

Hi Sharon!

The other day Emily, our three-year-old, didn't want to nap or rest or even stay on the bed for some quiet time. I told her that if she got off of the bed that she would be spanked. Over and over she got off of the bed, got a spank and put back on the bed, got off of the bed, got a spank and put back on the bed, etc. etc. I'm almost embarrassed, but I'm not exactly sure about what and I don't know what I could have done differently. At this point she was just out of control.(The door doesn't lock or that would have been my other choice for handling it- leaving her to cool off.) I ended up just hugging her until she finally settled down and was exhausted from her tantrum and fell asleep. I've had other similar situations. I'm wondering what the solution would have been.

A friend said she could relate to my story and has had similar issues with her daughter. We also both agreed that in these situations, our tempers start to flare and the picture gets uglier and uglier. So where did we go wrong? I've processed this over and over in my mind...I'd love to hear what you would have to offer as encouragement and advice and have promised my friend that I will also pass on your response to her.

Thanks!

Good morning,

It sounds like you did the right thing. You may just need to tweak your technique a bit and build up some confidence. So let's tackle this! The situation you described is a physical display of questions your child is asking you. "Who's really in charge here?" "Can I count on you even when I'm out of control?" and "Are you willing and able to stop me from doing what I want?" Despite what it seems, a defiant little one wants to be assured that the parent is in charge. And she wants to see if you really are worthy of the respect you are asking of her. Your actions will communicate these things strongly. By disciplining her promptly and properly, you will say to her, even without words, "I am your mommy and I'm in charge. I know better than you what you need to do right now, and you must obey me. I am able to make sure that you do it. You are safe with me." This is just what your child is wanting to know. So let's look at each one.

Who's in Charge?

I remember one of my boys at age three doing the same thing as Emily, except he didn't have the melt down. He just very unemotionally kept getting up from his bed even after repeated spankings. I just kept spanking him and sending him back to bed. Eventually he stayed. I asked a "mentor friend" of mine about it and she said, "Just keep being consistent. If he keeps disobeying, keep spanking him." It was hard for me to hear that, but it was good advice. I also read a book called, "What the Bible says about Child Training" by Richard Fugate. Both the friend and the book taught me, "You, the parent, must win these little battles." Early on, the child needs to know that you mean what you say and you meant it the first time. God has given us parents authority that is important for our children. It's good for little ones to memorize the bible verses about children obeying their parents and about parents using the rod. They need to know that we parents are doing this training because God wants us to! I tell my children every once in a while, "God wants you to obey your parents, so I want to help you do that. If I don't train you up in the way God wants me to, then I'm disobeying God. I don't want to disobey God and I don't want you to disobey God either. So I will help make sure you obey me." God can handle the responsibility for the fact that this sometimes does not seem logically fair. When the children are older and ask why you spank with a rod, point them to Him and His Word.

Can I count on you even when I'm out of control?

Children really want to know that their parents are capable of being in charge. They feel safe when they know that the parent can deal with even an "out of control" situation. Deep down, a child knows that she is incapable of dealing with all of life's situations. One of the greatest gifts we parents can give our children is the comfort of knowing that we can deal with life for them. And we can, through Christ. Without Christ, parenting is a series of wild stabs in the dark. I can't imagine it. But God has given us some specific tools for parenting, and offers great wisdom for the asking! (James 1) So keep on asking!

A child will test you and push you to see how easily you give up your God-given authority. You need to assure her that you indeed can be counted on to protect her from herself and from other dangerous situations. So you need to win each little battle. Winning the little battles when the children are young (and will forget all the spankings) will eliminate many future battles and make the important ones so much easier.

Are you willing and able to stop me from doing what I want?

