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DARE TO DISCIPLINE

MISSIVENESS DOESN'T WORK.
A FAMOUS CHILD PSYCHOL-
IST SHOWS HOW FIRM CON-
TROL IS THE KEY TO REAL LOVE.
BY DR. JAMES DOBSON

DARE TO DISCIPLINE

James Dobson Ph.D.

To Danae and her mother, Shirley,
I affectionately dedicate the pages of this book
and the remaining years of my life.

*This low-priced Bantam Book
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designed for easy reading, and was printed
from new plates. It contains the complete
text of the original hard-cover edition.*
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.



DARE TO DISCIPLINE

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Foreword

Everyone who has to do with children or youth should welcome this sound, straightforward, plainly written discussion of the ways in which order can be maintained, responsibility developed, and character built. It is a statement that has been long needed, on a subject that has been so much confused. Love is not enough. Discipline is not merely punishment. Good citizens cannot be produced in homes where children have good reason not to respect their own parents.

Successful education should be based on the psychological laws of learning, so often disregarded. Children learn to follow patterns that produce satisfactory results (to them). Good discipline is brought about by the intelligent application of this principle of reinforcement, although many parents consistently reinforce the behavior they want to eliminate. Dr. Dobson presents these principles and many others in a very readable style with abundant illustrations of good and bad "techniques."

He insists that the individual differences in natural endowment, and in social and emotional maturity must be considered in academic matters, and warns parents against expecting too much too soon.

One extremely valuable chapter tells how these principles can be applied effectively in the schools; another deals with creating effective moral behavior; still another is devoted entirely to the abuse of drugs.

Mother and father both get full attention and they are warned that they must show respect for their children if they want their children to show respect in return.

Dr. Dobson has had wide experience both as a

teacher and as a psychologist. He makes technical procedures not merely understandable but interesting and often humorous. Best of all, readers who follow him will find that they get the results they want.

PAUL POPENOE, Sc. D., *Founder and President*
American Institute of Family Relations,
Los Angeles, California

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Introduction

A mother recently asked for help in handling her defiant three-year-old daughter, Sandy. She had realized that her tiny little girl had hopelessly beaten her in a conflict of wills, and the child had become a tyrant and a dictator. On the afternoon prior to our conversation, an incident occurred which was typical of Sandy's way of doing business: the mother (I'll call her Mrs. Nichols) put the youngster down for a nap, although it was unlikely that she would stay in bed. Sandy is not accustomed to doing anything she doesn't want to do, and naptime is not on her acceptable list at the moment. On this occasion, however, the child was more interested in antagonizing her mom than in merely having her own way. Sandy began to scream. She yelled loudly enough to upset the whole neighborhood, fraying Mrs. Nichols' jangled nerves. Then she tearfully demanded various things, including a glass of water. At first Mrs. Nichols refused to comply with the orders, but she surrendered when Sandy's screaming again reached a peak of intensity. As the glass of water was delivered, the little tigress pushed it aside, refusing to drink because her mother had not brought it soon enough. Mrs. Nichols stood offering the water for a few minutes, then said she would take it back to the kitchen if Sandy did not drink by the time she counted to five. Sandy set her jaw and waited through the count. ". . . three, four, five!" As Mrs. Nichols grasped the glass and walked toward the kitchen, the child again screamed for water. Sandy dangled her harassed mom back and forth like a yo-yo until she tired of the sport.

Mrs. Nichols and her little daughter are among the

many casualties of an unworkable, illogical philosophy of child management which has dominated the literature on this subject during the past twenty years. This mother had read that a child will eventually respond to patience and tolerance, ruling out the need for discipline. She had been told to encourage the child's rebellion because it offered a valuable release of hostility. She attempted to implement the recommendation of the experts who suggest that she verbalize the child's feelings in a moment of conflict: "You want the water but you're angry because I brought it too late"; "You don't want me to take the water back to the kitchen"; "You don't like me because I make you take naps"; "You wish you could flush mommie down the toilet." She has been taught that conflicts between parent and child were to be perceived as inevitable misunderstandings or differences in viewpoint. Unfortunately, Mrs. Nichols and her advisors were wrong! She and her child were involved in no simple difference of opinion; she was being challenged, mocked, and defied by her daughter. No heart-to-heart talk would resolve this nose-to-nose confrontation, because the real issue was totally unrelated to the water or the nap or other aspects of the particular circumstances. The actual meaning behind this conflict and a hundred others was simply this: Sandy was brazenly rejecting the authority of her mother. The way Mrs. Nichols handled this confrontation would determine the nature of their future relationship; she could not ignore it. To quote the dilemma posed by a television commercial, "What's a mother to do?"

