



**I WANT
MY KIDS
TO ARGUE**

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I Want My Kids to Argue, Seriously!

“ALL PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARGUE, BUT IT'S THE QUALITY OF THE ARGUMENTS THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.”

PART ONE

If you're a parent, you are routinely embroiled in disputes with your child. Those disputes, especially in teens, are the symbol of appropriate developmental separation from parents. It's a vital part of growing up, but it can be extraordinarily wearing on parents. There is an art form to training up your child through argument with an end goal of greater godliness. All parents and children argue, but it's the quality of the arguments that makes all the difference.

“We tell parents to think of those arguments not as nuisance but as a critical training ground. Arguments are actually mini life lessons in how to disagree — a necessary skill later on in life with spouses, friends and colleagues on the job. Kids should be rewarded when arguing calmly and persuasively and not when they indulge in yelling, whining, threats or insults.” – *Joseph P. Allen, Psychologist*

Scripture affirms the value of using our words and our soft persuasion to appropriately challenge a decision. Proverbs 25:15 says,

“BY FORBEARANCE A RULER MAY BE PERSUADED, AND A SOFT TONGUE BREAKS THE BONE.”

Wisdom, Solomon says, makes words palatable. So cultivating argument in my home could be GOOD? Could learning how to have a healthy,

logical, and non-emotive argument at home keep your kids from falling prey to the dangers of this fallen world?

Allen continued, “The children who learned to be calm and confident and persuasive with their parents acted the same way when they were with their peers. They were able to confidently disagree, saying ‘no’ when offered alcohol or drugs. In fact, they were 40 percent more likely to say ‘no’ than kids who didn’t argue with their parents.”

So NOT learning to have healthy arguments could actually be BAD!?! Yes. If I as a parent set up a “My Way or The Highway” environment, it could lead to a higher instance of destructive behaviors. “Children who felt it was pointless to argue with their parents and would back down right away. This kind of passivity was taken directly into peer groups, where these teens were more likely to acquiesce when offered drugs or alcohol. These were the teens we are worried about,” says Allen.

“TEACHING OUR KIDS TO ARGUE PERSUASIVELY MAY BE ONE OF THE BEST LESSONS YOUR CHILD COULD LEARN.”

Studies have shown that effective arguing acted as something of an inoculation against negatively bowing to the pressures of their peers. Studies concluded that kids who felt confident to express themselves to their parents also felt confident being honest with their friends about their beliefs and values. So, ironically the best thing parents can do is train their children argue more effectively, at home, with their parents! Studies found great benefits in families where communication



and, yes, even argument was acceptable. It is in HOW one argues their case that makes all the difference. I want my kids to have a strong backbone. I want my kids to hold their head high and be confident about their values and convictions. I want them stand for what they believe in a world oppositional to their spiritual views. This can be done, in part, by educating them HOW to lobby their cause appropriately when they are 6 and 7 years old about issues important to them. I want my kids to appropriately raise a different point of view about the fairness of the chore system at place in our home.

I am wise to listen. I am a fool to shut them down. Their future depends on it, I think. Research shows that the art of appropriate argument is a quite a valuable trait. Allen concludes, “We found in this study that successful parents and kids weren’t just trying to fight each other at every step and wear each other down. They were really trying to persuade the other person.”

Teaching our kids to argue persuasively may be one of the best lessons your child could learn. The next several pages will focus on the practicalities of HOW we as parents can encourage the right kind of argument for a long-term victory in our kids.

PART TWO

About 15 years ago, I observed an interaction between a five-year-old child and their parent that positively changed the way I would come to view parenting.

I was a special guest at the house of some friends. It was time for their small children to go to bed. Michael, age six, was so bummed that he had to “quit all the fun and go to bed.”

The direction was clear, “Michael is time to go upstairs and go to bed.” Michael was three quarters of the way up the stairs when he stopped, nearly pouted, composed himself and stated these fateful words that changed the way that I would view parenting: “Dad, may I make an appeal?”

