

Emotional Control

THE AMISH FAMILY

When an Amish family with their twelve children comes over to visit, you would think it was a Japanese delegation, for all the self-control and order present. The children are taught to maintain control of their emotions. They are all respectful of your property and presence. When in the presence of adults, the children don't talk or play loudly. If hurt, they don't cry excessively. The children learn to give-over when their rights are trampled on by another child. This is consistently accomplished through consistent training and discipline.

SCREAMING TEEN

We were at a "dinner on the grounds" [This is not eating off the ground. It is eating together outdoors.] when a twelve-year-old girl who had been swinging on a swing set commenced to scream the cry of the imminently perishing. If one of my kids had screamed like that, I would have expected her to have been caught in a people eating machine slowly being dragged to destruction. We all threw our paper plates of food on the ground and ran to the rescue. She appeared to have fallen out of the swing, with no perceptible damage. (We later discover she had received one bee sting.) When the father tried to examine her for what he thought was a broken arm, she rolled and thrashed, kicked and squalled. She sounded much like someone tied to a hill of fire ants. For the next ten minutes he tried to get her attention, demanding to know what was wrong. She wouldn't let him examine it, but continued the screaming. Ten seconds of that, and I said to my wife, "She isn't hurt, she's mad."

As I returned to find my paper plate, I could occasionally hear the father's bellow over hers, "What's wrong honey? Tell me where it hurts." I knew she wasn't badly hurt, for no one who was hurting could muster that much energy. Furthermore, the screaming had the sound of a protest—an assault cry.

After the men had shared a couple more fishing tales, we saw them carry her past us into the house where her arm was eventually pronounced just fine. I was glad when they got her indoors. With the background noise, the men were starting to tell war stories. Be careful not to make emotional liars out of your children by your own emotional weaknesses.

POOR THING, WHERE DOES IT HURT?

For your children's' own good, teach them to maintain control of their emotions. If you do not want to produce a sissy who uses adversity as a chance to get attention, then don't program them that way. When your toddler falls over on the floor, don't run and pick him up, speaking in an alarmed sympathetic voice.

I remember a stunt performed, when I was only about eight years old, for the entertainment of all the adults present. My little toddler cousin was sitting on the floor playing happily, when my older cousin said, "Watch this." Speaking to the infant in a pitiful, compassionate voice, he said, "Oh! is the baby hurt? Poor thing. What did you do? Does it hurt? Show it to Mama." Sure enough, my happy little cousin puckered up, started crying and made his way to his mother for emotional support. To the roar of the adults, she picked him up, told him it would be all right, brushed off the imaginary dirt, and sat him back on the floor to continue happily playing. I instantly programmed that away for future use. Over the years, I observed that same phenomenon many times. Only once or twice was it done deliberately for entertainment. The other times a mother was rushing to her child's real or imagined distresses.

TOUGH TEENS

When I was yet young I determined that I would rear no sissies. When an infant fell over from a sitting position to the floor and bumped his head, we pretended to ignore it. When a toddler took a spill, we let him lie, whimper a second and then climb back up for another try. When a toddler fell out of the wagon or stumbling into the dirt, we let him deal with it. When the young ones wreck their bicycle and skinned their knee, we paid no attention except say something like, "You shouldn't go so fast until you learn to ride better." They would come in to dinner and we would see blood knees or skinned hands and ask, "What happened to you, tiger?" "Oh, nothing. Just slid out on the curve in the loose gravel. I think can make it next time." "Take it easy. Don't break something."

Now our responses, or lack of, were not unconcern; quite the contrary. There were times when we had to hold each other back in order for our child to learn the lessons of life. The times when medical attention was necessary, we administered it calmly and efficiently, returning them to their play.

Your response is important to the development of character. You do not want to produce a teenager, and ultimately an adult, who hurts himself when he needs attention.

When still a youth, I saw a teenage girl, jilted by boyfriend, feign being hurt. I know an adult who hurts herself every time she gets emotionally disturbed. If, in your family, these extremes never occur, it is nonetheless more pleasant

to live with a child or teenager who is not a “crybaby.” Also, your daughter future husband will appreciate your having trained her. And y sons will be better men.

HOLD STILL

When our first daughter was a young girl, maybe seven eight, I looked up to see a brown-recluse spider crawling along I neck. Their bite is very cruel indeed. A pound of flesh may rot out where one bites. My daughter had been taught to trust and obey. I said, “Don’t move.” She froze. Not a muscle twitched. Fear paled her eyes as she followed our intense stare and felt the creature creeping up her neck. I could see the rising compulsion to slap and to flee screaming. She stood perfectly rigid as I slowly approach reached out, and carefully flicked the spider away. I was thankful I had trained her to maintain control of her emotions.

THE TUMBLING TOT

I was driving my truck some distance behind a horse-drawn hay-wagon when a little fellow about four or five years old fell off the back of the wagon into the gravel road. No one had noticed him, and the wagon continued to rattle along. I thought I might go to the rescue, when he jumped up and ran to catch the wagon. After a couple of failed attempts to jump on, someone saw him and, grabbing a hand, swung him back on the wagon. After being seated, he rubbed his sore spots and continued on to the field. He did not expect the world to stop simply because he was lying in a dirt road skinned up. I can imagine the fuss if that had happened to the modem, over-indulged, under-trained child.

CRYING BABIES, OR CRYBABIES

When ‘crawlers’ or ‘scooters’ cry, there should be a legitimate reason. If they are hungry, feed them. If they are sleepy, put them down for a nap. If they are truly hurt, give time for the pain to subside. If they are physically uncomfortable, adjust the environment. If they are wet, change them. If they are afraid, hold them close. If they are grouching, discipline them to get control of their self-centeredness. If they are mad, switch them. Don’t let your child stay unhappy. Meet the real needs and make their selfish crying an unrewarding experience. The mother should be careful to anticipate the infant’s real needs and meet them at appropriate times and levels. However, when the infant is allowed to gain control of his environment through whining he is training you.