



## Parenting with Trust

As parents, we think carefully about how to convey our Torah values to our children. We aspire for them to identify with what is important to us, and we wonder how to most effectively transmit our beliefs, practices and heritage.

It can be normal to worry about whether we are being successful and whether our children are internalizing our messages. The goal, however, should be to instill “fear of G-d” in our children in ways that are healthy and palatable.

Describing the educational philosophy of his great-grandfather, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Dr. Mordechai Breuer once wrote: “In education, let ourselves be guided by trust and truth, not by fear.”

What can educating with trust look like in practice?

I believe that the first part is identifying the core values that are so important and meaningful to us in life, that we want ourselves and our children to carry forward always, no matter where we are and whatever life throws our way. Examples of core values can include our connection to *tefilla* or to Talmud Torah, Shabbat, *chesed* or the Land of Israel in our lives, the importance of being a mature and dignified person or the kind of relationships we have with family or friends.

If parents can trust that their children understand these values, then they do not need to live in fear that every misdeed on the part of a child might mean they have failed to educate properly. And when we have faith in the power of our values and in the way we convey them to our children, we can better trust our intuitions about when to discipline and when to ignore, when to punish and when to let something go.

Let’s take the example of Shabbat.

If Shabbat is a core value in our lives, we should focus on making it the highlight of the week for even our youngest children. It should be permeated with entrancing sounds and smells, tastes and images, rather than with parental angst or harsh scolding in response to children who reach for electric toys or giggle between handwashing and eating *challah*.

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This takes trust in the power of Shabbat, as well as the courage to avoid fear tactics and to overcome our own lurking fears for our children. For example, while much of Shabbat observance involves abstaining from many of our typical weekday practices, we need to trust that our children will absorb this concept over time and that what is genuinely important to us will become important to them as well. Even though we can introduce the concepts of *muktzeh* and *melacha* at a young age and discuss them in our homes, I would suggest we do not need to agonize or get

involved when a four-year-old colors on Shabbat or turns on a musical toy.

Unfortunately though, fear, often subconscious, can lead us to unjustifiably rebuke or even punish a child in these circumstances, as we worry that this child does not, and therefore will not, care about Shabbat.

The concern is real, but this kind of reflexive response can be damaging in the long run. We can always teach our children more about the expectations of observance, but it is infinitely harder to undo negative feelings and associations. Rebuke and scolding may cause a child to quickly drop the crayon she was coloring with, but what feelings will be internalized at the same time?

Moreover, fear is palpable and easily detected by even the youngest of children. If our youth sense fear, they might learn that even the adults in their lives don’t authentically believe in the inherent attractiveness of the very tradition they are working to transmit.

If, however, we trust the potency and vitality of our own values – that is, if we genuinely believe in the ancient power of Judaism itself – we should trust that these values will penetrate over time. We will ultimately parent our children better, as we use situations as opportunities for education rather than for punishment. It is entirely possible to inculcate a strong belief system based on a positive perspective of trust, and we should have confidence in ourselves to do so.

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