Requiring **first time obedience** in the smaller events of a day will help you both to avoid the major blow

ups. Here's what I mean: During the course of a day, have the training stick (a thin rod, the size of a wooden spoon handle and about 18"), ready at all times. A mother from generations past taught me to keep several around the house on the top of the door frames. As you ask your child to do something ("Emily, could you please pick up that fork that Jacob dropped off the table?") teach her to respond, "Ok, Mom" and do it right then, the first time you said it. If she doesn't begin moving right then to do it, she gets a little swat with the rod, a swat that stings on the backside. Say calmly, "You need to do it right away." As the day progresses, there will be many little training times like this until she gets the picture that when you say something to her, she's expected to do something the first time she hears it. You are training her to obey God quickly and you're training her attention too. Sometimes, even if the child complains, "I didn't hear you!" I say, "Then tune your ears in to my voice. You need to be attentive to my voice." Attention is a trained response. Many children these days are not required to be attentive, and they suffer later on.

Tweaking your technique

A decisive "Aht Aht" and a stinging swat with a rod can stop a tantrum before it starts. Maybe you did this, but if you're not using a thin rod that stings the backside, your spankings may be ineffective. A larger paddle or a parent's hand gives a wider "whop" that doesn't sting as much, but may have the effect of damaging bones and joints since it shakes the child's whole body. The sting of a rod is effective. I can give a sting from a rod with just the flick of my wrist that will stop any toddler from wanting a second one. A spanking at this age must be painful enough that the child thinks twice about repeating the offense. If the spanking isn't painful, then the confrontation becomes a matter of who can physically hold out the longest. Your little one must learn now that "tantrums" are not worth it. The consequences are too painful. Very quickly the tantrums will drop out of her repertoire.

Dealing with Anger

Concerning your own anger, I can truly relate to this, and I would love to have known years ago what I know now. Children's disobedience is a great agitator for parents and it's easy to get too angry. But this is yet another situation in which parents can mature in the Lord by learning to "take thoughts captive" and giving them to Him. When the child gets out of bed the second time and my anger starts to boil, I need to quickly pray, "Lord, take this anger captive." or "Lord, I need Your patience; mine's gone." or just, "Jesus, I need You." This is not a cute little activity to give a parent time to cool down. This is spiritual warfare at it's best. We Christians are in God's army and the battlefield is our families. Satan would love for us to explode and do something damaging to our children and our relationships. He is a prowling lion seeking out whom he can kill. But God is the Victor. And He has given us the tools and skills to do battle while we're on this earth. Raising children is excellent training for future responsibilities in His kingdom. So take it seriously.

A very calm response to an out of control little one builds respect and confidence, both in the child's eyes and in your view of your own parenting. While she's going bonkers and coming out for the third time, you very calmly say, "You may not do that," give the stinging swat and tell her to go back to bed. If she doesn't go back she gets another one. You must win every time. I'm glad you didn't lock her in her room, where she'd be allowed to be out of control and unmonitored. That is way too scary for a child. It was wonderful that you hugged her (hopefully on her bed!), and God's grace that she fell asleep! When she's calm, you can talk about it with her, as I'm sure you have. "Remember when you wouldn't stay in bed? You may not ever do that again. When I tell you to take a nap, you must stay in your bed until I come to get you. Do you like spankings? I will spank you if you get up before napttime's over."

Children need Jesus.

All these things that I've mentioned will be helpful for any child. Even those who are handicapped or have medical problems need parental care like this. It helps prepare the child's heart to receive Christ. Without knowledge and experience in the "sin and consequences" department a child can grow into an adult without recognizing his need for a savior or the value of the gift of forgiveness that Jesus' death affords us. But these lessons can be learned early on through the parent's careful diligence in disciplining. We are training our children to respond to us as we want them to respond to the Lord: obediently, quickly and with respect. It's the foundation for deep, deep love.

Children can understand quite young that Jesus paid the penalty of death so that our sins won't keep us from enjoying God forever. So keep talking to your little ones about Jesus and their need to put their trust in Him as Savior. Their hearts will be more responsive to you and to discipline and to the Lord when they have made that decision that Jesus is King of their lives. That decision grows gradually in some, and it comes suddenly in others. But all children need to be fed daily from the word and from parents' comments and instruction that Jesus is the only way to life and life eternal.

I pray this is helpful and not too much to digest. I am excited for you and your family. You are eager to learn and I can tell you want to raise your children for the Lord. They are blessed. Keep up the good work.