

Always Right? Cut It Out!

“I finally met Mr. Right. If only I knew his first name was always!” Some people base their self-esteem on being right. They never admit mistakes, don’t apologize and assume only one person’s point of view can be right. If this is you, you really need to CUT IT OUT! Children know that parents make mistakes, even if you don’t acknowledge it. If you make a mistake in disciplining a child, the child will respect you more for apologizing than for pretending you were right, and will also feel better about himself because you have validated his perception of the situation

When we insist on always being right, the child learns to accept the parent’s assumptions and second guess himself. This affects his self-esteem so he tries to boost it by being right as much as he can. Then....he becomes like his parent.

Many of us have lived with a parent who insisted that he or she was always right, even in situations in which they were clearly wrong. Why does a parent do this? Because he or she has grown up in a family atmosphere where it was made clear that when people saw a situation differently, one and only one person was always right. Only that person deserved respect and insisted on being listened to. Everyone else was wrong, and therefore shamed. The child learns that in addition to having to be right, that the way to establish that you are right is through power and force – through being the big person, who by virtue of your size or your ability with words can establish your rightness.

The reality is that we live in a world where “right” is a difficult thing to establish. We can’t be “right” about “the facts”, because if any two people are asked to remember the same situation, they will almost always remember it somewhat differently! We can’t be “right” about decisions, because when we make decisions, we don’t know all the facts. We can’t be right about the meanings of words, because words have different meanings. Mature moral behaviour is based not on rigid rules of “rightness” but on recognizing that other people are selves just like we are and have a right to different opinions.

Cartoon: Tammy Murdock
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