



Are You a Parent or a Friend to Your Child?

As a therapist, I hear it frequently. “But I don’t want him to get mad at me.” This response is usually given when I am explaining the importance of boundaries and consequences and how children need to have both. And consistently have both.

Many times, I have had parents bring their children to me, who are displaying problem behaviors at home (eg. tantrums, throwing things, not obeying their parents, screaming, etc.) but at school, they are respectful, quiet, and getting good grades. The parents don’t seem to understand why.

Here is the issue: you are the parent. You are the authority. They are the child. They need to listen and be respectful. They are not equal to the parent in decision making. Too many kids run the house and have their parents responding to them. How has this happened and why? Because the parent is treating their child as their friend and they don’t want to hurt their child’s feelings. Therefore the child is now in the position of power and they have the upper hand. To fix this problem, it’s simple. Parents need to be empowered.

The relationship between a parent and their child is based on affection and esteem (Lehman, 2015). At first, parents are both in the emotional role as well as the functioning role for the child. When they are babies, parents show affection by holding the baby, kissing him or her, talking and singing to the baby. At the same time, parents are also in the functioning role by feeding, changing diapers and bathing the baby. There needs to be a healthy balance between these two roles, so that the child experiences both equally. If one role surpasses the other, the child is at risk of being neglected.

As children grow older, the parent’s role switches to more functional than emotional. For parents who want to be their child’s friend, this can be a difficult transition. As parents, they may feel those emotions inside, but they really have to do more for

their child functionally, and set limits with the child (Lehman, 2015). All children need limits, boundaries, and consequences. That is how they learn what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in life. The functional role changes for parents as the child grows. With a one-year-old, it involves changing diapers. With an eight-year-old, the functional role involves getting homework done. With a fifteen-year-old, it involves enforcing a responsible curfew (Lehman, 2015). When a parent wants to be a friend to their child, these functioning roles go by the wayside and the kid is soon running the house.

The parent and the child are NOT co-decision makers. Kids can offer you their opinion. They can tell you what they like and dislike and how they feel about the situation. But certainly decisions, especially important ones but even minor ones, have to be made by the parent. Kids have to understand that the family moves as a unit and the adults make the decisions. Not them.

Not only are you not your child's friend, you are also not their enemy. There will be times when your kid does not like you and that actually probably means you are doing your job as a parent. You are making some decisions they do not agree with and that is 100% ok. They can express to you how they feel about it but that does not necessarily mean you change your mind. Kids will respect their parents more when boundaries and consequences are enforced and the parent/child relationship will be stronger for it.

Resource: Lehman, James. (2015). The Complete Guide to Consequences. Retrieved from: <https://www.empoweringparents.com>

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