OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

While you're on the topic of accepting children and in-law children, how about you address the topic of children and grandchildren visiting?

Most of us love it when the kids come over, and it's important to make them feel comfortable. Here are some pointers that I feel people should keep in mind:

- Never pressure your children to join you for Shabbos, Yom Tov, etc. The less pressure they feel, the more they'll want to come.
- When the grandchildren act like kids and behave badly, the in-law child will feel that there are many eyes on him or her and feel guilty. Try to make light of it and say, "Kids will be kids; I acted the same way," or something like that.

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

THE COMFORT ZONE

If you want to build a warm, loving relationship with anyone, making the other party feel comfortable in your presence is the first step. This is true regarding any relationship, especially the more sensitive ones, such as between parent-in-law and child-in-law.

Some are naturally adept at playing the part of the gracious host(ess) and have a way of making everyone feel at ease. If you aren't blessed with this knack, don't sit around and beat yourself up about it, nor deny it and blame others. It's possible that you mean well but somehow, your overtures may come across as pressurizing or intimidating. It's a good idea to put thought into what others are seeing and feeling, regardless of your harmless intentions.

What makes it trickier is that what one child takes the wrong way, another appreciates. A benign question like "What are those pimples on Chaim's face?" may be interpreted as an accusation or cross-examination of your child's parenting abilities, but others may appreciate that you noticed and are showing concern. Similarly, a comment that makes light of their child's misbehavior, as the writer is suggesting, can be appreciated by one and seen as intimidating by another, who sees this as a clear sign of you noticing everything.

When it comes to relationships, it's not enough to mean well or even to do what the book says. If you want to achieve the optimal connection, make sure to tweak your messages to ensure user-friendliness on



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

your end and on the receiving end. Don't make the mistake of wondering why someone misinterpreted your comments or blaming them for being too sensitive.

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Making others feel comfortable in no way implies that parents need to fall prey to the whims of their children and grandchildren. You don't have to tolerate whatever goes on when your children and grandchildren spend time in your home. If they're breaking things and you feel that the parents should be supervising them better, you can and should find a respectful and gentle way to bring up the issue. Doing so is a favor to both you and your child/in-law. It would be a shame to allow the resentment to build up, resulting in fewer invitations and less time spent together.

There's still a time and place to nicely yet assertively say what needs to be said. Make sure to be and sound reasonable, but don't hesitate to gently say, "Rivka, please make sure your children don't touch the glasses," or better yet, "Rivka, can you put the glasses on a higher shelf while you're here? I'll feel better knowing that they won't get broken."

It's all about balance. Knowing what to overlook and being a bit more tolerant can do a lot to make your children feel relaxed and comfortable when they come over. Additionally, make sure that you stay in a comfortable zone as well so that you can appreciate their presence and they can feel appreciated.

Disagree

EXCEPTIONS TO THE NO-PRESSURE RULE

The writer suggests that if you don't pressure your children to join for Shabbos, they'll want to come more often. While it's true that less pressure attracts people and makes them feel comfortable, it's not always so straightforward.

Some people need many invitations to make them feel like they're wanted and needed, and not hearing it enough makes them question your interest in having them. Others are even more complicated and will only be tempted to come if they know that they'll get VIP treatment along with that perfect balance of attention and privacy to make them comfortable. It isn't always simple.

The fact that some people are just a bit complicated often makes parents become self-critical and blame themselves for not getting it right. As much as they try to make their children feel comfortable, it doesn't work, and they keep on trying. Sometimes it's the child, sometimes it's the child-in-law, and sometimes it's the dynamics of the child's marriage. I've seen this many times.

Parents won't necessarily always get it right, and sometimes they may never get it right. One-on-one guidance from an outside party may help these parents figure out if and how they can best relate to a challenging or self-entitled child. So while the no-pressure rule works for many, some people need a different approach. The main thing is to try your best to do what works for you and your child and to remember that sometimes trying is all you can do.

I would add...

ACCEPTANCE: IT'S A MESSAGE FOR YOU

Each topic needs to be addressed from multiple angles. When people point fingers at the parents, it's good to notice the children's part, and vice versa.



I was recently talking to a *bachur* who's part of a group of older boys in their post-yeshivah years who get together once a week to relax. They often invite different speakers to address them with words of inspiration. Once, they asked a man who's involved in helping parents of kids at risk to address their group. Knowing that the overarching message he is so passionate about is how parents should accept children despite their challenges and their choice of lifestyle, they assumed he'd discuss something along those lines.

To their shock, the man sat down and told the group, "I'm not sure what you were expecting to hear from me. When I talk to parents, I encourage them to accept children no matter what they do and wherever life's path has taken them. To you, however, I'm saying that you have to accept your parents. Your parents aren't robots, and they aren't perfect. They make mistakes and may be unrealistic in their expectations. But just like parents have to know to accept children, children have to know to accept parents."

The boys were taken aback by this new twist on acceptance, yet they were impacted by its brilliance.

When people start demanding acceptance of each other, no one gains. Acceptance is to be granted, not demanded. Parents should be welcoming, gracious, and pleasant to be around, and children should be understanding as well. Obsessing over how unaccepting your parents are and constantly noticing how they notice too much isn't helpful. When at your parents' home, it's important to remember that you aren't in your own territory and your hosts have opinions, likes, and dislikes too.

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Whichever end of this relationship you find yourself on, it's good to remember how much room there is for acceptance and consideration. It would be a shame for a lack of the correct perspective to cause you to spend less time with family.

This reminds me of...

SETTING THE RIGHT TONE

Back in my yeshivah days, I was invited to someone's house for the Friday-night meal. My host told me that his son-in-law, who would also be joining for the *seudah*, would walk me to his home. On the way, we bumped into an older single who was clearly troubled. The interesting fellow asked my host's son-in-law a question and got an answer that he felt was disrespectful.

Mortally insulted, the fellow began harassing this *yungerman*, and he apologized for the disrespect. But it didn't end there. The young man began heaping "blessings" on the *yungerman*. As we continued on our way, he followed us, continuing his litany of insults and comments: "You embarrassed me; Hashem will repay you for what you did," and so on.

It was getting uncomfortable, but the *yungerman* looked unfazed. To be honest, the fellow's accusations did have some truth to them, though any levelheaded person would voice them in a lower tone and let it go.

As we approached the father-in-law's home, I thought, *Uh-oh. This is going to get ugly. Imagine, the son-in-law walking into his father-in-law's house with this guy bashing him out loud.*

I felt very uncomfortable, but the *yungerman* didn't seem nervous. We walked up to the door of our host, and sure enough, the fellow walked in right behind us. Right away, he told the father-in-law about how his son-in-law had embarrassed him. After hearing him out, the father-in-law invited him in for the meal. The fellow stayed for the *seudah* and continued ranting and raving about the "crime" the son-in-law had committed.

I remember being flabbergasted, not so much by the father-in-law's cool way of dealing with the guy but by the comfort level this son-in-law had in his in-laws' home. If the son-in-law could so confidently stride into the house with this guy bashing him from behind, he clearly knew that his father-in-law would take it well.

Those who create an atmosphere of security and comfort in their home will have it serve as a buffer even in difficult situations. When the energy in the home is positive, people feel free to be themselves and aren't afraid of making a mistake.

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
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will be changed to protect your privacy.

