OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

This week, we deviate slightly from our typical format by bringing two contrasting letters that highlight the same topic.

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience #1

Thank you for your enlightening column. Last week, you touched on the topic of sharing information. That made me think. When my children get married, how will I feel if they share with us the same amount of information I share with my parents (I don't share much)?

I realized that there's so much information that we could share, like good test marks from my kids. I can have my children write them letters and send voicemails of cute recordings. I haven't made the effort of sharing these until now because I wasn't thinking how big these small things can be for them.

Send

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience #2

One of the biggest things for me is when my parents and in-laws mix into my parenting. I know that they have experience (though my husband and I are both in therapy for all the pains of the experiences we've been through), but, quite frankly, I feel like telling them, "I don't want your judgment or great ideas — especially when you don't know my children and their needs the way I do."

In general, if you trust that your child is old enough to get married, that means you trust that they're old enough to have and raise children. If we ask you for advice, you're welcome to give it, but if we don't, please respect our abilities, respect our maturity, and aside from *davening* for us and our children (always appreciated and helpful), please refrain from saying anything.

Send

While cutting the apron strings is the healthy, natural way of the world, a child remains a child to his parents even after leaving their home. So when and where is sharing our lives with our parents or allowing them to share in it recommended, and how is this best done?



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER



Sometimes, people only realize what they should've done when they're already on the other side of the table, when they're the parents waiting to hear from their children

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

APPRECIATE THE SHARING

Sharing parts of your life with your parents makes them feel cherished and admired; it's a great way to perform the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim*. Kudos to the first writer for coming to this conclusion (and thanks for letting me know that it may have been generated by this column). You realized how little you're sharing with your parents by thinking about how it would feel to be on the receiving end. Sometimes, people only realize what they should've done when they're already on the other side of the table, when they're the parents waiting to hear from their children. And some never realize it, sadly.

Besides agreeing that there's so much to share and that it's a nice thing to do, which I wholeheartedly do, I'd like to take this opportunity to appeal to parents to make it pleasant for children to share with them. Taking into account what the second letter is expressing, it's so important to make a conscious effort to make it pleasant for your child to share with you. Parents sometimes make it harder for a child who's sharing by adding their comments, "You sent me a picture of the kids; where'd you buy those fancy clothes? The sales haven't started yet!" Or "You went on an outing today with Moishy? Wasn't he supposed to be in school?" How about a great test mark, "Is she doing better in this subject than in others, and you're not telling me about it?"

When sharing becomes unpleasant, people start to think twice about doing it again.

It seems that the first writer is expecting it to be a very different experience. But it's more than just not being unpleasant. It's great when parents know how to appreciate and enjoy when children let them into their life and give them well-earned *nachas*.

Even when you don't express this openly, sometimes it's obvious how much you love it and how meaningful it is. But in general, don't rely on it being obvious. While some parents feel entitled to the information and don't even feel the need to express appreciation, others assume that children will know on their own that it's appreciated. In all areas of communication, particularly when it comes to appreciation, if you feel something, say something! Showing appreciation for cute *nachas* tidbits and relevant family news will go a long way in bringing about more of the same.

Disagree

IT'S NOT ALL OR NONE

While I agree that when parents make it unpleasant for their children to share they get turned off and want to run to the other extreme, I don't agree with the black-and-white undertone. Failing to see the subtle shades of gray in relationships and other areas in life leaves people crippled as they miss capitalizing on worthwhile opportunities. If they see the issue of sharing with parents as an all-or-none topic, either I'll share everything or I won't share anything, they're usually going to be wrong a large percent of the time.

These two letters contrast each other and highlight the message that even if you don't share everything, like personal, sensitive information, you can still share so much non-inflammable content.

In general, crossing off your parents as "not knowing your children or their needs" might be a rather immature way of thinking. Perhaps, as you wrote, they don't know your children the way you do, but that doesn't mean they have no valid opinion worth listening to. Your parents are older than you and actually do have more life experience. Granted, they may be throwing it in your face in a tactless way, and they might have experience...failing. However, it's often small minded to discount whatever they say just because you know your kids better.

Even with meddling parents and in-laws, if you care enough to develop a relationship with them, you'll almost always be able to find topics to discuss or news to share that won't set off that negative interaction. Safe ground would include benign issues you don't care to hear feedback on (*What should I do first, cook or clean?*) or topics you don't mind discussing because they won't know what you did with the feedback (*Thank you for telling me about that natural remedy! It was a great idea!* even though you decided to do antibiotics).

When you'll be a parent, I assume you'll be much more careful about the way you interact and react with your marrieds, but in the meantime, it's a pity and a loss to both sides when you choose to close the door on parents because of incidents and challenges that arise.

