



Giving Control Without Giving It Away

We often hear how wise it is to give our children a certain amount of freedom and control over their lives. However, children who have more control than they know how to handle often act out in unbelievable ways to show us that they need limits.

It's almost as if they are saying, "How bad do I have to act before you will control me?" This confuses parent and child alike as the child, having become addicted to power, is demanding more power at the same time he/she is asking for parental control.

Kids who start out with too much power force us to tighten the limits around them-- and that makes them angry. Who wouldn't be mad? When control is being taken away, kids feel they are being robbed of something that is rightfully theirs.

Dr. Sylvia B. Rimm, psychologist, educator and author, reminds us that we all compare the amount of control we have in a relationship to the control we used to have, not to how much we think we should have.

Dr. Rimm says loving parents use what she calls the "V" of love. The sides of the "V" stand for firm limits within which the child may make decisions and live with the consequences. The bottom point of the "V" represents birth while the open top of the "V" represents the time when the child will leave home. Toddlers are deciding about such things as chocolate or white milk. Ten-year-olds are deciding how to spend their allowances, and seventeen-year-olds are deciding almost all aspects of their lives.

Unfortunately, the "V" is turned upside down in families where the child is treated almost like a miniature adult right from birth. These kids soon become tyrants. We've all seen them hold their parents hostage to temper tantrums and pouting.

Children need the opportunity to make choices, but these choices should be within firm limits appropriate to their age. This is easier said than done. However, it helps to keep the "V" in mind, always leaving bigger decisions for next year, but making sure there is more control available to the child this year than last.

Teachers are good resources regarding age-appropriate decisions for children. And remember, some of the greatest experts on parenting may be in your carpool or community. However, it is most wise to pick parents who have well-adjusted kids rather than those whose kids are driving them crazy.

*Make sure there is **more control available** to your child **this year than last year.***

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