

PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC

*Presented by:
Families First of Pella*

Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

What's a Parent For?

"But, how can I be a good parent if I can't make my kid do, what I want him to do, when I want him to do it?"

Award-winning educator, Jim Fay, found himself discussing this question with the parent of a rebellious 12-year-old. The discussion didn't start with this question. It started with, "Your speech was very interesting, but what do you do with a child who never hears anything you say?"

Jim asked for more information and the mother said, "It's just like calling a cat. I call him to dinner and he doesn't even flinch. It's like my words go in one ear and out the other. Let me give you an example. I walk up to him when he is playing with his computer and tell him to come to dinner, and he just ignores me."

"What do you do then?" Jim asked.

"Well," she said, "I raise my voice, but he still doesn't pay attention. It seems like I have to get really mad and stern before he knows that I mean business!"

Jim asked, "How does that work?"

"Well, he doesn't show any respect. He just starts in on me with complaints about our being on his back all the time, and it ends up ruining the dinner every night! What do you do?"

Jim suggested a technique some parents use. These parents go to the child and calmly say, "We will be serving dinner for the next 30 minutes. Sure hope you can make it, but if not, we'll be serving breakfast at the regular time."

"I could never do that," she said. "It's not good for him to miss a meal. He needs his nourishment!" This gave

Jim some interesting thoughts about the quality of the nourishment her son gets when he is doing battle with his folks.

Jim asked, "Are you saying that technique won't work, or are you saying you just can't stand to think of him getting hungry during the night?"

With this she went on to explain seven different reasons why she could not use the technique suggested. She was becoming more anxious with each new reason.

Then with great exasperation she blurted out, "But how can I be a good parent if I can't make him do what I want him to do, when I want him to do it? Just tell me how to make him come to the table, eat his dinner, and show a little appreciation for a nice meal by not arguing with us all the time!"

Sad but true, it may be impossible to find someone to tell her how to do that. She is asking for control over something she can never control. It is impossible to control the thoughts and actions of another person. The very best we can do is to set up situations in which the other person decides it is best to do as asked. It makes us wonder which is most important, to control how our children act and think, or to give our kids 18 years worth of experiences that show them how the real world works. If we believe it is our job to control children, we will be inclined to operate like the mother in this story, who demanded that her child come to dinner *right now*.

If we believe our job is to help children discover how the real world operates and how to think for themselves, we will tend to act like the parent who says, "We will be serving dinner for the next 30 minutes. I sure hope you make it because we love eating with you."



Great parents teach their children ...rather than control them