



WHEN WORDS FALL SHORT AND ACTIONS DO THE JOB

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During my earliest days as a young mother and parent, I was often challenged by one thing: doing as I said. My children had opportunity after opportunity to do what they want, and it was upon me to curb their young impulses with my own brand of discipline. Sometimes, at the risk of creating future dysfunctional children, I fell prey to the temptation of screaming my head off and blabbering like mad just to get my message across. During those times, I did nothing else but reduce myself to helpless tears and hair tearing. Yet, my children seemed not to get my message or even to begin to understand what had created the monster in me. Those immature, distressing and depressing moments were in my younger years as a mother. Fortunately now, many eons (yes, I feel it's been that already) and many episodes and seasons hence, and millions of parenting advice and readings later, I have mastered the art of doing as I say to my children. Well, at least to a certain degree.

Now, when I say no I most definitely mean NO! with capital letters and an exclamation point, yes. Back then, it was easier to threaten my kids with grounding or bodily harm. But the groundings grew to be a test of wills for both me and my child who suffered from it. I ultimately shortened the grounding period when I had seen how glum and heavily sighing my grounded child appeared. Bodily harm hasn't been and will never be effective deterrents to children making infractions. In fact, the threat of bodily harm will only open avenues of hostility and ill will between us and our children. Tiger mom or not, I will now always think twice, take a step back and heave a deep breath before I lay a hand on any one of my children. They say that when you spare the rod, you spoil the child. The language of yesteryears has taken a paradigm shift, however. That shift has leaned toward interactive and more child-centered discipline, where the child's interests become more important considerations than the message of discipline itself.

Classroom teachers in my time were allowed to use pointer sticks to whip hardheaded children into submission, or to use mung beans or salt as kneelers for hard-to-discipline students. Nowadays, corporal punishment is heavily disapproved, frowned upon, and could be a cause of termination from the teaching force. Somehow, teachers have a Damoclean paradox before them: they're damned if they don't teach values and discipline in the classroom, but they're even more damned if their methods are perceived cruel and tyrannical in any way.

I miss my late father precisely because he had taught me that words are a far cry from actions when it comes to teaching children. But cogito ergo sum, and I exist to do the thinking.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why is it difficult for a parent to carry out punishment for their child?
2. Should the fear of reprisal or condemnation deter a parent from dispensing discipline to their child? Why or why not?
3. How can a young child be shown that a parent means what they say? What about a teenager?
4. How has the duty of teachers to teach discipline in the classroom been affected by anti-child abuse laws?
5. Would you adapt a more westernized approach to discipline? How?