

## TWINKIE TWERP

My wife was standing in a yard talking to the young mother of a seven-year-old boy and two girls. The girls are fairly obedient and even-tempered, but the boy is the kind that keeps our books circulating. He displayed the sort of behavior that is often label by “specialists” who get paid a lot for knowing such things. Ritalin was made for him and Prozac for his mother. The father practiced distraction.

The situation began when the boy came from the house with a Hostess Twinkie, demanding that his mother let him eat it right now.

His mother said, “No, there is not enough for the other children (neighbor children with whom he was playing).”

At first he looked shocked and offended. Then his lips curled in anger and his brow hardened. He exploded with protest and begging, frantically tearing at the wrapper. It appeared he was going to defiantly rip it open. The mother commenced a foot shuffling, grabbing competition for the Twinkie. For a while it was up in the air as to who would win. She finally out-grabbed him, but she didn’t win—neither did the boy. His was the greater loss, a loss of character.

Since he knew that his more powerful mother would eventually win any physical struggle, and that he would have to forfeit his spoils, he surrendered the Twinkie. But he used it as a bargaining chip. Mother was standing there holding the deformed Twinkie, looking exhausted, when he demanded, “Then, let me have a graham cracker.” Seeing a way out, she paid the little extortionist his graham cracker and resumed her adult conversation. It was all in a day’s stress at the old home place.

He never actually expected to overpower his mother (though he will someday). He just wanted to express his anger at being denied personal indulgence. Furthermore, from past experiences he knew how to manipulate her into compliance. After all, he did intimidate her into giving him a graham cracker. This mother had reinforced his pattern of ugly behavior. As we have said, “All children are trained—some positively, some negatively.” She was training him to repeat this negative behavior.

She could have handled the situation by flying into a rage and spanking him for his lousy attitude and actions. He would have screamed and kicked to make her sorry for being such an “abusive, cruel mom.” She would have felt deeply defeated in spirit and, I hope, saddened by the condition of his soul. If she increased the spankings or their severity, he would be more cautious, but still angry and manipulative.

Is this your situation? Have you “tried everything” and concluded that you just have a “strong-willed” child? Not so. Through ignorance you have neglected to properly train.

Keep in mind that the Twinkie consumer’s actions are a result of his undisciplined desire for things “*good for food.*” He is living for self-gratification and is angered when anyone dares deny him indulgence. He has also developed a will to dominate, and mother is an easy target.

The issue is far bigger than doling out sweets. Our first concern is the child’s character. He may not be old enough to voluntarily choose self-restraint, denying his flesh, but he needs to be placed under a strong authority that constrains him to exercise self-control. If you do not condition him to get control of his passions now, when he is young, he will be out of control long before he knows that he should exercise self-discipline. When mother gives in she is training him to repeat this and other similar, undesirable actions.

Here is one way you could deal with the Twinkie ripper. When he begins to tear at the wrapper and protest, don’t accept the challenge and become the other half of the competition. Maintain the dignity of a judge, as you solemnly observe and review the evidence. If he intends to open the package, he is quite capable to do so. If he doesn’t actually intend to forcibly open it, if it is all just a demonstration of his displeasure, with no one caring to spar with him, his little performance will soon become a lonesome embarrassment. Wait until he reveals his intentions. Whether he gets it open, or gives up the pretense, judgment is going to fall. He is going to learn the meaning of cool authority. He is going to get a spanking, but we are going to do more than punish him; we are going to train him.

As the trainer of young souls, our response is always going to be to enforce boundaries that force the child to exercise self-control. When you know what a child hopes to gain by his negative behavior, make sure he gets the opposite. Make his negative behavior counterproductive by causing him to see how his actions are directly responsible for limiting his gratification now and in the future.

What does he want? The Twinkie—sweets. So when he gets the Twinkie out of the wrapper, or gives up trying, calmly tell him to give it to his friends. The shock of your cold and solemn rock hardness may cause him to obey. Then, tell him that he will be denied sweets for one week. Reinforce it with a spanking. Stand by your pronouncement. Let him do without junk food while he watches the other family members indulge. Remind him often that he purchased this abstinence with his negative behavior. After two or three such times, he will see the law of cause and effect in action. Apply the principle of action and reaction. When his actions are inappropriate, it is the cause of a reaction on your part That will get the opposite of what he wanted. He will soon make adjustments, using the law to his own benefit. If you are as consistent as the “law of the Medes and the Persians,” he will adjust his actions in favor of his own appetite.

What if he should continue to scream and protest when you give the Twinkie to the other children? Calmly lead him to the place where the “magic wand” is kept and give him respect for the “Powers that be.”

What if he should continue to steal sweets and make demands? Simply tell him that his actions have led you to see that his addiction must be broken, so you will not buy anything sweet for one month—and stick to it. The worst thing you could do is to make an exception or to give over after a week or two. Let him follow the progress on a calendar.

## **Moral development**

You may ask, "If he is still motivated by selfishness, how is the conditioning going to be morally beneficial?" Though he may still be acting out of self-interest, that is, he has to force himself to accept deprivation in hopes of securing future indulgence, nonetheless he is caused to exercise his own will in the immediate denial of passion. This will equip him for exercising self-discipline when his moral faculties are fully developed. The rod and your manipulation of his responses can't forcibly change the child's heart. However, it will completely stop the development of bad habits and cause him to be teachable and disciplined in body and mind. The rod, when ministered with dignity and for the child's good, is an indispensable part of training. But it cannot take the place of training. You must not continue to scream at or beat on your child in response to his repeated twinkieholism. If you are out of control emotionally, you cannot direct him into self-control. Arrange the circumstances so that, if nothing else, his own selfishness will motivate him to acceptable behavior; and then use the rod as a part of that reinforcement and training.