

WHEN KIDS ABUSE PARENTS

by Sally Burgess, Forefront families LLC

We hear a lot about child abuse, but parent abuse? Not so much. The National Director of Family First New Zealand says that, “The increasing level of parental abuse by their children is an unfortunate but expected outcome of the rise of children’s rights and the undermining of parental authority.” It was also reported that young people arguing and fighting with their parents or caregivers made up nearly one fifth of that country’s cases of family violence reported over the last three months. Are parents charging their children with violence in the home? Is this a healthy society? Are these healthy homes? I think not. What has gone wrong and how can we, as parents, reclaim the leadership and peacefulness of our homes?

There are several causes for family abuse. The first is the misguided method of maintaining control. If your way of winning an argument is to yell at your spouse, then your kids will assume that this is the way to solve differences. Firstly you have made the assumption that you are right, and then you raise your voice to intimidate the other person into giving up. If you resort to screaming at your children in an effort to command obedience, they will learn that shouting is the way of scaring another person into doing something you want. When parents act this way they are being disrespectful to one another and to their children. What they do is what their children learn to do. Kids mirror their parents’ behavior. The answer is to learn to be self-controlled. A self-controlled person is one who acts objectively instead of allowing themselves to become so angry that all reason goes out the window and they start becoming verbally and/or physically abusive. Kids need to learn self-control and they need to learn it from their parents.

Kids become frustrated when parents won’t listen to them, ignore their feelings, show favoritism or neglect their capabilities. It makes kids feel devalued by the ones who they love the most. Frustration leads to extreme measures and sometimes kids will lash out at their parents verbally or physically. I well recall an incident when I was about 11 years old. My father remarried and we moved into his new wife’s family home. Her mother had spoiled her as a child and continued to be in the home as her helper. Grandmother didn’t know where her boundaries were and Dad never had the courage to say anything because he knew this was not his home. Grandmother said some terrible things about my Dad in front of me and to people outside the home. I was deeply hurt by it but didn’t have a clue what to do to stop her doing it. One day I said a really terrible thing to her – out of frustration. She was the adult and I was the child. I was out of line but she knew better. I had held my tongue as long as I could but she was never aware that her words were like knives into my soul.

Parents have the advantage. They are the big people while kids are still learning how to deal with frustration and anger. If, as a parent, you are having a problem controlling your temper then it is imperative that you get help so you can role model how to deal with issues in a peaceful and positive manner.

If your kids are sassing you, stop and think. Where is this coming from? Are they doing what they see you do? Are they frustrated because you are in fact being unreasonable? Are you, as parents, presenting a divided front? Both parents' expectations should be the same. One soft and one tough parent will always cause frustration and confusion to all concerned.

A peaceful home starts with you. Look seriously at what is happening and deal with it – quickly. Call a family meeting and explain what your concerns are. Ask your kids what they want their home to look like and what they need from you. Create a list of wants and needs and put them in priority order. Ask your kids to come up with ways to make that negative aspect go away and stay away.

You children do not want to live in a war zone and you don't either. Don't blame it on how you were raised. Recognize that this is not how you want to deal with issues in your family. Create a new and improved footprint for yourselves and following generations.

If you have lost confidence or never had confidence in how to parent well, get help. Please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.