

Parents, Please Be Gentle with the Rules

The new school year has begun, and I am certain all parents have established rules their children must follow. Without a doubt, there are rules about television watching, use of devices like the cell phone, iPad, laptop, time to go to bed, chores around the house, when to get up in the morning, etc. These rules are good, but they are often difficult to enforce or often disobeyed because the parents did not establish principles for living and self-government during the summer months.

Many parents are slack for ten weeks during the school vacation time and then come down hard on their children like military generals when school starts. This is not good. Although rules can be adjusted during vacation times, they are not to be eliminated. This method does not teach discipline. The older the child is, the more important the consistency of enforcement of rules should be.

In this article, I am talking about students attending primary to high school. By the time the child reaches college, patterns of behavior and self-discipline should have been riveted in the young adult's thinking and lifestyle.

Parents, what are some of the techniques needed to enforce your rules during the school year? Remember that since you were a slack parent during vacation time, you have lost the opportunity to truly govern your child effectively during school time.

Noting that it is too late to undo what was done during the summer vacation. You were a slack parent. Yes, you were. You went easy on your children because you thought it was best for them and easy for you. Now you know that was a mistake. Hence, your approach now has to be a gentle start-up. Note that gentleness is not weakness. It is about understanding, listening, and respecting, seasoned with a little flavor of firmness.

TIPS: Hence, here are a few tips to help you navigate this process. 1) Cast away the military-like attitude and behavior. The more rigid you are, the more rebellion there will be. 2) Respect your child's right to have a view. Listen more and criticize less. As soon as the child is capable of understanding, his/her reason should be enlisted on the side of obedience. 3) Solicit the child's input on the establishment and application of rules. 4) Do not scream and shout at them. Remember this important point: The louder you shout and scream at your children, the less authority you have to manage them. Gradually, you are teaching them how to disrespect you as a parent. 5) Show a genuine interest in their schoolwork and activities. Avoid asking the question "Do you have homework?" This is training the child to lie to you. There should be an understanding that there is homework on every school day. If the teacher does not assign homework, the home should be at least one hour of review of the day's work or preparation for the next school day.

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES: Before implementing any rule, make sure as parents or guardians of the home, you have your own meetings to discuss and plan wisely the necessary rules of governance. Write them down. Do not leave it to memory. When discussing the rules with the children, be prepared to have opposition. However, it is imperative to solicit their suggestions or points of view. Often, they will surprise you with many good ideas. Be prepared to adjust or compromise to get good results. Be gentle.

In reality, what life principles do you want your child to learn while in your home? Do you want these principles to be lifelong personal governance tools? In my 2010 article "Twenty-three Stupid Things Parents Do to Mess Up Their Children's Lives," I shared seven most important behavior principles you should want your children to learn before they leave home as independent adults. Military-style parents fall short on making this possible. This is why I am encouraging parents to be gentle leaders. Here are seven behavior principles of governance you want to achieve when making and enforcing rules in the home.

Here are the seven principles of governance:

1. How to do things for themselves: **INDEPENDENCE**
2. How to do what they say they'll do: **DEPENDABILITY**
3. How to have confidence in themselves: **SELF-ESTEEM**
4. How to get along with others: **COOPERATION**
5. How to solve problems without yelling and hitting: **PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**
6. How to do well in school: **ACADEMIC SKILLS**
7. How to live Godly and righteously in this world: **SPIRITUALITY**

Understanding these behavior principles is important. In addition, knowing and understanding the three most important goals in parenting is crucial. These goals are: **1) Teach your children to think independently. 2) Teach them to be critical thinkers. 3) Provide the environment for them to create original thought.**

"The goals of active parenting are not to drive away stubbornness, break the will, "teach them a lesson or two," nor to restrict behavior. In a nutshell, active parenting provides the freedom to choose, think, and act on your own."

I think now you understand what I mean by "be gentle with the rules." Also, I hope you understand that vacation breaks also include a teaching opportunity for self-government. Do not be guilty of destroying what you did during the school year by having no rules during vacation times. Be gentle all year round.

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