

Think About It



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“Balancing on My Toes” is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), her partner Daddy G and father-in-law Grandpa G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found here. BMT-only RSS feed available here.

Its funny when the world comes together to teach us things. I find many things in my life are either a foreshadowing of sorts or setting me up for another event. Life can be like this sometimes and I like to embrace it. Parenting is a bit like this. Every event can be linked to another. Where does a behavior come from? Even desirable behaviors have a root. History begets more history and traditions grow, and culture is taught generation to generation. Mindfulness in parenting can lead to stunning results that many may not believe without proof.

Lets use the example of polite culture. Parents everywhere want their children to be thought of as polite. Why is this? So we are not judged negatively by our peers. This is okay, but something we should recognize. When politeness is not needed it may not be taught, much like proper dinner table etiquette. So why do we want our children to say please and thank you, may I and after you? Because we want them to model respect for others. Respect another’s right to property, or space, respect another’s right to freedom and happiness. How do we teach them? We model desirable behavior in everyday interactions and we coach our children along the way. “Now say please, and thank you”, or “No thank you”. But many leave out giving respect to our children who are learning by what we do and not necessarily what we say. Ask them politely when to borrow or have things and they will believe that is how they are supposed to behave.

Hitting is also like this. Hitting in any form teaches children its okay to hit. This influence may come from anywhere. Not necessarily the parents. My son was exposed to another family that used hitting as a form of punishment, but because he was too young to understand this is not okay he began hitting in his interactions. He observed the Mom hitting children, but also the children hitting each other. He witnessed the kids getting hit for hitting one another and was truly confused. I could tell because he began flinching

when I would come up to him and ask him not to hit. As if he was trying to see if I would hit him. I try to limit the influences in his life that show hitting is okay, but I cannot be everywhere. Although some things I can control. Like the cartoons that he really likes that are more like Tom and Jerry cartoons than the kind of thing I'd like him watching. Its gonna break his little heart when he finds I have restricted access to those shows.

But that goes back to mindfulness in parenting. Its hard work but its worth it. Now, there are many that believe their kids will develop naturally without mindfulness and that's okay, but for those of us that want to plan how we raise our kids this is something to really think about. How will you raise your children to act and react to the world in a desirable way? It takes time and effort, but it can happen. There are many examples of this. Think of the people in power around the world. If they were raised without thought they would not likely be there today. Bill Gates, while I believe he is a bit misguided I think he is a really brilliant, devoted to humanity person and he has his upbringing to thank for that.

There is a meme that I have seen circling the internet that has an iconic 50's father spanking a boy child above a picture of some "thugs" and the caption is "with more of this (the top picture) there would be less of this (the bottom picture)." Now leaving out the face that the "thugs" could be perfectly nice people the meme is absolutely wrong. It doesn't take spanking, smacking, swatting, beating et al, it takes mindfulness in parenting and teaching children values. Perhaps those unruly looking people are plenty nice but were never taught the value of dressing well. But that is exactly the point. Mindfulness in parenting will give them the tools later on in life to know what is acceptable in different societies.

With all of this mindfulness in mind we must also remember to model to our children empathy and kindness. If we judge others with our parenting we are not modeling desirable behavior. In this effort our parenting should come from within, and not from without in examples of undesirable parenting tools. There are many things i have learned from being a parent and many things I have learned from being a kid. There are ways to honor the childhood in your own children. If you wish your parents would have understood something more you have the chance to understand in your own children, but it should not be at your parents' expense. They did their job of raising you (hopefully) as well as they could and now its up to you to improve on the model.

Mindfulness will always be rewarded. Teaching through actions as well as words can help accomplish this goal. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself along the way. You may face some opposition. You may hear "wouldn't it be easier this way?" but you know the answer. Of course it would, but it would not yield the results you are looking for. Good enough, or just fine is okay, but I'm shooting for extraordinary.

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