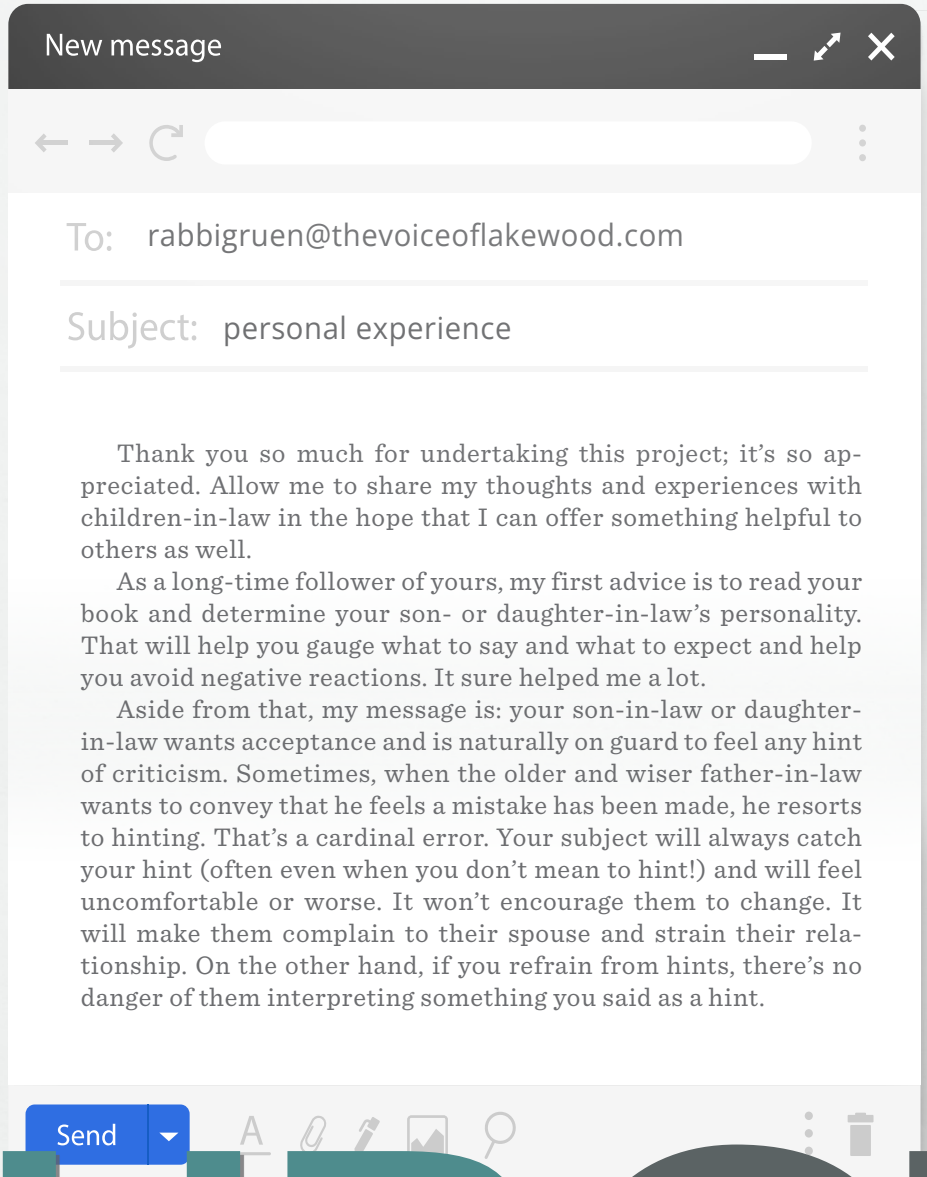
OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP





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RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

EMBRACE YOUR NEW CHILD

Everyone wants to feel accepted and respected for who they are. And this need is amplified when an in-law child takes their first tentative strides to join a new family. Even a subtle undercurrent of rejection can hurt a vulnerable, intimidated child-in-law.

Sometimes, parents think that by virtue of marrying off a child, they've acquired another child (the in-law) to educate. Yes, a parent may do a thorough detective job when looking for the perfect *shidduch* for their child, but when the right one comes around, they should embrace the new child fully and show them that they trust them and accept them. A small negative com-

ment or unsolicited advice can contradict their most basic need of total acceptance.

Some may argue, *What do you mean? My son-in-law is still young and needs to be guided!* They may be young, and they may need to be guided, but if they don't want to be guided, you're not only wasting time and energy by imposing on them, you're probably also putting a strain on the relationship.

If your in-law children want to hear from you and learn from your advice, they'll let you know. When they do reach out, be polite and gentle in your communication. It's crucial, even then, to be cautious with how you say something.

When you know someone is comfortable and willing to hear from you, it's best to do it in a natural, gentle yet open way. Being roundabout, especially when the advice wasn't asked for, is not a good idea and should be avoided, as I will explain soon.

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Disagree

HANDLE WITH CARE

I feel gratified that the writer suggests that people read my book. While I agree that it can be helpful, and *baruch Hashem* it has helped many, I don't think it's necessary if you're ready to err on the side of caution. For those who aren't great at being cautious on their own, it might be helpful to read the book before trying their luck and damaging the relationship.

