

TRAINING NOT TO TOUCH

There is much satisfaction in training up a child. It is easy and challenging. When my children were able to crawl (in the case of one, roll) around the room, I set up training sessions.

Try it yourself. Place an appealing object where they can reach it, maybe in a “No-no” corner or on an apple juice table (That’s where the coffee table once sat). When they spy it and make a dive for it, in a calm voice say, “No, don’t touch it.” They will already be familiar with the “No,” so they will pause, look at you in wonder and then turn around and grab it. Switch their hand once and simultaneously say, “No.” Remember, you are not disciplining, you are training. One spat with a little switch is enough. They will again pull back their hand and consider the relationship between the object, their desire, the command and the little reinforcing pain. It may take several times, but if you are consistent, they will learn to consistently obey, even in your absence.

PLANT YOUR TREE IN THE MIDST OF THE GARDEN

When God wanted to “train” his first two children not to touch, He did not place the forbidden object out of their reach. Instead, He placed the “*free of knowledge of good and evil*” in the “*midst of the garden (Gen.3:3)*.” Being in the middle of the garden, they would pass it continually. God’s purpose was not to save the tree—rather, to train the couple. Note the name of the tree was not just “knowledge of evil,” but, “*knowledge of good and evil*.” By exercising their wills not to eat, they would have learned the meaning of “*good*” as well as “*evil*.” The eating was a shortcut to the knowledge, but not a necessary path.

The beauty of this is that thereafter, every time the children pass the ‘No-No’ object (their “tree of knowledge of good and evil”), they are gaining knowledge of **good and evil** from the standpoint of an overcomer. As with Adam and Eve in the garden, the object and the touching of it is, in itself, of no consequence; but the attachment of a command to it makes it a moral “factory” where character is produced. By your enforcement, your children are learning about moral government, duty, responsibility and, in the event of failure, accountability, rewards and punishment. In the here and now, they are also learning not to touch, which makes a child’s social life a lot more pleasant.

It just takes a few minutes to train a child not to touch a given object. Most children can be brought into complete and joyous subjection in just three days. Thereafter, if you continue to be faithful, the children will remain happy and obedient. By obedient, I mean you will never need to tell them twice. If you expect to receive instant obedience, and you train them to that end, you will be successful. It will take extra time to train, but once the children are in general subjection the time saved is extraordinary. Some people say, “Child-proof your home.” I say, “Home-proof your child.”

TOUCHY SITUATIONS

Have you ever been the victim of tiny inquisitive hands? The very young child, not yet walking, is keen on wanting to grab any object of interest. There is no fault in this, but sometimes it can be annoying. When you are holding a baby and he keeps pulling off your glasses, you cannot explain to him the impropriety of such socially crude behavior. The little tot is not yet moved by fear of rejection. So, do you try to hold him in a pinned-down fashion where he can’t get to your face? No, you train him not to touch. Once you train an infant to respond to the command of “No,” then you will have control in every area where a prohibition is in order.

Get set for training. Hold him where he can easily reach your glasses. Look him right in the eye. He reaches out. Don’t pull back. Don’t defend yourself. Calmly say, “No.” If anything, lower your voice, don’t raise it. Don’t sound more serious than usual. Remember you are establishing a pattern of command to be used the rest of his youth. When he touches the glasses, again say, “No,” and accompany your command with minor pain. He will pull his hand back and try to comprehend the association of grabbing the glasses and pain. (I usually just thumped their little hand with my index finger. I never knew one to cry. They don’t even know that you did it. They think it was the glasses, or perhaps the “No” itself causes pain.) Inevitably, he will return to the bait to test his new theory. Sure enough, again the glasses caused pain; and the pain is always accompanied by a quiet little “No.” It may take one or two more tries for him to give up his career as glasses snatcher, but he will.

Through this process of association the child will involuntarily recall the pain every time he hears the word “No.” There comes a time when your word alone is sufficient to gain obedience.

