

Building a Culture of Liberty II: Parenting



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Building a Culture of Liberty I: Definitions

Having thus defined our terms, we can begin exploring the necessary prerequisites to building a culture of liberty, and ultimately, a free society. We must start at the same place where each of us began life, the home. Our parents are first to influence our enculturation and socialization. Followed by our siblings, grandparents, cousins, friends, and so forth.

Attachment Parenting

Parenting science in the realm of attachment theory posits that our ability to empathize with others begins its development in infancy. Mother/baby eye contact and bonding is the first step. From there, breastfeeding, babywearing, and cosleeping continue the process. Empathy is important if we are to experience the plight of others. Feeling moral outrage toward the violation of the rights of others is as important for the desire to secure their rights as it is our own. Following attachment parenting practices is the first step toward building a culture of liberty.

Children’s Rights

The second is the practice of respecting a child’s self-ownership and property rights. “The rights of children” is an oft-debated topic among libertarians, but as I hope to show here, irrelevant to the need to socialize them to expect their rights be respected once they’ve entered adulthood. If little people will one day be big people, and we want them to consider themselves as self-owners having the right to own and trade property, then we should socialize them as self-owners having property rights throughout their entire life.

As self-owners with property rights, all the mainstream parenting practices that include arbitrary consequences to either “good” or “bad” behavior go right out the window. Why? Because arbitrary consequences are disrespectful to the child’s rights (spanking and time-outs are acts of aggression). Think about it. Because children are ignorant (without

knowledge and wisdom, or uneducated) and still early in the socialization process, they make many mistakes, which include, among other things, the handling of their big emotions. As self-owners with property rights, children must be met where they're at. They have a right to feel the things they feel, and to make the mistakes they make. Their mistakes are evidence of their ignorance. What they need so that they make less mistakes, is more honest knowledge and wisdom.

Natural Consequences

Arbitrary consequences are educational, sure, but because they are arbitrary, they do not convey honest knowledge and wisdom regarding the particular mistake being corrected. Rather, they convey dishonest knowledge and wisdom. For example, when a child steals a toy from another child, his mistake is being the cause of hurt in the child whose toy he stole. That child is not only hurt, but also less trusting and more resentful of the first child. Those are the natural consequences of stealing someone's stuff. It's even possible, and natural, for the second child to feel anger and desire to use his power to take back his toy and desire revenge.

The correction that the first child needs is to be made aware of how his actions negatively affected someone else, and all the fallout from that. This is an honest approach to the child. Alternatively, when a parent offers an arbitrary consequence, what the child learns as natural cause and effect is wrong. He learns not that stealing causes pain in others and their resentment toward him, but rather that stealing causes his own pain and resentment from him toward his parent. He's thus been defrauded out of a genuine and honest learning experience through the use of arbitrary consequences. His rights have been disrespected because he's been attacked by his parent, given fraudulent information, and now expected to act in accordance with a lie. He's been set up to fail, in other words, and to take that failure, and every failure compounded after that, into the future, with less of an expectation of having his self-ownership and property rights respected by others, and more of a willingness to violate the self-ownership or property rights of others. And more, he's socialized into the belief that his parents have a greater right to enact arbitrary consequences and to handle him than his right to experience natural consequences and choose how he'll be handled by others. This bodes poorly for building a culture of liberty.

Misbehavior

A better approach for socializing liberty than the use of arbitrary consequences is to recognize that every mistake a child makes is the result of some need not being met. I no longer believe that children "misbehave", rather, they behave exactly as I would expect them to given their needs and their ignorance in meeting them properly. They do the best they can under the circumstances. In the example above, the first child has a genuine need to explore the toy being played with by someone else. Had he enough knowledge and

wisdom, he'd know that he should either wait for it to be free or persuade the other child to part with it. But because he's still ignorant, he does the next best thing (from his perspective), he takes it. The natural consequences as described above are the result. The first child, if he is to survive in society and maintain his life and liberty, needs to learn about these consequences so that he's more likely to value cooperation (over domination) in the future. He learns through being made aware of them by either a parent or the natural course of events. But the parent's job is not done there.

Final Thoughts

The child also needs to learn how best to meet his need to explore the toys being explored by others. He needs to learn both how and why to cooperate. And he'll only learn these things if they are taught to him in the proper way for his age. As already explained, arbitrary consequences are always improper if we want our children to learn the value of cooperation, which those of us who value liberty, do. Instead, we should learn how to be effective listeners or discerners of, and communicators to, our children while fully respecting their self-ownership and property rights. The two programs - at the very least - that I recommend be studied by every parent who desires to live in a free society are Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication* (epub) and Thomas Gordon's *Parent Effectiveness Training* (html, mp3).

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