



## DEMOCRACY IN THE FAMILY, ANYONE?

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Politics is not the only field where democracy is practiced. As a parent, I have often found the need to be democratic in my role as a mother, especially now that I no longer share parenthood roles with a partner. The parenthood journey I have taken is never easy, not on any level. I am definite that all parents out there, whether single or sharing parenting roles with their partners, also undergo the same travails I have.

What exactly do you do when a child asserts their independence? The only thing you can do at that point is to allow that independence to develop as it may. There is this mistaken notion that giving advice is what parenting is all about. But as our children become teenagers, there occurs a shift in parental roles that we need to pay attention to. As our children no longer need constant care-and tireless surveillance, for that matter-we need to see the bigger need they have for respect. We need to respect our children as much as we respect our own friends. In doing so, we also have to make our children understand that we always want to help them in whatever way we can, but we may not always know how. Thus, with open communication lines, we empower our kids to have direct access to us whenever and wherever they need our words and comfort.

The solace of family empowers our children to grow in a totally democratic environment. A family setting that allows free flow of information and ideas between us and our kids will ensure that they believe in the strength that comes from being a member of our family. Their formative years are important, yes. But as our kids mature, they should be given freedom to choose their friends and make their own choices, mistakes and decisions in their lives. We can not always be with them much like the police or the military can not always be at every corner of the country to ensure the safety of all citizens. However, in their younger years, we have the opportunity to mold our children's character, to do changes that can still be made. As they develop into adults, our children will no longer give us the freedom to perform changes on their overall make-up. By then, they will have learned to optimize their own life values.

Children who grow in a home where there is the right amount of freedom and responsibility will develop into responsible, freedom-loving adults. Striking a balance between freedom and responsibility requires a healthy amount of common sense and practicality. Look to the golden rule to achieve the balance: do unto others what you would have others do unto you. With that, all else will follow, including democracy in the family.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you believe your parents raised you in a democratic way? How?
2. Why is it important for children to have freedom to decide for themselves?
3. In your family, were you free to choose your own religion? If yes, what religion do you have? Why is that your choice?
4. What problems crop up when children's rights are not respected?
5. At what stage in a child's life does it become more difficult for a parent to assert authority? Why do you think this is the case?