בס"ד

10 COMMANDMENTS FOR HANDLING THE FRAGILE CHILD



לְהָאִיר
ILLUMINATING THROUGH CLARITY AND UNDERSTANDING

THE FRAGILE CHILD

There are fragile objects all over our home: We have a chandelier, some crystal vases, windows, and wine glasses in the china closet. These objects beautify and enhance our homes, but they are fragile. If not handled carefully, they will easily crack or even break.

It goes without saying that we should handle all of our possessions with care. But we understand that with *objects* that are fragile, gentle care is not only a good idea, it is absolutely crucial.

In our homes there are also fragile children. They are delicate souls. By nature they are very sensitive and highly emotional. They appear in many "shapes and sizes:" The loner. The bully. The insecure child. The anxious child. The obnoxious child.

These children aren't bad or dangerous, nor are they in any way inferior to more hardy children. They are just "fragile," and are easily affected by the way they are handled. They, too, beautify our families and enhance our lives.

It is important to handle all of our children with great sensitivity and loving care, but with a child who is delicate, such care is not only necessary, it is crucial.

Fragile objects are shipped with the label "fragile" on the packaging. We are careful to avoid causing damage to it. Fragile children do not have a label on them, but parents know intuitively which of their children require special handling. We don't want to cause them damage, nor do we want to get hurt in the process.

We need to learn how to handle the fragile children entrusted to our care, so that they can grow up to become beautiful, happy, and successful adults.

I offer these "10 Commandments" that are fundamental in dealing with, educating, and bringing out the best of the fragile child. Your delicate child wants and needs you to understand him, and these ideas can help you do that.

Each point can really be elaborated on and explained at great length, or be tweaked according to a specific situation, but as the saying goes, תן לחכם ויחכם עוד, "Give to the wise man and he will become even wiser."

Most of these rules apply to all children, but when it comes to delicate children they become critically important, and proven to succeed. Please remember: It is important that they *be employed at all times and in all situations.*

❶DON'T CHALLENGE THE CHILD'S EMOTIONS

While you're not expected to walk on eggshells around your sensitive child, it is vital that you understand how sensitive your child is. Any expression, gesture or statement that is degrading, insulting or even "just" sarcastic can be very hurtful. It can unfortunately also cause a breakdown in trust and create a lot of resentment that can simmer for years. With a bit of forethought and patience, one can come up with creative ways to say almost anything without hurting someone's feelings.

❷ DON'T TRIVIALIZE THE CHILD'S CONCERNS, PROBLEMS, ISSUES AND "NEEDS"

Your fragile child has a strong need for you to validate his concerns.

Saying something that trivializes what is important to him can be hurtful and create a lack of trust. Validating, and even justifying his needs, does not necessarily mean that you agree with

the child, or that you are prepared to immediately fulfill his wishes.

❸ NEVER HUMILIATE THE CHILD IN ANY WAY

Nobody ever deserves to be humiliated, but a fragile child needs special care because he gets humiliated very quickly (often, even when there is no intent).

It goes without saying that one should never intentionally embarrass a child. The expression "to die of embarrassment" is real: people can feel they are dying inside when someone embarrasses them. This is true even with people who are not fragile; how much more so with the sensitive child! If letting something go "unnoticed" will save the child from feeling humiliated, it's most often the best way to go. Don't notice everything! Let some things go.

❹ NEVER FORCE ANYTHING

Even when it seems like force is your only option, refrain from using it to get the sensitive child to do something. Sure, you may force your will on the child at that moment, but it will almost surely backfire. This child will usually resent the fact that something was forced upon him, and it may be the exact reason why at a later date he will be contrary and choose to do the exact opposite of what you requested or taught. Take some time to think of ways to encourage this kind of child to do things willingly, without coercion.

❺CONSTANTLY SHOW RESPECT (NOT HONOR!) FOR YOUR CHILD

Show your child that you respect him. You can ask him for his opinion and when possible, act upon it.

Notice any achievement, any growth, any improvement, and make a big deal about it.

Respect the child's boundaries and privacy. The sensitive child is craving respect, and the more you can supply him with that, the healthier the child will be.

❻ MAKE YOUR CHILD FEEL IMPORTANT, SPECIAL, AND NEEDED

Besides making sure that your child feels that you love him and respect him, it is important to let him know that he is a very special and important part of your life. He really counts! The fragile child is always yearning to feel important. Don't wait until he asks for it. Let him know unequivocally that without him your life would not be complete.

❼ LISTEN ATTENTIVELY

Your child may have a lot to share. If the timing does not work for you, it's fine to be honest and clear about it. However, make sure you tell him and to arrange an alternate time when you will be able to listen wholeheartedly. When you do listen, your expression, body language and gestures should convey that you are fully there. You should convey with words and expressions, "I am interested in what you are sharing with me."

❽ SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

It's not enough to be appreciative, it's crucial to demonstrate it, especially with the fragile child. This child is craving your acknowledgment and appreciation.

Your gratitude and acknowledgement of even the smallest thing will encourage more of the same. The more you appreciate something he does, the more often the child will willingly repeat the action.

❾ GIVE COMPLIMENTS SINCERELY, APPROPRIATELY, AND JUDICIOUSLY

It's in your best interest to boost the self-esteem of your sensitive child,

and one of the best ways to do it is by praising him. Be aware though, that being too direct and complimenting the child too often may backfire. He may be skeptical of such generous compliments and not take them seriously. Instead, compliment an *action* that the child did, or discuss the positive action with a third-party when the child is listening. This can really go a long way in making a child feel good about himself.

10 BELIEVE IN YOUR CHILD

It is quite probable that this fragile child may not believe in himself. Therefore, how you feel about your child will strongly affect him. The more you believe in your child, and the more you express it, the healthier your child's ego will be. Constantly reevaluate: How does your child think you view him? Do you see him as a loser or a winner? What messages are you giving him?

When you implement these 10 Commandments, you will see that your child will be happier and healthier, and as a result, more capable of reaching his true potential.

There are always challenging situations that arise with children, and especially with sensitive children. If you are encountering frequent problems, you will need to acquire additional skills to help you bolster his sense of self but also to implement proper boundaries and institute necessary consequences in a way that will not trigger even more rebellious behavior.

It's important to remember that any methods you plan to attempt should never contradict any of the above-mentioned 10 Commandments. When dealing with a sensitive child, these rules must be immutable. Only then will you and your child be in a winning position where you can parent and educate successfully.

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RABBI SHIMON GRUEN is the founder of Leha'ir. He offers classes, workshops, teleconferences, and one-on-one counseling to teach this unique methodology for understanding the parent- child relationship. His groundbreaking approach to conflict resolution and relationship building has won him accolades from many in the Chinuch world, as well as in the secular world.

Rabbi Gruen offers practical tools for Shalom Bayis, classroom management, effective teaching, and success in the workplace. His revolutionary methods have been mastered by countless educators, parents, business owners who want effective solutions. His ideas have been repeated by some of the greatest minds and speakers, and are being effectively used in classrooms, boardrooms and dining rooms on a regular basis.

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