Much has been written about the dangers of harsh, oppressive, unloving discipline; these warnings are valid and should be heeded. However, the consequences of excessive punishment have been cited as justification for the elimination of discipline. That is foolish. There are times when a stiff-necked child will clench his little fists and dare his parent to accept his challenge; he is not motivated by frustration or inner hostility, as is often supposed. He merely wants to know where the boundaries lie and who's available to enforce them. Many well-meaning specialists have

waved the banner of tolerance, but offered no solution for defiance. They have stressed the importance of parental understanding of the child, and I concur, but we need to teach Junior that he has a few things to learn about mamma, too. Mrs. Nichols and all her contemporaries need to know when to punish, how to set limits, and what behavior to inhibit. This disciplinary activity must occur within the framework of love and affection, which is often difficult for the parent who views these roles as contradictory. *Dare to Discipline* is addressed, in part, to this vital aspect of raising healthy, respectful children.

The term "discipline" is not limited to the context of punishment, and neither is this book. Children also need to be taught *self-discipline* and responsible behavior. They need assistance in learning how to face the challenge and obligations of living. They must learn the art of self-control. They should be equipped with the personal strength needed to meet the demands imposed on them by their school, peer group, and later adult responsibilities. There are those who believe these characteristics cannot be taught—that the best we can do is send the child down the path of least resistance, sweeping aside the hurdles during his formative years. The advocates of this *laissez-faire* philosophy would recommend that a child be allowed to fail in school if he chooses—or maintain his bedroom like the proverbial pigpen—or let his puppy go hungry. I reject this notion, and have accumulated considerable evidence to refute it. Children thrive best in an atmosphere of genuine love, undergirded by reasonable, consistent discipline. In a day of widespread drug usage, immorality, civil disobedience, vandalism, and violence, we must not depend on hope and luck to fashion the critical attitudes we value in our children. That unstructured technique was applied during the childhood of the generation which is now in college, and the outcome has been quite discouraging. Permissiveness has not just been a failure; it's been a disaster!

The recommendations in this manuscript are not experimental or speculative. They represent an ap-

proach to child management which can be trusted. They are not based on abstruse theoretical assumptions, but rather on practical consequences. As Jack London has stated, "The best measurement of anything should be: does it work?" When properly applied, discipline works! It permits the tender affection made possible by *mutual* respect between a parent and child. It bridges the generation gap which otherwise separates family members who should love and trust each other. It allows the God of our fathers to be introduced to our beloved children. It permits a teacher to do the kind of job in the classroom for which she is commissioned. It encourages a child to respect his fellow-man, and live as a responsible, constructive citizen. As might be expected, there is a price tag on these benefits: they require courage, consistency, conviction, diligence, and enthusiastic effort. In short, one must *dare to discipline*.

I

Teaching Respect and Responsibility to Children

Nature has generously equipped most animals with a fear of things that could be harmful to them. Their survival depends on recognition of a particular danger in time to avoid it. But good old mother nature did not protect the frog quite so well; she overlooked a serious flaw in his early warning system that sometimes proves fatal. If a frog is placed in a pan of warm water under which the heat is being increased very gradually, he will typically show no inclination to escape. Since he is a cold-blooded creature, his body temperature remains approximately the same as the water around him and he does not notice the slow change taking place. As the temperature continues to intensify, the frog remains oblivious to his danger; he could easily hop his way to safety, but he is apparently thinking about something else. He will just sit there, contentedly peering over the edge of the pan while the steam curls ominously around his nostrils. Eventually, the boiling frog will pass on to his reward, having succumbed to an unnecessary misfortune that he could easily have avoided.

Now obviously, this is a book about parents and children, not frogs. But human beings have some of the same perceptual inadequacies as their little green friends. We quickly become excited about *sudden* dangers that confront us. War, disease epidemics, earthquakes, and hurricanes bring instant mobilization. However, if a threatening problem arises very slowly,

perhaps over a decade or two, we often allow ourselves to "boil" in happy ignorance. This blindness to gradual disasters is best illustrated by the way we have ignored the turmoil that is spreading systematically through the younger generation of Americans. We have passively accepted a slowly deteriorating "youth scene" without uttering a croak of protest. Suppose the parents of yesterday could make a brief visit to our world to observe the conditions that prevail among our children; certainly, they would be dismayed and appalled by the juvenile problems which have been permitted to become widespread (and are spreading wider) in urban America.