His dad responded simply, “Thank you, Michael, for the way that you asked. No you cannot make an appeal this time. Thank you again, it’s time for bed.” Michael turned, and made his way up the stairs, clearly disappointed, but no fight ensued.

I was blown away. What had just happened? What was this “appeal process” that I just observed? A five-year-old had just respectfully asked to overturn his father’s decision. I was amazed. Mark, Michael’s dad was a towering 6’8” with a deep, masculine voice. Yet his six-year-old son did not seem the least bit intimidated to respectfully ask if he could challenge the decision his dad had laid down.

“*A DOMINEERING DAD DISMISSES. A HUMBLE DAD HEARS AND HONES HIS CHILDREN’S SKILLS AT DISAGREEING AGREEABLY.*”

I asked Mark, “What in the world is ‘the appeal’ and how does this work?!” Mark carefully laid out for me a plan that he and his wife had concocted. He wanted his children to have the ability to respectfully challenge any decision, free of emotion, free of whining and free of disrespect. His children had the ability to ask “can I make an appeal?” and on some occasions, an opportunity for an appeal was granted. At this point, his kids could lay out their rationale for why they felt that the parents should reconsider the decision at hand.

I asked Mark if he ever granted any of the appeals that have been made by his kids, appeals intended to overturn his decisions. Mark eagerly shared, “Absolutely! Sometimes they have a good point. I want them to understand that a respectful and well thought through rationale has a chance of being honored! They will go through life with jobs and bosses and they are going to need to know how to challenge a decision in a way that honors God. Plus, I don’t always see things clearly as their dad.” He led with wisdom, humility and honor, yet his authority was clearly intact, authority that was appreciated by his children.

This process seemed so honoring to the budding intellect of his child. He gave them a chance to learn the art of respectfully asking someone in authority to reconsider their decision, based on your non-emotive input. Wow.

I stayed in contact with this family over the years. Their two children, Michael and Jin are dynamic young Christians with a heart of leadership and an extreme respect for authority. They are successful young adults that I deeply respect. I recently asked them to reflect back on what he “appeal process” meant for them as children, pre-teens and teens in their home.

MICHAEL, AGE 21

“Well, they taught me the best way to get a point across when doing something you don’t want to do is to make “The Appeal”. The appeal gives kids the ability to protest a parent’s decision/command with respect. Whenever I made an appeal I was supposed to have a logical reason to my protest. If my parents agreed, or sometimes even when they didn’t, they honored the appeal by granting it because I showed respect even when I didn’t want to follow their command. Looking back, I think it was a great way to learn respect, also about the importance of having good logical reasoning behind why I didn’t want to do something. I still think about that when interacting with figures of authority, I still use it sometimes. It’s something that carries very well into adulthood.

“*LEADING WITH WISDOM, HUMILITY AND HONOR, ALLOWS FOR DISAGREEMENT AND OPENS THE DOOR FOR VALUABLE LIFE-LONG LEARNING.*”

JIN, AGE 20

“I loved being able to “appeal” to my parents. It gave me a chance to do things that I wouldn’t normally be able to do. It’s a good way to approach your parents if you want to be able to extend curfew, have friends over, or do something that you aren’t normally allowed to do (especially for bedtime!). Instead of whining or complaining about something, the “appeal” approach was a more beneficial way of asking my parents. There are so many things you can do with an “appeal” for kids. It taught me that if I respect them enough to politely “appeal” for something than I would reap the benefits. I loved having this option once in a while! I will definitely provide it to my kids someday!”



Only a humble parent can invite disagreement. Leading with wisdom, humility and honor, allows for disagreement and opens the door for valuable life-long learning. We can humbly lead in a way that allows our authority to remain intact. A domineering dad dismisses. A humble dad hears and hones his children's skills at disagreeing agreeably.

My wife and I have this process of “the appeal” in our home with our kids. Stay tuned for how it played out in our home....

PART THREE

My wife and I have used a process called “the appeal” in our home with our kids. We are educating our kids to challenge decisions that we make in their lives using logical, non-emotive reasoning to layout their position.

