

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

CHINUCH BY OSMOSIS

Following the slaying of Zimri at the hands of Pinchas, the *passuk* describes how Pinchas removed Hashem's anger from the Jewish People by avenging Hashem "among them." This saved the Jews from destruction.

The Kotzker Rebbe notes the apparently superfluous words, "among them," and explains that not only did Pinchas display zealousness for Hashem's honor, but he also instilled zealousness into the entire Jewish People. The Vorka Rebbe adds that although being passionate about standing up for Hashem's honor is a high level which is generally hard to attain, after Pinchas' deed there was not a single Jew who did not reach this.

Every Yid has within him a desire to defend the honor of Hashem and His Torah. Each person expresses this passion in a different way, depending on his personality, level of observance, and upbringing. Virtually every Yid will be extremely passionate about something, and you'll rarely find someone who is capable of being indifferent about absolutely everything.

Each of us can pinpoint where his red lines are and what kinds of actions he simply will not — and cannot — tolerate, and it's very common for children to absorb a sense of where the red lines are from their parents, even if they don't actually inherit their parents' precise order of priorities.

Interestingly, just as each person has a number of issues about which he has no strong feelings at all (even if those issues may be objectively serious or considered serious by most other people), so too is it common to find children sharing their parents' passion about certain issues and not sharing it at all, about others. This is where friction can arise, and it's important to know how much one can relay ideas and principles, and where one simply cannot.

This week's essay is dedicated by loving parents in honor of the Shidduch of their son

Yakov Rozenblat

יה"ר שהזיווג יעלה יפה ויזכה
לבנות בית נאמן בישראל

Parshas
Pinchas
VOL. 7 | ISSUE 38



Q QUESTION

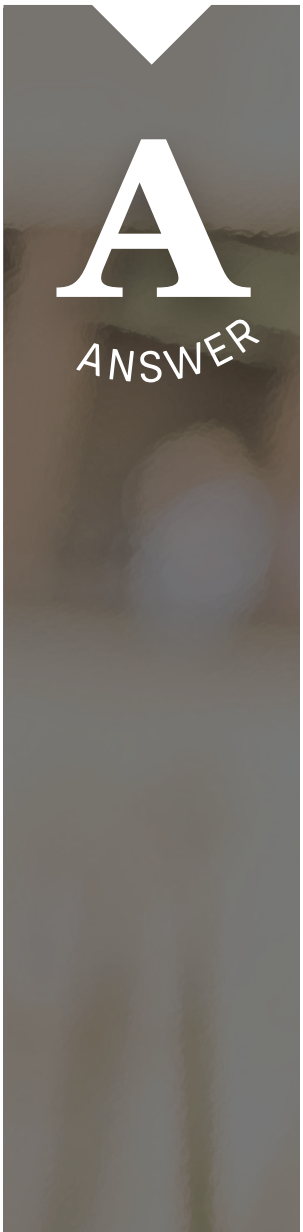
Dear Rabbi Gruen,

I hope you can give me some advice on a difficult issue. My kids are very good and lively children, *baruch Hashem*, but lately they've started actually damaging property at home.

It started with scribbling on the walls, went on to peeling off the paint, and has already reached a point of using a hammer to bang holes in the walls and ripping the leather off the chairs.

I'm not sure how to go about stopping them, and I would really appreciate it if you could discuss this. I also wish that me and my husband were on the same page about this, which maybe can happen if we are clearer on what is right.

Thank you so much.



A ANSWER

What you are describing is certainly frustrating, so it is commendable that you begin by stressing how your children are both good and lively. While these difficult behaviors are a great challenge, you seem to recognize that they don't define your children entirely. They are good children, and their liveliness is part of what causes them to behave as they do.

It's generally healthy for children to be lively and active, and very often this translates into causing trouble, and even breaking things when they're young. In most cases, children grow out of this stage and you won't find them damaging property anymore once they're in their teens. When they're still small, however, they need to let off steam and imposing too many restrictions can lead to the development of far more serious problems.

This doesn't mean that causing serious and deliberate damage to property should be ignored. As in almost all areas of life, we need to find a healthy balance — here, this means finding a middle way between valuing our property and serenity, and allowing our children to express their exuberant spirits. Finding the right place to draw the red lines is half the battle; the other half is imposing those red lines.

• • •

Every family has its rules and regulations. Very often they are unspoken and simply instinctive. This is why it's well worth the

effort for all parents to consciously review their order of priorities and make sure that what they believe in and how they behave really do align, as much of what we want to convey is done by osmosis, which is more effective than constant preaching.

