

Revered Philosopher: Children Actually Want Parents to Lay Down the Law

Over the years I've heard various parents explain their approach to parenting in the following way:

"We really don't want to force our children to _____ (fill in the blank with 'do chores,' 'go to church,' 'practice an instrument,' or any number of other responsibilities). We want them to make their own decisions and decide what's right on their own."

It's this type of parenting approach that Dr. Leonard Sax has been recently [known to question](#) – the type of parenting which attempts to establish parents and children as equals, and often ends with children tyrannizing their parents.

But Sax is not the first and only authority to question the effectiveness of this type of parenting. John Locke (1632-1704) also addressed the futility of equality parenting in his [Two Treatises on Civil Government](#). As Locke explains, it is the responsibility of parents to play the role of authority and influencer until the child is grown. Parents who avoid doing so are actually letting their child down:

"Children, I confess, are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it. Their parents have a sort of rule and jurisdiction over them, when they come into the world, and for some time after...

...

The power, then, that parents have over their children, arises from that duty which is incumbent on them, to take care of their off-spring, during the imperfect state of

*childhood. To inform the mind, and govern the actions of their yet ignorant non-age, till reason shall take its place, and ease them of that trouble, **is what the children want**, and the parents are bound to: for God having given man an understanding to direct his actions, has allowed him a freedom of will, and liberty of acting, as properly belonging thereunto, within the bounds of that law he is under. **But whilst he is in an estate, wherein he has not understanding of his own to direct his will, he is not to have any will of his own to follow: he that understands for him, must will for him too; he must prescribe to his will, and regulate his actions; but when he comes to the estate that made his father a freeman, the son is a freeman too.**"*

Is it time we recognized that it's not stifling or cruel for parents to lay down the law and direct young children toward responsible life decisions?