

Several things have happened lately that make me wonder about parent's beliefs about their authority with their children. I know there are different styles of parenting, some more lenient or stricter than others. What I'm looking and hoping for is an understanding among all parents that we as a society have and need to maintain social rules for safety, respect and consideration of others. Our children come into the world knowing nothing about it. They learn from others.

One of the jobs of being a parent is to teach children about boundaries, power, limits, consequences, consideration and safety. Children without boundaries or limits are hindered by insecurities and heightened anxiety. Children who don't learn about empathy and consideration grow up to be self-centered and difficult to get along with.

Lately what I have observed makes me wonder why parents has given their children so much power and few limits. Although it may seem like fun and games to the child at first, it actually is a huge burden and not one that fits easily on small shoulders. For example, the other day I was at the mall shopping for my husband's birthday. My husband was trying things on while I waited. A man with his father entered the men's department followed by two screaming children. They are young and playing as if the mall were a playground. I turned at a particularly piercing scream and automatically put my finger to my lips in a shhhh motion. A few minutes later while playing chase, the older boy slammed into my side as he rounded a clothes rack. I lost it! "No!" I said firmly and loud enough to get his father's attention. I looked at the father and told him this was not a playground, and that if I had been one of the many frail elderly people walking around the mall I'd be on my backside with possibly a broken hip. He looked at me bewildered as I was a crazy woman. What he failed to understand or teach his children is that indoor public places have rules for conduct. Maybe they aren't written on the wall, but it's some of the rules we teach our children as they grow up. Indoor voices are quieter than outdoor voices. We don't run indoors because we could harm ourselves or others. In this way we respect the boundaries of those around us, and we learn to control our impulses.

Not long ago a similar thing occurred at a busy bookstore/bakery in the area. These kids were at least 11 years old, old enough to know better I would have thought. While their mother engaged in a conversation with a friend over coffee, her kids were running the length of the building to race each other. I happened to be meeting with their mother and her friend and took a seat. As one child came racing towards our table, his mother's back to him, I put my hand out to signal stop. He did. I then reminded him that if he ran into a small child, a frail person, someone with a cane or walker or a blind person, he could really hurt someone. Did he mean to take that chance? He looked wide eyed at me and shook his head as if the thought never occurred to him. His mom looked at me with a puzzled expression on her face as if she hadn't noticed what her kids were doing. "I reminded them of indoor rules," I told her. The boys took up a quieter activity in the corner of the room.

I don't want be policing children in public. That's their parent's job! Why aren't they doing it? And why aren't people, like any of the three Macy employees who stood by as the boys raced through the store, setting limits? We can do so kindly and without shame.

In my job as a therapist and parent educator, I help parents to reclaim their power. We talk about expectations, rules, limits and consequences. Kids need boundaries to feel secure in the world. Be your child's guide to how to be in the world. If you aren't sure how to do this, then get help. I cringe when I think of the damage that boy at the mall could have done had he slammed into the elderly couple not far from me. There are consequences to all our actions. Make sure your kids know what they could be. Teach them to consider different options, different scenarios. Teach them to be compassionate and caring about others. The world is getting smaller and smaller. We need to teach our children basic manners to get along.