I'll add a word of caution, though: If you do read my book, or any book about understanding people and personalities, keep the information to yourself so you can better deal with those around you. Going around and telling people that you understand them very well and that you know how they think and feel is often unappreciated. Many people dislike being labeled an extrovert/introvert or one with high self-esteem/low self-esteem and so on. Be careful with what you do with your newfound knowledge.

One of the things that someone reading my book will learn is that you should never fight sensitivity. That's part of what this question was about. When someone throws a hint and the other person gets offended, very often the hinter will think that they've gone overboard. "Come on, why did you take it personally?" They try to fight with the person's sensitive personality and sometimes even say it clearly: "Get over it and grow up already." That is never smart.

Some people try to undo sensitivity in younger children, assuming it's possible because the child is still so young. Others challenge sensitivity in older people, thinking that the person is



mature enough to understand that there's nothing to be offended about and see the situation more logically. These are big mistakes. Natural hypersensitivity doesn't evaporate just like that.

It's wonderful when people are willing to work on themselves and try to overcome their negative feelings, but you can't change others. Any criticism you give or imply may be taken the wrong way and hurt them instead of getting them to improve, and it will affect your relationship with them as well.

This reminds me of...

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

I mentioned that it's not your place to educate married children. However, there is a form of education that you should always use, and this doesn't only involves your children; it affects everyone around you. And that is your personal example.

Even with younger kids, this is the best and most effective form of education. However, being that you're not always in the same situation as they are, you can't always set the example for what they should be doing, for example at school or at bedtime. Therefore, there's a lot of teaching and even dictating or clarifying what they should be doing. However, the older the child gets, the less that works. And it definitely doesn't belong in your relationship with your children-in-law (who, by the way, have parents of their own).

If you're concerned that they still have to learn, you can teach them by serving as a positive role model. It's very important to take that seriously, because this form of osmosis is natural; it's not optional. Just watching you influences them, hopefully for the better.

When your married children come into your home, they watch you closely. They're learning how to talk to their spouse. They're learning how to lead a Shabbos meal. They're learning how to greet people and how to be *ehrlich* at home, etc. Think about it. Are you giving off the right impression?

This subtle *chinuch* has a lasting impact. You may have the option to preach, but you'll have a more effective impact and influence by showing the right example than by commenting or being critical.

Another form of *chinuch* that's always called for and is also effective is genuine compliments. Instead of hinting where people are mistaken, compliment where they're successful. This is a method that works well with children too, but with adults, it's one of the only things you could and should do.

Some people misuse the idea of compliments and talk about the positive just to imply what they want, such as, "Last week, you managed to deal with your daughter's tantrum so well." Are you hinting that you're unhappy with how it was done this week?

A genuine compliment, not a hint, simply promotes the good and helps someone feel acknowledged, respected, and appreciated for what they do well. When there are no secret intentions or underlying negativity, a compliment encourages, educates, and spreads goodwill. Generally, when you're sincere and genuine, people won't misinterpret your intentions or think you're hinting at things you're not.

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I would add...

TRUTH BE TOLD

This topic reminds me of the story of an old Polish Yid standing nervously in line at Ellis Island, hoping to be allowed entry into the *goldene medinah*.

The immigration official asks R' Yankel, "How old are you?" but he doesn't respond. He asks again, "How old are you? What's your age?" And he just stands there, looking like he's lost in thought or pondering the question.

The guy behind him whispers to him in Yiddish, "Yankel, they're asking '*Vi alt bist di*?" thinking he doesn't understand English.

To which Yankel replies, "I know. I'm trying to figure out if I should tell them that I'm older than I am or younger than I am."

"Why don't you just tell them how old you are?"



Yankel grins and says sheepishly, "Oh, I didn't think of that."

So often, people tend to look for the roundabout way of communicating and don't realize the benefit of being straightforward.

In general, the idea of hinting at things instead of being straightforward isn't a great one, not when dealing with your children, your spouse, or anyone else for that matter. While hinting has its benefits, as the message gets across without negative connotations and hurt feelings, it can be akin to trying to kill a mosquito by using the long straw and aiming WD40 into its microscopic mouth. If it works, you're a winner and don't have to deal with getting the dead mosquito remnants off the wall, but what are the chances that you'll manage to accomplish your goal?

Similarly, if you give too small of a hint, you'll become frustrated by the lack of response (and tempted to get more assertive and explicit). Giving a less subtle hint may hurt the other person, who may interpret it in a way that's even sharper than your intended message. What are the chances that you'll get it just right?

When criticism is clearly warranted and in place, whether it's because someone wants to hear from you or because it's obvious that something should be said and you're in the position to say it, then by all means, go ahead and say it. Of course, you should make sure to say it in the nicest way possible so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. But why hint? And if you're not certain that it'll be taken well, most often, the best thing to do is to keep quiet.

This advice isn't just for criticism. If you think someone is open to hearing your opinion about something sensitive or personal, say it clearly and gently. And if you're not sure, it's best to skip it until you feel more comfortable.



Rabbi Shimon Gruen, author of the bestselling book *Get Along with Everyone*, consults and guides individuals in the areas of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch* through classes, workshops, teleconferences, and one-on-one counseling. He specializes in guiding and counseling based on a very deep understanding of personality assessment. Many of his classes can be found on TorahAnytime.com.

Are you on either side of the adult child-parent/in-law relationship? Feel free to share your thoughts by contacting Rabbi Gruen at rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com. Your correspondence will be kept anonymous and identifying details will be changed to protect your privacy.