



Spectrum Podcasts

Dr. Jane Bluestein
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Is Control the Goal? The High Cost of Controlling Kids

Guest: Tammy Cox, LMSW

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Background and Bio: Tammy Cox, LMSW, received her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Texas and brings more than 25 years' experience to her profession. Since 1988 she has been the owner and director of The Redirection Connection. She is an instructor and instructor trainer for the International Network for Children and Families and was a nationally certified instructor for Global Relationship Centers, Inc. She has served as consultant to schools, day care centers, special groups, and professionals in the medical and legal arenas, guest trainer for various agencies and organizations and is a professional coach for individuals, couples, and families. She has also written articles and regular columns for several publications and is a professional speaker.

Program Description: Power is an intrinsic need we all have from day one! When it comes to adult-child relationships, power struggles are consistently at the top of the list. We all know that kids need limits and structure to grow into responsible adults, but there is also an equally strong need for autonomy, power, and control. So what is an adult to do? Parenting expert, Tammy Cox talks about the importance of teaching children self-control, something they cannot learn if an adult is doing that for them. She shares examples of the cost of trying to control kids, and understands the pressure parents feel to do so. Ms. Cox also offers suggestions for separating "our lives" from "their lives," for building decision-making skills and self-management, for influencing the choices kids make, and for building the type of relationships with kids that encourages cooperation, trust, and respect.

Article by Tammy Cox

Good Parenting or Effective Parenting

by Tammy Cox

What is the Difference?

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Good parents control their children. Right? When a child is throwing a temper tantrum at the supermarket, everyone is thinking, "If they were good parents, they'd control that kid!" Well, perhaps not everyone thinks that, but when it's our child and we are the ones on center stage, it usually feels like it. Unfortunately, all too often, this feeling or fear of being judged gets in the way of effective parenting.

"Good" parents feel the need to control their children in the immediate situation so they can avoid being judged by others or judging themselves harshly. They are also afraid that unless they control their children in the little things, they'll lose complete control over the big things. From this perspective, it's easy to see how "good" parents are more in danger of being abusive, because they often have to take extreme measures to gain that control, especially if they have a strong-willed child.

The more difficult the child, the more the parent feels compelled to control the child's behavior, no matter what the cost. This places a heavy burden on parents. As anyone with a strong-willed child could attest, the more they try to control the child, the more out-of-control the child becomes. They find themselves doing and saying things they later feel terrible about and their self-esteem as parents plummets. That's just one of the costs of trying to control children.

The decadence and violence we now face in this country stems from our mistaken belief that it is possible and even necessary to control others, especially children, and our willingness as parents and as a society to use violence, fear, intimidation, and humiliation to accomplish that goal. It's an unrealistic goal with no chance of true success!

In order to change this paradigm, it is important for parents and society to first recognize and then understand the high price tag attached to controlling children. And make no mistake about it! There is always a price for control.

The bill is often presented immediately in the form of uncontrollable tantrums, rages, destruction, aggression, or other acts of revenge. Sometimes it is delayed and we all pay the price with rebellious teenagers on drugs, in gangs, and in many other ways "out of control." Or it can even be delayed until children become adults with a myriad of problems, who are estranged from parents and society.

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At the extreme, the price can be exorbitant to society as a whole in the form of our most hardened criminals. In the best of cases, it can still cost closeness in families. Attempting to control others always builds walls in relationships.

Most of us recognize that controlling children really just teaches them how to be controlled (and ultimately more subject to peer or gang pressure) or pushes them even more to avoid being controlled by rebelling against all authority. Even though we intuitively know that no one likes to be controlled and most of us admit it is virtually impossible to really control another person, we still keep trying to control our children. Why?

Perhaps the most significant reason is that we just don't know what else to do. The only tools we have are those handed down to us through the generations. These tools were forged for a very different time and place. Another important reason is that society as a whole is not willing to take responsibility for the cost (or effects) of control.

In fact, parents and school officials are constantly being charged with the job of controlling children. The main function of both is really to teach, guide, and nurture so that we can raise generations of emotionally healthy adults who can function successfully in our democratic society. It is time for all of us to recognize that control doesn't work and start looking at more effective ways of dealing with our children.

The good news is that we don't have to look far. Many in the modern corporate world have been teaching such skills and techniques in management training for some time. One parent told me, "I've been using these tools as a supervisor at work for years with lots of success. It never occurred to me to use them with my children!" The tools he spoke of are based on mutual respect, empowerment, negotiation, encouragement, and teamwork, instead of the old carrot-and-stick (reward and punishment) approach most of us grew up with.

Effective parents draw on the knowledge that children really do want to live in closeness, cooperation, and harmony with others—especially their parents. This attitude fosters working to gain cooperation instead of trying to control a child's behavior. Just as corporations are interested in long-term results, effective parents are more likely to look at the lessons they want their children to learn from any given situation and how that lesson will affect them in later years

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Effective parents have a kind and firm approach: kind in that they do nothing to hurt or disrespect their child and firm in that they do not allow the child to disrespect or infringe on the rights of others.

Some specific techniques are: speaking to their children as they would an adult, allowing them to have input in family decisions, taking responsibility for their own part in disagreements and promoting an atmosphere where all family members are held accountable for agreements in non-judgmental and non-punitive ways.