You can also stop him from assaulting his mother with a bottle held by the nipple. The same holds true for hair and beard pulling. You name it, the infant can be trained to obey. Do you want to wrestle with him through his entire youth, nagging him to compliance, threatening, placing things out of reach, fearing what he might get into next? Or would it be better to take a little time to train? If nothing else, training will result in saving you time.

I know a mother who must call a baby-sitter every time she takes a shower. You should be able to take a nap and expect to find the house in order when you wake.

OBEDIENCE TRAINING—BITING BABIES

One particularly painful experience of nursing mothers is the biting baby. My wife did not waste time finding a cure. When the baby bit, she pulled hair (an alternative has to be sought for bald-headed babies). Understand, the baby is not being punished, just conditioned. A baby learns not to stick his finger in his eyes or bite his tongue through the negative associations accompanying it. It requires no understanding or reasoning. Somewhere in the brain that information is unconsciously stored. After two or three times of biting, with the accompanying head hurting, the child programs that information away for his own comfort. The biting habit is cured before it starts. This is not discipline. It is obedience training.

OBEDIENCE TRAINING—BOWLS AND BABIES

The mother clumsily holds her cereal bowl at arms length as she wrestles her infant for supremacy. When she places the bowl out of the baby's reach, he is taught it is off limits only if it is out of reach. To train him, place the bowl within easy reach. When he reaches out, say "No" and thump his hand. He will pull his hand back, momentarily look alarmed and again reach out. Repeat the process of saying "No" in a calm voice and thumping the hand. After several times, you can eat in peace.

When "No" and a thump occur simultaneously, several times, on different occasions, the voice command alone soon becomes sufficient to mold behavior. Again, keep in mind, the baby is not being punished, just conditioned. The thump is not a substitute rod. It is reinforcement to the obedience training.

COME WHEN I CALL YOU

One father tells of his training sessions with each new toddler. He sets aside an evening for "booty" camp, which is a boot camp for toddlers. The child of ten to twelve months is left alone to become deeply interested in a toy or some delightful object. From across the room or just inside the other room, the father calls the child. If he ignores the call, the father goes to him and explains the necessity of immediately coming when called, and then leads him to the father's chair. The child thus led through these paces is being programmed.

He is returned to the toy and left alone long enough to again become engrossed. Another call, and, if no response, the father gives a patient explanation and demonstration of the desired response. The parent, having assured himself of the child's understanding, once again sets up the situation and calls the child. This time, if there is not an immediate response the child is lightly spanked and lectured. The father continues this throughout the evening until the child readily and immediately responds to a summons. Thereafter, until the child leaves home, he is expected to drop everything and come upon the first call. As long as the parents remain consistent, the child will consistently obey. This "obedience training" is carried out in the utmost patience and concentration. The spanking should not be viewed as punishment but as reinforcement to commands.

NEVER TOO YOUNG TO TRAIN

The parents who put off training until the child is old enough to discuss issues or receive explanations find their child a terror long before he understands the meaning of the word. A newborn soon needs training. The child needs holding, loving and lots of attention, but the mother often has other duties.

As the mother, holding her child, leans over the crib and begins the swing downward, the infant stiffens, takes a deep breath and bellows. The battle for control has begun in earnest. Someone is going to be conditioned. Either the tender-hearted mother will cave in to this self-centered demand (thus training the child to get his way by crying) or the infant is allowed to cry (learning that crying is counterproductive). Crying because of genuine physical need is simply the infant's only voice to the outside world; but crying in order to manipulate the adults into constant servitude should never be rewarded. Otherwise, you will reinforce the child's growing self-centeredness, which will eventually become socially intolerable.

STEPS TO OBEDIENCE

One of our girls who developed mobility early had a fascination with crawling up the stairs. At four months she was too unknowing to be punished for disobedience. But for her own good, we attempted to train her not to climb the stairs by coordinating the voice command of "No" with little spats on the bare legs. The switch was a twelve-inch long, one-eighth-inch diameter sprig from a willow tree.