Narcotic and drug usage by America's juveniles is an indescribable shame. Although the danger is now getting wide publicity, the adult who has not worked with teen-agers recently may be unaware of the degree to which this activity has infiltrated adolescent society in the past few years. In 1960 there were 1,500 juvenile arrests for narcotics usage in the State of California; in 1968 there were 30,000. That is an increase of 2,000 percent in an eight-year period. The magnitude of the problem was further described in the following quotation, taken from a recent article in *Time* magazine:

"A heroin epidemic has hit us. We must face that fact," says Dr. Donald Louria, president of the New York State Council on Drug Addiction and author of *Drug Scene*. Dr. Elliot Luby, associate director of Detroit's addict-treating Lafayette Clinic, concurs: "Addiction is really reaching epidemic proportions. You have to look at it as an infectious disease." Epidemic, of course, is a relative term, but as a Chicago psychiatrist, Dr. Marvin Schwarz, says: "Now we're seeing it clinically, whereas before we weren't. The kids on heroin all have long histories of drug use." At the California-based Synanon self-help centers for addicts, the teen-age population has risen from zero five years ago to 400 today. In San Francisco, Dr. Barry Ramer, director of the Study for Special

Problems, calls heroin now "the most readily available drug on the streets." He adds: "In my wildest nightmares, I never dreamed of what we are seeing today."*

Many young people are now playing another dangerous game, packaged neatly under the title of sexual freedom. The rationale sounds very plausible: why should you be restricted by the hangups of the past generation? Why shouldn't you enjoy this greatest of life's pleasures? Now that God is dead, who has the authority to deny you this fulfillment? Contraceptives will prevent babies, so why not find out what everyone is talking about? Now certainly, illicit sex is not a new phenomenon; this activity has been with us for a few thousand years. However, immorality has never been embraced as right and proper in America until now. "Bed today, wed tomorrow—maybe" is the plea. Without being unnecessarily pessimistic, it is accurate to say that the traditional concept of morality is *dead* among the majority of high school students today. The "Playboy Philosophy" has been accepted as the banner of the now generation. I spoke recently to a group of high school homemaking teachers who related their surprise at the blatant admission of immorality by their students. Whole classes now argue with their teachers about the "rightness" of sexual freedom.

The casualties of this permissive sexual philosophy have been known for centuries and can hardly be overlooked today: (1) Illegitimate pregnancies and their accompanying heartache are common in most high schools in this country. (2) Venereal disease has reached epidemic proportions within the cities. A physician who directs a venereal disease clinic recently described for me the depressing conditions he witnesses. He said most of his young patients do not come wringing their hands in despair at the awful disease they have contracted; rather, they schedule routine visits to his clinic in order to "cure" what they carry in time for the events of the next weekend! The medi-

**Time* magazine, March 16, 1970, p. 16. Used by permission.

cal examination serves as a pit stop for their upcoming exploits. (3) Perhaps the most severe result of promiscuity is the effect it has on the emotions and personality, subjecting innocence and wholesomeness to an untimely death. These consequences of sexual permissiveness are not widely advertised by the advocates of the new morality!

Another symptom of the adolescent unrest is seen in the frequent display of aggression and hostility. Young people are more violent today than at any period in American history. According to published FBI figures, juvenile arrests for aggravated assault have increased seventy percent faster than the general population in recent years. Two-thirds of all the crimes of violence (murder, rape, and assault) are committed by those under twenty-one years of age. A recent Associated Press article stated that students across the United States are attacking their teachers with increasing frequency. Most of these physical attacks occur in the junior and senior high schools, although a surprising number of the episodes take place at the elementary school level. Can there be any doubt that school authority is being challenged seriously?

There are many related phenomena occurring among the young which reveal the turmoil in adolescent society. Emotional maladjustment, gang warfare, teenage suicide, school failure, shoplifting, and grand larceny are symptoms of a deeper illness that plague vast numbers of America's young. During the earlier days of the adolescent rebellion, the reassuring watchword was "only a small percentage of the youngsters are getting into trouble." That statement no longer comforts us, because it is no longer true. On the other hand, it would be grossly unfair to say that most young people are "bad"; they are merely responding to social forces and causes that are leading them into the icy face of disaster.

