

Teasing, or Being an Asshole?

Teasing is a very delicate and almost odd activity. It can be used as a means of strengthening a relationship and having a good time, but it also is used as a veneer to jerk people around. Sometimes we even think it is one while it is kind of another, and the hardest thing to analyze is when it is truly both at the same time.

When I am in a grumpy mood, I think I am teasing to be playful and fun, but my wife has pointed out that I am less sensitive and poke in subtly jerkier ways. I've learned that she is usually right when she points that out, and I stop teasing in that mood.

I've heard some people speak out against teasing in general, but I think that is a bad idea. They feel that since it can be used in jerky ways, many people today are highly sensitive, and they don't perceive the upside to teasing that it is best to get rid of it. Many think that teasing is really just only a desire to treat people poorly disguised as something else. I disagree. Teasing has many beneficial psychological, and social benefits. Like tickling, we poke in sensitive spots while in a safe environment. This can serve to prepare an individual for reality. At the social level it can add fun, spontaneity, better understanding of boundaries, and a myriad of other social benefits.

I think what I am going to teach my kids is that if someone is bothered, you either messed up, or you now know not to do that. When someone gets bothered and you act like they are just being stupid or sensitive, you are usually just using teasing as a means of being an asshole and you are guaranteeing that people won't look at your teasing as lighthearted fun. It also ceases to be a safe environment for the person when they get insulted when they believe you crossed a line.

Of course, today we live in a world where many people like to advertise their offendedness in order to control others. However, you shouldn't be teasing these people. Insult them if you please, but don't label it as teasing. Make offensive jokes, but don't label that as teasing. These people are your adversary in a social sense, and "teasing" isn't an appropriate thing in this dynamic.