Effective parents also enjoy the whole parenting process more, because they recognize it is a process and allow for their own, as well as their children's mistakes. They usually view mistakes as valuable learning experiences instead of failures.

There is more help for parents who are tired of trying to control their children and want to learn more effective tools to win cooperation. It is important to remember, however, that change in behavior is a process and will require time as well as commitment and desire. Once you have decided to become a more effective parent, be gentle with yourself and get help. You don't have to do it alone!

© 2003, Tammy Cox. Tammy Cox, LMSW, received her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Texas and brings more than 25 years' experience to her profession. Since 1988 she has been the owner and director of [The Redirection Connection](http://www.janebluestein.com). She is an instructor and instructor trainer for the International Network for Children and Families and was a nationally certified instructor for Global Relationship Centers, Inc. She has served as consultant to schools, day care centers, special groups, and professionals in the medical and legal arenas, guest trainer for various agencies and organizations and is a professional coach for individuals, couples, and families. She has also written articles and regular columns for several publications and is a professional speaker. This article is available online at <http://janebluestein.com/2013/good-parenting-or-effective-parenting/>

Additional Resources:

"5 Characteristics of a Good Boundary," by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Includes descriptions and examples for parents, <http://janebluestein.com/2013/5-characteristics-of-a-good-boundary-for-parents/>

"Dangers of Obedience and People Pleasing," by Dr. Jane Bluestein. It's not as desirable as it sounds!

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<http://janebluestein.com/2013/10-dangers-of-encouraging-obedience-and-people-pleasing/>

“Connection Before Correction,” by Dr. Jane Nelsen. The need for connecting with kids before we can effectively influence them in positive ways.

http://store.positivediscipline.com/Connection-Before-Correction_b_33.html

“An Alternative to Advice-Giving,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Using questions to guide problem solving processes (exploring options, anticipating outcomes, etc.)

<http://janebluestein.com/2013/an-alternative-to-advice-giving/>

“The Challenge of Setting Boundaries,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. A win-win alternative to authoritarian or permissive parenting.

<http://janebluestein.com/2012/the-challenge-of-setting-boundaries/>

“Magic Sentences for Effective Communications,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Positive language for avoiding conflict, negotiating agreements, and taking care of yourself.

<http://janebluestein.com/2013/magic-sentences-for-effective-communication/>

“Motivating Cooperative Behavior,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Three approaches to authority relationships.

<http://janebluestein.com/2012/motivating-cooperative-behavior/>

“Parenting Teens: How to Draw the Line,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein.

<http://janebluestein.com/2012/parenting-teens/>

“Talking with Kids: Seven Tips for Practicing Positive Discipline,” by Bridget Bendt Sizer, on PBS Parents Web site.

http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/positive_discipline_tips.html

“Questions, not Answers,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. The benefits of asking questions instead of giving answers or advice.

<http://janebluestein.com/2012/questions-not-answers/>

“101 Positive Discipline Techniques,” by Elizabeth O. Cooper, on Old Dominion Web site. <http://ww2.odu.edu/ao/instadv/quest/101s.html>

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"Ways to be a More Conscious Parent," by Dr. Jane Bluestein. 14 Tips for Becoming More Aware of How You Interact with Your Children,
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/ways-to-be-a-more-conscious-parent/>

"Ways to Build Irresponsibility in Children," by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Things you can do to reinforce children's irresponsible behavior.
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/ways-to-build-irresponsibility-in-children/>

"Ways to Model Respect with Your Children," by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Practical ways to teach respectful behavior.
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/ways-to-model-respect-with-your-children/>

"The Choice is Yours: Connecting the Dots," podcast with Dr. Lynn Collins on helping kids connect their choices to the outcomes of those choices.
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/the-choice-is-yours-with-dr-lynn-collins/>

"Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior," by Diana Baumrind, University of California Berkeley. 2003 academic paper on different parenting styles and results.
<http://persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/hortonr/articles%20for%20class/baumrind.pdf>

Positive Parenting Web site. Clear, positive suggestions in numerous articles by Deb Godfrey. At the time of this post, she is offering a free booklet on "10 Things to Do Instead of Spanking."
<http://positiveparenting.com/BePositive/>

"Seven Simple Mommy Secrets for Calming Tempers (Including Yours)," by Michele Borba, Ed.D.
<http://www.micheleborba.com/Pages/ArtRM02.htm>

"How Does Authoritative Parenting Affect Children?" by Kathryn Hatter.
<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/authoritative-parenting-affect-children-2160.html>

"What's Your Parenting Style?" by Carol Lloyd. Explores the difference between authoritarian, permissive, hands-off, and authoritative approaches.

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<http://www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/slideshows/6407-parenting-styles-authoritarian-authoritative-permissive-handsoff.gs>

“The Discipline Trap: Catching up to the 21st Century,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Excerpt from *The Win-Win classroom*,
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/the-discipline-trap/>

“The School as a Dysfunctional Family,” by Dr. Jane Bluestein. Excerpt from *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools*,
<http://janebluestein.com/2012/the-school-as-a-dysfunctional-family/>

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