

The Source of Authority

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It is important to remember what the source of authority is, and that it is *not* us! One of the most irritating statements, responsible for many of the breakdowns in communication between the generations, is the four little words “because I said so....”

We always tried to have a reason, from principle, for what we asked our children to do or not to do. From earliest days we explained the reasons for requests, rules, and expectations. Sometimes, as we tried to do this, we found that we didn't have good reasons, and we had to change our request or reaction. It never hurts to apologize to a child when you have made a mistake. They learn that everyone makes them, and they learn how to handle it when they make mistakes themselves, as they surely will. If they think parents are infallible, how are they going to feel about themselves when they discover they aren't?

It takes effort initially to think these things out. However, life is amazingly repetitive beneath its infinite variety, and I found things falling into natural categories, which helped me think them through more easily as time went by. If I was caught without a reason, I said so and asked for some time to think about it. I told the child that I would discuss it with Daddy, and we would both read the *Word (Bible)* and ask God for help to decide what we believed was right. In this way, the child was learning both the process and the source of authority for his or her own decision-making in the future.

With daily family worship in whatever form you choose, the source of final authority is clear from the beginning. Parents and children can go together in reading and prayer to God, however they understand Him, and guide their lives in this way. This is also another way of avoiding an adversarial relationship between parents and children. It involves both parents and children looking to God as the final authority, rather than parents arbitrarily telling the children what to do. It is also a great relief to realize that “the buck doesn't stop” with us, and we can go to a higher authority in our perplexities.

Authority, in other words, does not come from you, a finite person, but from the fact that a thing is true or right. God is the final source of authority. Parents go to Him for answers. Children must obey parents, not because the parents are authorities, but because they have more experience and education in following God and His truth and thus can teach the children. When the children are old enough and have developed conscience and self-discipline, they can go to Him themselves.

Excerpts from *To Gently Lead from Child to Angel: Thoughts on Parenting*, pages 97-99. This book is available from the General Church Office of Education