A story is told of a visiting Rov from Europe who was a guest in the home of a rich American, before the Second World War. The host would certainly have described himself as an *ehrlicher Yid*. And yet, when his young child forgot and switched on a light on Shabbos, he barely reacted, as "he's only a child, after all." Just a few moments later, when that same child broke a vase by mistake, the host totally lost it and yelled at the child.

"But isn't he only a child?" the Rov suggested. "Yes, of course," the host replied, "but he has to know that this isn't okay!"

This is just an example of what we teach by osmosis, and how children learn what is acceptable and what is not — in their parents' eyes. Those instinctive reactions are more educational than anything formally taught. If we don't consciously assess our beliefs and behaviors, we can easily find ourselves teaching one thing while conveying something very different.

The Brisker Rov's son, R' Dovid Soloveitchik ztz"l, would say that nothing could anger his father unless it had some connection to Torah and *mitzvos*. Even if the children were making noise or a mess or even causing minor damage, he wouldn't get upset — but if they weren't careful enough about a *mitzvah*, the Brisker Rov would react strongly.

Similarly, the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz ztz"l would often say that children are "supposed to be lively," and wouldn't get frazzled by the wild behavior of young children.

• • •

Interestingly though, the level of misbehavior that children exhibit always has some kind of instinctive and natural limit. Even when it comes to "out-of-control" children, there are still some things that they simply won't do, some lines that they won't cross. Sometimes it's because they realize it wouldn't be acceptable, but generally it's because they're afraid the consequences would be too extreme. As parents, it's our responsibility to make sure that those lines are drawn in the right place.

As mentioned, often these "lines" are drawn based on our reactions. When a parent explodes in anger at an unintentional mistake that shattered a vase, while accidental *chillul Shabbos* is brushed aside, a line is being drawn, even if unconsciously, and the child most likely learns the lesson well. Children are very quick to discern what earns praise and what will bring punishment, and they instinctively want their parents to approve of them. Naturally, if something they do always horrifies their parents, they'll soon stop doing it.

This doesn't mean that a parent's reaction to something they want to ensure won't be repeated must be expressed with yelling or physical punishment. Sometimes, it could be something as simple as a gasp of shock, a sad look, or saying, "Oh my, I can't believe you just did that!" But it does have to be genuine, as children will certainly sense if a parent is only putting on an act to convey a message that (for example) something is truly a terrible thing and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

In many cases, especially if the misbehavior is severe, it won't be enough to only express

shock and disappointment. Parents will have to implement a fitting consequence, which could be withholding a privilege or a treat, or actually making the child pay for the damage caused. So often, parents hope their children will get it on their own, or wake up one morning and suddenly start doing as they're told, but in many cases, what makes behaviors persist is simply the fact that they are being tolerated.

• • •

When it comes to deciding on the form of discipline, it's common to find husband and wife disagreeing on how strict to be. There are parents who mistakenly believe that any kind of discipline at all contradicts being a loving parent; others may think that punishing a child for damaging property conveys the message that the property is more valuable than the child himself.

It's important for parents to know that accustoming children to behavior that is calm and considerate is not suffocating them; it's part of normal chinuch. While healthy children do need to let off steam, there's no need for that to involve such extreme carelessness that it often ends up in harm being done.



As with many topics of *chinuch*, even where husband and wife aren't in total agreement on the right approach, it's important to decide how to come up with something you can present jointly, whether by asking a third party, compromising, or anything else, and to be absolutely clear on how things are going to be dealt with.

This means deciding on an approach in advance of incidents, and gently letting a child know that from now on, crossing line X will lead to consequence Y. It's important to be consistent and follow through with something you clearly spoke about, and for the most part not change the rules even if a child begs to be let off "just this once," or claims to have "forgotten," and so forth. Relenting in any such case really is an example of "sparing the rod and hating the child". Being predictable and consistent is what will instill good behavior and accustom our children to be thoughtful and responsible, which is exactly what we want them to grow up to be.

Teaching children, gently but firmly, to respect not only people but people's property, to keep their play within safe and responsible boundaries, and to obey their parents and trust that they know better, is not excessively strict discipline. It is simply executing our duty as parents to guide our children to the right path.

May we all have success in doing so.

TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME: PINCHAS 5785

To contact Rabbi Gruen please call **718.841.6557** or e-mail **rabbigruen@lehair.org**
To subscribe to receive the weekly essay, please email **parshalessons@lehair.org**

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org