As I've mentioned previously, people tend to run after those who are running away from them. Maybe your parents are trying to give you input and share their experience because you aren't interested in their opinion? If you would ask them for advice every now and then, maybe they wouldn't feel so desperate to try to educate you and your children.

This reminds me of...

LISTEN AND LEARN

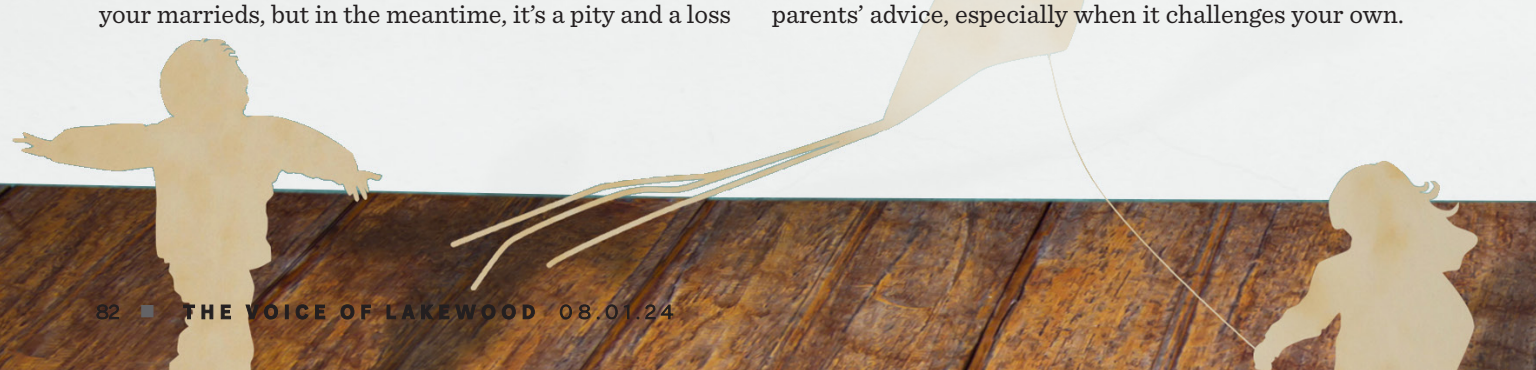
Now that you brought it up, let's address this head on: Who's more equipped to tackle *chinuch* issues that crop up? Is it me, who knows my children best, or my parents, who are older and wiser but don't know my child as intimately as I do?

Well, there are different variables to take into consideration. As the one raising your children, you do know your children better than anyone else. But that very fact, your emotional subjectivity, may cloud your vision and hinder you from making the right decisions. Your parents, on the other hand, may not know your child as well as you do, but they may have two advantages: more life experience, and a less biased, more objective perspective. Each side has a distinct advantage, and it would be wise to cash in on both of them.

To make decisions yourself without acknowledging that you're too emotionally subjective is a mistake. Even the wisest of people seek outside counsel

I think it's important for people to realize how subjective they are. Even if you decided that you know better than your parents, and you might, it doesn't mean that you know what to do on your own. It might still be very important to find someone who can help you and give an objective opinion, whether it's someone you trust, someone you're close with, someone with *da'as Torah*, or someone who's more responsible and professional. Making decisions yourself without acknowledging that you're too emotionally subjective is a mistake. Even the wisest of people seek outside counsel.

Yes, you may be right that it's too hard to take your parents' advice, especially when it challenges your own.



I also understand why the facts might not be as clear to them in one aspect; after all, you see your children a lot more than they do! Still, if you want to be the best parent you can be, it's worth your while to consult with someone who doesn't have the disadvantage your parents have, but has an advantage over you, as they're more experienced and objective.

I would add...

LOOK OUTWARD AND LOOK INWARD

This whole debate of when to share and how much to share reminds me of a conversation I had with a father who recently celebrated the birth of his twelfth child. He was talking to his father about the name he wanted to give, and his father responded by adding his own two cents (plus) on the topic. When he told his father something like, "You know, it's my twelfth child, please, I should be allowed to decide on my own what name I want to give." His father said, "What do you mean? You still have a father, and you should take my advice seriously. You may be a little older, but that doesn't mean that you understand everything on your own."

The interesting thing was that this grandfather didn't realize that by the time he had his third child, he didn't have a father anymore. He's been making his own decisions from when he was 28, and here he is educating his 49-year-old son and telling him he's not too old to learn. At what point does he become old enough to give a name?

My point with recounting this is that there are always two ways to look at things, and each has its own merits. Parents have reason to think they're smarter than their children, and the older they get, the smarter they get and the more experience they have. They may even expect their children to care about their opinion and to take them seriously. On the other hand, it's important for parents to realize that their children are grown and it's time to give them space.

It's always good to think about what it looks like from the other side. Parents should be aware of how negative and intimidating they may come across, while children should realize that parents may not mean anything negative and they don't have to be so intimidated by every remark.



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.

