

Like it or Not, You're the Boss!

There's no question that being a parent is a hard job and there are times when we all just want to throw up our hands and say; "I quit!" But we don't. One of the reasons why parenting can be so hard is because despite the fact that we may not feel in charge or want to be in charge, *we are in charge.*

We have to accept the fact that parents are in charge of what happens in their families. Not only is it our responsibility to be in charge, it's our obligation. And despite their protests to the contrary ("You're not the boss of me!"), children and teens need their parents to be in charge, because, deep down, they know they're not ready to be totally in charge yet. Limits help children and teens feel safe. Limits let them know they're not alone and that you will be there to guide them in this big and complicated world. So, like it or not, parents are in charge and somehow we have to find the voice to speak with authority. What does it mean to speak with an authoritative voice?

Speaking with an authoritative voice is not about power. You don't have authority because you're bigger or stronger. You have authority because you have knowledge and life-experience and, yes, wisdom! You have authority because you focus on your child's needs as they grow and develop and you try to do what's best for them. In everyday life it can be hard to find the right balance between setting limits that keep your kids safe and focused, while at the same time providing enough space for them to grow and learn. I'm afraid there is no simple easy formula but there are a few things you can think about that may help with this complicated family dance.

- Learn as much as you can about basic child development. Parents need to know what to expect in the different developmental stages. Setting behavioral expectations too low or too high undermines your authoritative voice and confuses your child.
- Don't be too hard on yourself! You don't have to be perfect! You will make mistakes - too lenient one day and too strict another day. The important thing is to admit to yourself when you've gone overboard one way or another, admit your mistake to your child, and then figure out what might be a better strategy.
- In the immortal words of the Rolling Stones; "You don't always get what you want, but if you try you'll find, you get what you need." What children want and what children need are often very different things. As the person with wisdom and authority, it's up to you, the parent, to figure out the difference.
- Each child has a unique personality and temperament. How you set limits and encourage responsibility for one of your children, may not work with another child. You may need some totally different strategies.
- Anyone who has potty-trained a two-year-old gets a very powerful lesson in what a parent can and can not control. You can sit a child on the potty, but you can't control whether they perform or not. You can put a child to bed, but you can't control whether they sleep or not. Don't waste your energy on what you can't control!

Parenthood is a long and sometimes lonely journey. Don't isolate yourself. If you need help, ask for it. Get support from your family, your friends, your neighbors, books and professionals. But, in the end, remember what Dr. Spock said to parents way back in 1946: "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do."