We cannot solve these problems by lashing out at the young with venom and hostility. Many of the youngsters who are behaving in such antisocial and self-destructive ways are actually lost, aimless and valueless individuals. Millions of other teen-agers have

not attacked society or rejected its time-honored values, yet they experience the same inner emptiness and confusion. They are badly in need of wise and understanding parents who can anchor them during their personal crises. Certainly, the purpose of this book is not to condemn our children; they are our most important and valued resource. To the contrary, the older generation must assume the blame for allowing the circumstances to deteriorate. There was a time when the trend could easily have been reversed, but like the contented frog, we must have been thinking about something else. The time has come for us to hop, rather than boil. It is our parental responsibility to get off our corpulent behinds and take steps to eliminate the problems which threaten our children. We may not salvage some members of the present generation but perhaps we can preserve the next. Ultimately, we must deal with this question: how did we get into this mess and how can we get out of it?

Without meaning to oversimplify a very complicated picture, it is accurate to say that many of our difficulties with the present generation of young people began in the tender years of their childhood. Little children are exceedingly vulnerable to the teaching (good or bad) of their guardians, and mistakes made in the early years prove costly, indeed. There is a critical period during the first four or five years of a child's life when he can be taught proper attitudes. These early concepts become rather permanent. When the opportunity of those years is missed, however, the prime receptivity usually vanishes, never to return. If it is desirable that children be kind, appreciative, and pleasant, those qualities should be taught—not hoped for. If we want to see honesty, truthfulness, and unselfishness in our offspring, then these characteristics should be the conscious objectives of our early instructional process. If it is important to produce respectful, responsible young citizens, then we should set out to mold them accordingly. The point is obvious: *heredity does not equip a child with proper attitudes; children will learn what they are taught.* We cannot expect the desirable attitudes and behavior to appear

if we have not done our early homework. It seems clear that many of the parents of the post-war crop of American babies failed in that critical assignment.

Nature is rather careless about whom it allows to become mammas and pappas. The qualifications are not very high; in fact, it is not necessary to know a single fact about children in order to produce one. Young men and women may find themselves saddled with the unwanted responsibility for impressionable, helpless infants, about whom they know nothing. They may be totally ignorant of the principles of discipline, nutrition, or child growth and development. The mistakes that they make are certainly unintentional, yet the consequences are no less severe. Perhaps the greatest and most common shortcoming during the past twenty-five years was related to the belief, particularly by new parents, that "love is enough" in raising children. Apparently they believed that successful parenthood consists of two primary obligations: (1) raise the child in an atmosphere of genuine affection; (2) satisfy his material and physical needs. They expected every good and worthwhile virtue to bubble forth from this spring of lovingkindness. As time has shown, that was wishful thinking. Although love is essential to human life, parental responsibility extends far beyond it. A parent may love a child immeasurably, and then proceed to teach him harmful attitudes. Love in the absence of instruction will not produce a child with self-discipline, self-control, and respect for his fellow man. Affection and warmth underlie all mental and physical health, yet they do not eliminate the need for careful training and guidance.

At a recent psychologists' conference in Los Angeles, the keynote speaker made the statement that *the greatest social disaster of this century is the belief that abundant love makes discipline unnecessary*. He said that some of the little terrors who are unmanageable in the school classroom are *mistakenly* believed to have emotional problems. They are referred to the school psychologist for his evaluation of their difficulty, but no deep problems are found. Instead, it becomes ob-

vious that the children have simply never been required to inhibit their behavior or restrict their impulses. Some of these children came from homes where love was almost limitless.

Respectful and responsible children result from families where the proper combination of *love and discipline* is present. Both these ingredients must be applied in the necessary quantities. An absence of either is often disastrous. During the 1950s, an unfortunate imbalance existed, when we saw the predominance of a happy theory called "permissive democracy." This philosophy minimized parental obligations to control their children, in some cases making mom and dad feel that all forms of punishment were harmful and unfair. As a result, the mid-century decade has been described as the most permissive ten years in our history. Is it merely coincidental that the generation raised during that era has grown up to challenge every form of authority that confronts it? I think not. It should come as no surprise that our beloved children have hangups; we have sacrificed this generation on the altar of overindulgence, permissiveness, and smother-love. Certainly, other factors have contributed to the present unsettled youth scene, but I believe the major cause has been related to the anarchy that existed in millions of American homes.

Have you considered the fact that the present generation of young people has enjoyed more of the "good life" than any comparable group in the history of the world? One can define the good life any way he chooses; the conclusion remains the same. Our children have had more pleasure and entertainment, better food, more leisure time, better education, better medicine, more material goods, and more opportunities than has ever been known before. Yet they have been described as the "angry generation." How can this be? Those two conditions do not seem to fit together. Down through the ages, people have dreamed and longed for a day when their major troubles would be resolved: "If we just didn't have this terrible war to fight; if we could eliminate this famine, or this depression, or this plague." At last in post-war Amer-