Such was her fascination with climbing that four or five sessions had not made her stop. The thought of further spankings was disconcerting, so I conceived an alternative. After one more spanking, I laid the switch on the bottom step. We later observed her crawl to the stairs and start the ascent, only to halt at the first step and stare at the switch. She backed off and never again attempted to climb the stairs, even after the switch was removed.

EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Disciplinary actions can become excessive and oppressive when the tool of training is set aside and one depends on discipline alone to do the training. I have observed proud, stern fathers, ruling their house with a firm hand and making sure everyone knows it. The rod is swift to fall, and especially in the presence of company. The children tremble in his

presence, fearing to incur his displeasure. I have often wondered why, if he is so firm and faithful to gain obedience, he has not achieved it before entering the public arena. I am impressed, but not in the way he hopes.

Except where the very smallest children are concerned, training at home almost entirely eliminates the need for discipline— especially public discipline. Yet, should the need arise in public, do a flanking maneuver and administer it; then go home and train so that it never again happens in public.

TRAINING THE ORNERY AMISH BOY

As I sat talking with a local Amish fellow, a typical child training session developed. The father was holding a twelve-month old boy who suddenly developed a compulsion to slip down onto the floor. Due to the cold floor, the father directed the child to stay in his lap. The child began to stiffen so as to make of himself a missile that would slip through to the floor. The father spoke to him in the German language (which I did not understand) and firmly placed him back in the sitting position. The child began to make dissenting noises and continued the resistant slide. The father then spanked the child and spoke what I assumed to be reproving words. Seeing his mother across the room, the child began to cry and reach for her. This was understandable in any language.

At this point, I became highly interested in the proceedings. Most fathers would have been glad to give up the child to continue their own conversation. It was obvious the child felt there would be more liberty with his mother. If he had been given over to her, the experience would have been counterproductive training. He would have been taught that when he cannot get his way with one, just go around the chain of command. The faithful mother, more concerned for her child's training than the gratification of being clung to, ignored the child.

The father then turned the child away from his mother. The determined fellow immediately understood that the battle lines had shifted and expressed his independence by throwing his leg back over to the other side to face his mother. The father spanked the leg that the child turned to the mother and again spoke to him.

Clearly, the lines were drawn. The battle was in array. Someone was going to submit his will and learn his lesson. Either the father would confirm that this one-year-old could rule his parents or the parents would confirm their authority. Everyone's happiness was at stake, as well as the soul of the child. The father was wise enough to know this was a test of authority. This episode had crossed over from "obedience training" to discipline for attitude.

For the next weary forty-five minutes, fifteen times the child would make his legs move, and the daddy would turn him around and spank his legs. The father was as calm as a lazy porch swing on a Sunday afternoon. There was no hastiness or anger. He did not take the disobedience personally. He had trained many a horse or mule and knew the value of patient perseverance. In the end, the twelve-month-old submitted his will to his father, sat as he was placed, and became content—even cheerful.

Some will say, "But I couldn't take it emotionally." Sometimes it is difficult and trying to set aside your plans for the sake of child training. It does involve emotional sacrifice. Yet, what is love, but giving? When we know it will work to the temporal and eternal good of the child, it is a joy instead of a sacrifice.

Where our motives are not pure, where we suspect anger may be part of our motivation, our pricked conscience causes a reluctance to act. We fear that our discipline is an act of the ego to dominate. We must deal with our own impurities for the sake of the child; for if the child doesn't receive this kind of training, he will greatly suffer.

BE ASSURED OF TWO THINGS:

1. Every small child will have one or two times in his young life when he will decide to take hold of the reins. The stubbornness is profound—amazing—a wonder that one so young could be so dedicated and persevering in rebellion. It is the kind of determination you would expect to find in a hardened revolutionary facing enemy indoctrination classes. Parents who are trained to expect it and are prepared to persevere still stand in awe at the strength of the small child's will.

