

How Parents Are Slowly Ceding Authority to Children

Last weekend, our five-year-old daughter yelled at an adult friend of ours. When I found out about it later that day, I made my daughter call and apologize for yelling. It was very hard for her to do (oh, the waterworks!). She has a strong personality and doesn't like to say sorry—at all. But I also found it difficult because when I got back on the phone with our friend, he sounded more pained than my daughter about the exchange. His response led me to rethink the whole thing. Had I gone overboard? Trying to enforce rules for respecting others is tough and I started to think that it wasn't worth it.

But an amazing thing happened just three days later. I got a call from a parent in my two-year-old son's class telling me that his son needed to speak to my boy. Why? Because the son needed to apologize for biting my kid. It was cute to hear my boy's little friend say sorry and my son say (distractedly, because he was watching TV), "It's OK. Bye!" Beyond cute, it was also meaningful because I immediately felt validated for my own efforts to instill and demand respect for others. Turns out, I needed the reinforcement.

I was reminded of both of these episodes when I read Leonard Sax's recent book, *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups*. Sax is a family therapist who has spent a lot of time over the past few years talking to students and parents both in the United States and abroad, trying to find out what is going on with our kids. Sax uncovered some parenting behaviors that are leading to the creation of a generation of fat, entitled, fragile, and unhappy children. "We parents are spending more and more time and money on parenting," Sax explains, "but when you look at

the results, things are getting worse, not better.” Sax lists increased diagnoses of ADHD and bipolar disorder, increased obesity, and lower resilience as evidence of worse outcomes for children.

“Here’s my diagnosis,” Sax writes:

Over the past three decades, there has been a massive transfer of authority from parents to kids. Along with that transfer of authority has come a change in the valuation of kids’ opinions and preferences. . . . what kids think and what kids like and what kids want now matters as much, or more, than what their parents think and like and want. . . . These well-intentioned changes have been profoundly harmful to kids.

The first negative result of this transfer of authority is the “culture of disrespect” that Sax argues has blossomed as a result. He chronicles how and why some basic rules of behavior, such as apologizing for hurting someone else, are no longer taught to kids. Sax says kindergarten and first grade educators used to teach these basic rules—clean up your own mess, don’t take things that aren’t yours, say sorry when you hurt somebody, play fair, don’t hit—but that such behavioral instruction has been supplanted by phonics and other academic lessons. With schools no longer inculcating these important and basic rules of behavior, parents are really on the hook. Instead, he argues, parents have abdicated their authority.

Sax isn’t the only fan of parental authority. Writing in the *New York Times*, psychologist [Lisa Damour](#) extols the virtues of enforcing family dining, especially for teenagers. She says that demanding that children sit and eat together with their parents is not only better for the family unit as a whole, but also proves beneficial to teenagers later in life. Family mealtime ritualizes the two main components of successful authoritative parenting—structure and warmth.

“Decades of research have documented that teenagers raised by authoritative parents are the ones most likely to do well at school, enjoy abundant psychological health and stay out of trouble,” writes Damour.

I’m glad to know that professionals recommend enforcing discipline, respect for others, and mealtimes. But it’s also worth noting that raising children who say please, thank you, and sorry (if they do something wrong) are a lot more pleasant to live with as well.

–

This blog post has been reproduced with the permission of [Acculturated](#). The original blog post can be found [here](#). The views expressed by the author and Acculturated are not necessarily endorsed by this organization and are simply provided as food for thought from Intellectual Takeout.

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!