

# Consequences of Some Parenting Styles Invite Questions

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**Q: You said that you had practical advice for parents. What kind of advice?**

A: Parenting lessons from a priest! What next? Poetry lessons from a computer programmer?

I'm not a father of small children. But I get to work with a lot of parents and their children, and I am the spiritual father to a lot of junior high, high school and college students. Because of that, I get to see the consequences of different parenting styles. Here are a few things that I have observed and a few questions that are worth asking.

***Why do you have the rules that you have?***

I once trained with an organization called the National Outdoor Leadership School. The primary goal of this group was to train people to survive in the wilderness and to be able to teach others to do the same. The founder was a unique man named Paul Pezoldt. One of his sayings was “rules are for fools.”

For those of us in our late teens and early twenties participating in this school, the idea was quite appealing. But thinking back, they had plenty of rules. NOLS embraced the principles of “Leave No Trace” and minimal impact camping. When it came to mountaineering, they were incredibly serious and disciplined regarding exactly how we climbed or rappelled mountain faces.

This school used rules but they prided themselves on this fact: none of the rules were arbitrary. They were based on sound wilderness and climbing safety principles. There were good reasons for their existence.

It is often easier to have arbitrary rules when it comes to families or companies or parishes. These can even be good rules. Having a bedtime or getting homework done or completing chores before playtime are all good, but at some point those rules will come into conflict with some other good. At some point, young people will push back against these rules. That is only natural.

Here is the issue: If you don’t know why this rule exists, you will find yourself trapped by it.

- First, as your child begins to think critically, they will want to know the “why” behind the rule. If you don’t know why, you can’t tell them why.
- Second, if there is no known “why,” when negotiation is necessary (and you have probably discovered that there are times when it is necessary) the negotiation is based off how much sleep you got the previous night, not necessarily on what is best or most fair.
- Third, when your rules are arbitrary, it is really difficult to know why you are enforcing them at any given moment.

I’m sure that every parent has had those times when you just “let it slide this one time.” That’s probably fine, but wouldn’t you rather have a reason why you enforce the rule this time and don’t enforce it another time? When rules grow out of intentional principles, they may still be challenged or broken, but you will not have any doubt about whether they should be there.

***Why are you doing what you are doing? This is one of those “personal inventory” questions.***

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I know of a great couple who used to cuss all of the time. They were so “good” at using crude language that I even tried talking like them for a season. They could pepper their language with little dabs of expletives so that almost everything they said took on a level of an early

Eddie Murphy stand-up routine.

But then they had children, and they realized that one of their jobs was to teach their children how to use words. It was remarkable. Their first child caused them to evaluate how they were speaking. Their subsequent children spurred them on to change their habits.

We want a personal life committed to excellence and holiness. I think that all parents learn (like all priests quickly learn), that giftedness is limited. All parents make mistakes. No parent is perfect. People cannot merely parent out of their giftedness, they have to parent out of character. Therefore, while there is something incredibly valuable about growing in your parenting gifts and knowledge, one's personal character is indispensable.

Media is where your example plays the most powerful role. We say that various television programs, books, songs or movies have "adult content." And sometimes this is accurate. There are some themes that your adult mind can process at a more advanced and subtle level. But there are some media that are called "adult programming" and all this means is that no one should ever expose themselves to it.

I've said it before, and I will say it again: If parents have given their child (regardless of age) a smartphone, iPod or tablet and have not activated all of the parental restrictions possible, those parents are fools. There is no way around that. "Woe to you . . ." if you have given your child access to all of the worst that humanity has to offer and not done anything to restrict and monitor those devices. It is one of the many lies that parents have been suckered into.

### ***Can they disagree with you? Is there room for pushback?***

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This is especially true for older children. Are you willing to give them a chance to agree or disagree on things that are optional? This strategy can even be helpful when it comes to things that are not optional, like Sunday Mass.

God is infinitely creative. And while there are certain nonnegotiables, there are many areas of life where God gives us permission to simply choose what we think is best. As a reminder of God for your children, do you give them the same freedom?

All parents get it wrong. But God is not calling you to parent out of fear of getting it wrong. God has entrusted his children to your temporary care. Love them like God loves them and is calling you to parent them out of a place of humble confidence and love.