as what you want is valuable to you. Most of the disobedience we see is just natural curiosity and natural resistance to a situation over which they feel like they have no control. Let's help them take charge over their lives, and help them develop a healthy self-esteem where they trust themselves to make good decisions and learn self-discipline. **Instead of obedience, seek for a cooperative child!**



So in our house, **saying no is okay**. Negotiating terms is encouraged. Asking questions about why we need to do something is okay. And most important, having strong emotions about a decision is absolutely okay. I want to teach my children that no matter someone's age, size, or status, it is always okay to question and stand up for your beliefs and ideas.

So when you are tempted to force your child to wear the matching blue shirt instead of the rainbow concoction they chose instead, don't let your discomfort override their authenticity. If you don't want an obedient adult, don't aim for an obedient child.