Their goal: change our minds on a given decision. Am I teaching my kids to argue with me? You better believe it. Read on...

From time to time, after I make a decision, someone may hear one of my children say, “Dad, can I make an appeal about this decision you have made?” At this point, it could go one of two ways:

“**NO**, THIS IS NOT A DECISION THAT IS OPEN TO AN APPEAL, THANK YOU FOR ASKING APPROPRIATELY.”

OR

“**YES**, ARE YOU PREPARED TO MAKE THIS APPEAL RIGHT NOW OR DO YOU NEED A LITTLE TIME?”



REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE #1

Three years ago, my daughter (six years old at the time) wanted to try out for the school play. As the leader of our household, having observed other families overloaded with activities during the school year, I have a rather strong aversion to any activities that take our kids away from home (admittedly, this may be somewhat reactionary and may be too strong on my part). I said “no” to her request to try out for the school play. She cried. My wife encouraged her to approach me and make an appeal. My

six year old daughter gathered her composure and asked if she could make an appeal. I said yes. I was amazed that without any coaching she was able to lay out a very strong position. I'll try to outline what she used as her rationale:

1 “Call Mrs. Bantz. Her four daughters have all participated in school plays at Western Hills elementary. She knows what it means to be in a school play. We don’t.” *(What she was saying...“Dad, get counsel from someone who’s gone before!!”)*

2 “I’m the firstborn. You should try this out on me before the other kids ask to be in the school play. If it doesn’t go well with me and this is too much for our family, you’ll know for the future and can say no to Caleb and Moriah to be in school plays.” *(What she was saying...“Let me be the guinea pig, dad!”)*

3 “The school play this year is, “The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe”. This is a Christian play. We know what this is about. This fits with what we believe. We have no idea what next year’s play might be. It might not be something that our family believes in.” *(What she was saying...“Dad, this is a one-time shot. Next year could be a play having content with which we philosophically disagree...like “The Devil Came Down from Georgia!” or worse....!!”)*

“*I’M TEACHING MY KIDS HOW TO CHALLENGE MY DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES.*”

I was deeply impressed. Clearly she had some fantastic reasons. She had reasons that I had not considered. I changed my mind and retracted my initial decision for two reasons. First, her argument was sound and it shed new light on the

matter at hand. Second, and far more importantly, I wanted to reinforce, as strongly as I could, that the appeal process works. I am willing to be persuaded. We allowed her to try out for the play, for which she got a small part.

“*THE ABILITY TO DISAGREE, DISCUSS AND DIALOGUE IS A FOUNDATIONAL – THE CONVERSE IS DYSFUNCTIONAL.*”

The last time I looked, I make appeals quite frequently in my adult life. I have a boss. I want to seek to persuade my boss to see things from a different perspective, from time to time. I don't throw a tantrum, I try not to yell. The times I have succeeded in persuading/moving things in a different direction I have used logic, reason and composure.

WHY TEACH AND EXERCISE “THE APPEAL” PROCESS WITH MY KIDS:

I want to teach a “life skill” that my kids can use with a future professor, boss or other authority figure.

I want my children to know they have a brain, they have a voice, and what they think and feel absolutely matters.

I want them to fight for injustices. Inside her heart, my daughter felt my decision was unjust. I want my kids to learn to fight for change in a controlled, logical and compelling manner that honors God.

I want to model humility. I want them to see a leader (or dad) who isn't always right and doesn't always see things crystal clear. Position should not infer perfection. Authority should not infer absolutism. Leadership should not infer LAW.

I'm teaching my kids how to bring forward a respectful appeal and challenge my decisions that affect their lives. I'm teaching them to argue with me... respectfully. The ability to disagree, discuss and dialogue is a foundational – the converse is dysfunctional.

“ AS A PARENT, I’M A FOOL TO THINK THAT I HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, ALL THE TIME. ”

PART FOUR

As a parent, I’m a fool to think that I have all the answers, all the time. To suggest to my children that I have crystal clear decision-making, 100% of the time is not only a façade but it can communicate something quite destructive to my children.