2. If you are consistent, this test of authority will come only one, two, or, at the most, three times in each child's life. If you endure, conquering the child's will, then in the long run the child wins. If you weaken and let it pass to the victory of the child's will, then by winning it is a character loss for the child. You must persevere for the both of you. The household cat who, regardless of protest, door barring and foot swinging, is occasionally allowed to stay in the house will take the occasional success as impetus to always try to get in. If he is consistently kept out (100% of the time), he will not come in, even when the door is left open. The cat, allowed to occasionally get its way, is trained, despite your protests, to come into the house. If you kick it hard enough and often enough, it will become sufficiently wary to obey while you remain on guard but will still bolt through the door when it sees the opportunity.

On the other hand, dogs, thirty-five times smarter than cats, can be trained either to come in or stay out upon command. The key again is consistency. If the dog learns through conditioning (consistent behavior on the part of the trainer) that he will never be allowed to violate his master's command, he will always obey. If parents carefully and consistently train up a child, his or her performance will be as consistently satisfying as that rendered by a well trained seeing-eye dog.

NEGATIVE TRAINING

How many times have we observed the grocery store arena? A devious little kid sits up in the command seat of the shopping cart exercising his “childhood rights” to unlimited self-indulgence. The parent fearfully but hopelessly steers around the tempting “trees of knowledge of good and evil.” Too late! The child spies the object of his unbridled lust. The battle is on. The child will either get what he wants or make the parent miserable. Either way, he conquers.

One father proudly told of how he fearlessly overcame by promising the child ice-cream if he would only wait until they left the store. Such compromises will simply confirm the child’s terrorist tactics. You are not gaining control of the child, he is gaining control of you. All children are trained, some carelessly or negligently, and some, with varied degrees of forethought. All parental responses are conditioning the child’s behavior, and are therefore training.

PURCHASED COMPLIANCE

Parents who purchase compliance through promise of reward are making their child a racketeer who is paid for protection. The child becomes the Mafia or union boss, and you, the “over the barrel” businessman. If you are just bargaining with a terrorist for one more day’s reprieve from anguish, may you then strike a favorable deal, but if you are training up a child, you need to reconsider your methods. This compromise method is the making of a bitter, undisciplined, fleshly child—and eventually, adult.

DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?

I observed a father tell his small boy not to touch a particular object. Having been trained to ignore mild commands, the child picked it up. The father demanded, “Give it to me.” The child pretended not to hear. “Did you hear me? [Of course he did] Hand it to Daddy. [With more firmness] Johnnieeee, give it to Daddy, NOW!! [Another decibel higher—hasty—angry] JOHNNY!! Am I

going to have to SPANK YOU?” By this time the father became aware of his embarrassing tone. He calmed his voice, and in an attempt to bring it to a conclusion he leaned way out and extended his hand, making it easier for Johnny to comply. Because of the angry voice and burning eyes, Johnny assumed the temporary posture of, “Oh well, there will be another day.” But, instead of meeting the humbled, groping father, he held the object in his general direction but down close to his body, forcing the father to advance even farther to retrieve it. The father, looking like a poor peasant receiving his necessary food from some condescending royalty, submitted to the child’s humiliation and reached to retrieve the object. And then, in a display of weakness, the father placed it out of the child’s reach.

What has Johnny learned from this episode? He has had his conviction reinforced that it is never necessary to obey a command the first, second, third, or fourth time. No one expects him to. He has learned it is permissible to grab anything within reach and to continue possessing it until the heat gets too great. He has learned not to respect authority, just strength (the day will come when he is the stronger one). By the father’s example, he has learned how to use anger. By the father’s advance to take the object from his hand, he has learned how to “get in the last shot” and maintain his defiance. That father was effectively training his small child to be a rebel.

What has the father learned? That little Johnny is just a “strong willed” child; that children go through unpleasant stages; that it is sometimes a very miserable, embarrassing thing to be a parent; that one has to watch a kid every minute and put things out of his reach; that the only things kids understand are force and anger? All of which are false. The father is reaping the harvest of his “mistraining.”

After we take a look at the nature of a child, much of the rest of this book will describe many positive training techniques.