



The Power of Respect: Willful Disobedience

“...when your children are being willfully disobedient?”

“In this column the reader is offered practical, respectful options leading to win-win solutions to the problems arising between adults and children in everyday life.”

Q: “How do you keep respectful when your children are being willfully disobedient?”
C.Z., Briceland

If you let yourself get ruled by your emotions in these situations it can be very, very difficult to stay respectful. It’s hard enough to stay respectful when your children disobey you. It is much, much harder when they are also not being respectful.

This is when all your practice at remaining calm which you have learned as part of a spiritual discipline, or as part of stress control, or in preparation for childbirth, can come in handy.

Acknowledge your emotions, feel them and if you want to, share them, tell your children what you are feeling. Just do not let your emotions be in charge of what you do.

Make sure you, the whole person that you are, is in charge of you. If you ever cannot control your impulse to react disrespectfully, it might be better to leave the scene until you have calmed down.

Let, “I treat my kids respectfully,” be your bottom line.

Although obedience is an integral part of our culture, if you wish to stay respectful, it is better to think in terms of cooperation rather than obedience or disobedience.

Assume that if you give them enough information, your son or daughter will want to cooperate, and if they do not, they have good reasons for not doing so.

Find out why they are being uncooperative. Are their needs different than yours?

Sometimes doing what you want them to do, in just the way you want them to do it, is going against their own needs. If this is the case, it is a good opportunity to negotiate a win-win solution.

Maybe they have misunderstood your needs. Misunderstandings are some of the most common causes of trouble among people. Make sure that your children have understood exactly what you had in mind.

Perhaps you have misinterpreted your children’s actions, and you think that they are being uncooperative because they did not do exactly what you expected them to do.

Sometimes what they do really meets your needs, it was just not the way you thought about having those needs met.

Often kids will not do what you ask the next instant after you ask it. Like many others, they need time to adjust to what you are asking of them, and to end what they are already doing, even if it is making noise.

It might also be that they are just tired of being bossed around. Maybe they feel as if everyone has been telling them what to do all day and they are fed up. That could happen to any of us.

Sometimes enough is enough and with you it's often safer to disobey than with others.

Another thing you might look at is yourself as a behavioral model. How cooperative are you with your kids when your needs are different from theirs?

Are you ever, or even frequently, uncooperative with your kids? When they let you know what they need and if it is not what you had planned, do you work cooperatively with them to find a mutually agreeable solution?

Remember, you are one of their primary models of appropriate human behavior.

Once you understand more accurately what is going on with your kids and what seems to be disobedience on their part, it is much easier to be respectful with them.

When you take the time to figure things out and not just to react, you can often discover that situations which seemed intolerable to you before are understandable and, with a little effort can be transformed into peaceful, satisfying interactions.

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