There have been occasions where I have made a rash decision as a father. The decision may not have been thoroughly thought through. Whether through exhaustion, lack of information or sometimes even pride, we all can have not fully baked decisions (notice I didn’t say “half baked” decisions, just not fully baked decisions!)

My kids are quite intelligent. They can see through smoke and mirrors. I like that! It keeps me on my toes. The real question is, do I have enough humility as a parent to receive a well thought through and articulate challenge of my authority by my children in a respectful way?

Well, we try.

My wife and I have followed the example of other parents and have employed a strategy called “the appeal”. From time to time, after making a decision, one of my children may ask if that decision could be overturned. The way that they go about asking if this decision could be overturned is by seeking to make “an appeal”.

If their request for an appeal is accepted by me, they have a choice. Do they want a little time to pull together their rationale or are they ready

to make the appeal right here and right now. I have been amazed at how my children have the ability, at even a young age, to articulating their feelings, their reasoning, and they are position.

SEVERAL CAVEATS ABOUT “THE APPEAL” PROCESS:

- 1** Asking for an opportunity to make an appeal ought to happen rarely, not daily, or even weekly for that matter. We teach our kids to rarely lobby for an appeal. Choose wisely. Conserve your ammunition.
- 2** I have the ability and exercise the authority to say no to their request to even make an appeal. They know this. Asking for an appeal does not necessarily mean that you will be given an opportunity to present your position.
- 3** CRYING OR WHINING ENDS the appeal process instantaneously.
- 4** This takes supreme humility on the part of us as fathers.

I’m sure someone might say, “This Is Hogwash. Kids don’t need the ability to make decisions and challenge authority. They need to obey! What type of New Age, emotionally sensitive, self-esteem-based parenting strategy is this?!?”

“*TRAINING MY CHILDREN TO CHALLENGE INJUSTICES IN LESS CONSEQUENTIAL MATTERS, EQUIPS THEIR HEART AND VOICE WHEN IT REALLY MATTERS.*”

Well, I suppose we’re all entitled to our opinions. However, I actually think teaching how to effectively communicate to authority figures in a non-threatening, non-emotive, articulate and logical way, is good parenting.

The Old Testament hero Daniel made an appeal. He successfully overturned a decision handed down by King Nebuchadnezzar himself. When asked to eat a forbidden diet, Daniel used logic, reason, persuasion and humility to challenge a decision. That's enough for me. I want my children, to be like Daniel.

The early Apostles disagreed. They were told by some pretty powerful authority figures, in no uncertain terms, "Stop talking about Jesus." What did they do? They were articulate. They were confident. They did not waver from their position. They boldly spoke and held their position.

"But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go..." Acts 4:19-21

I want my kids to argue with me. I want them to find a voice around things that matter to them. Cultivating argument starts with allowing my kids to logically articulate their point of view on seemingly non-essential matters. Argument tends to be around matters of perceived injustice. What seems like an injustice to a 7 year old may seem rather trite and inconsequential. However, what if my 7-year-old could find their voice and learn to persuasively lay out a case for change in a matter that has meaning to them? Training my children to challenge injustices in less consequential matters, equips their heart and voice when it really matters.

“ I WANT TO MY KIDS TO CHALLENGE SMALL MATTERS OF JUSTICE IN MY HOME, FOR SOMEDAY, A TRUE INJUSTICE WILL RAISE ITS HEAD AND SOMEONE WILL NEED TO STAND STRONG. ”



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Science Reaches People

It is a special feeling to perform a science experiment that showcases things kids have NEVER SEEN and conveys a message they will NEVER FORGET! Science allows us to earn the right to be heard with kids of all ages. I want to make kids laugh and do things that are captivating.

Our highest purpose is to reach people and make an eternal impact. Science is a remarkable tool for communicating the timeless truths of Biblical Christianity. Science is not magic and it is not an illusion. Using science inspires awe and celebrates our Creator. Science can be a powerful vehicle to convey the gospel message.

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