**HABIT TRAINING FOR THE TANTRUM CHILD AND 'STRONG WILLED' CHILD:**

In future newsletters we will talk more about habit training for normal students, but a recent area of concern has been to visit households with stressed out mothers because chaos reigns and children behave poorly. In this situation, very little productive learning can be accomplished and there is little joy and peace. So let's discuss how to help the household where things are falling into chaos.

**The 'Strong Willed Child':**
Regarding negative tantrum behaviour, Charlotte Mason believed that the majority of people wrongly classify this as the 'strong willed child'. She explained that a child who flies off the handle, is actually a 'weak willed child'. This child has not developed the strength of will needed to have self-control, and to calmly obey and quietly comply with the parent's wishes, in spite of their feelings. This child has not developed any 'emotional intelligence'.

The Charlotte Mason method aims to truly fortify the will of the child so that they are not at the mercy of their feelings. Her school motto was “I am, I can, I ought, I will”. [More about the meaning of the motto in the future]. Whereas the **so called** *'strong willed child'* does what he/she wants to do (being ruled by their feelings), the child who actually has a 'strong will' has control over his/her feelings, and does what they ought to do, simply because it is right to do it. So don't be fooled into saying “Oh he's just a strong willed child” as though it is an acceptable medical condition. Don't believe it for a minute – If your child throws tantrums when you ask him or her to do something, then you have a “weak willed child” because you have not taken the time to train them to exercise their will over their emotions. So, you may ask “How do we train our children to have true 'strength' of character?

**Consistency in boundaries and consequences:**
This 'discipline of habit training' doesn't mean angry chastising. Although we did smack our own children in the early years, eventually we found it unnecessary, and particularly when training other children. But you must have solid boundaries for behaviour.

To train well, the parent must remain calm, but certainly not passive – you can't afford to allow a negative behaviour or a bad attitude to slip past you. Consistency is essential, or you will undo your training. You are actually always training your children, whether intentionally or not. Regarding poor behaviour – you must 'nip it in the bud' by catching it every time. And it is useful to have the children replay the whole scene, but now with the appropriate words and actions – like a dramatisation, play-acting of the scene the way it should be.

[For example: Now Lucy go back and stand by the door doing what you were doing; and Johnny walk in the doorway again carrying that big thing – carefully this time – Then Johnny you can say “Excuse me Lucy. Can I pass through.” Lucy moves aside “Thank you Lucy”. Lucy says... “You're welcome. Can I help you with that load”. .. Voila – no crash. No injuries. No arguing. And everyone ends up laughing about their acting.]

To break negative habits of behaviour, you need to catch it every time, and also replace it with practising the better behaviour. If you slack off, you will end up training your children that the negative behaviour is ok. Vigilance is essential.

**Being on the same page:**
One aspect of being consistent, is that (for those who are living as a couple with their spouse) husband and wife need to be on the same page. The first step is to decide together what is appropriate and what is not acceptable behaviour. Mostly children just need firm boundaries, and they have a natural desire to please the consistent parent. However, the child with an untrained 'weak will' continually tests the boundaries because they are unsure of where is the actual line that mustn't be crossed.

Once you have decided together what is not acceptable (and what is the positive alternative behaviour you wish them to develop), then you must decide what is the consequence of crossing that line. A useful strategy is a 'time out' space (for young children) or 'reflection room' (for older children) as shown on the 'Supernanny' documentaries. However, only send them there for the equivalent number of minutes to their age (2 year old = 2 minutes; 9 year old = 9 minutes). Before implementing this strategy, you may need a family conference to clearly communicate the household rules, and the reasonable consequences for unacceptable behaviour. Until your child is fully trained, he/she will forget the rules. That is only natural, so you need to remind them whenever they slip up. But warn them only once – then if no change, administer the consequences. No counting to 10, or even counting to 3 – this only shows you didn't really mean it the first time, and they don't have to comply until they are totally out of control and, you have become exasperated to the point of anger. It is very important to warn once only, and then act swiftly. If they are bad-mouthing you on the way to the time-out space, don't 'double' or 'triple' the time, escalating into a full-on war. Just set the time once (one minute for each year of their age), and direct them into the time-out room firmly and calmly.

**Being creative with consequences:**
You can also be more creative with your consequences for poor behaviour. Charlotte Mason taught that, whenever possible, children should reap the natural consequences of their actions. So the young child who can't play civilly with others is removed from the play-area for a period of time. And for a teenager who locks themselves angrily in their room and turns up the music loudly, then confiscate the music machine. If this is a continual problem, then you might also get your husband to unscrew the door and take it off, because privacy is a privilege that your teenager has abused. When they apologise and agree to act civilly, you screw the door back on. This may seem excessive – but it can be very effective, and works fairly quickly. There are many such 'natural' consequences – such as they can only have desert if they finish the main meal.

If you are using the 'time-out' or 'reflection room', then as you put them in the room, calmly tell them why, and what you expect when you come back: for example, *“You know why you are in here – because you were calling your brother rude names and hitting him; and that is not acceptable behaviour. So you will be in here for (five) minutes (for a five year old) while you calm down and think about what you are doing. When I come back you will need to say sorry to Mummy (and your little brother), and play happily together”* etc. And the sorry must be said with the appropriate tone and attitude. When you come back after five minutes - if they still refuse to co-operate, and are still in tantrum mode, then give them another minute-per-age (eg another 2 minutes for 2 yrs old; 9 minutes for the 9 yr old etc). There is no need to negotiate, lecture, or fight with them. Just know what you want, and be calm and firm. Children learn from us. If you yell, they will yell. If you hit and rough-handle them, then they will act rough. If you 'lose it', they will lose it. You never see a policeman 'flying off the handle' in anger. They are always calm because they know they are in authority. The parent who flies off the handle is the one who does not understand his/her position of authority.

For the first few days it might seem as though the child spends a lot of time in the reflection room, but if their poor behaviour is no longer getting them what they want, then they won't keep doing it for very long. If you are consistent, then in a short time you can have peace in the house again.

**Love, fun and discipline always go hand-in-hand:**
Try to maintain a warm light atmosphere of love and laughter in the home, enjoying learning and living with your children. It shouldn't be all serious with rules all the time. But if you have firm (and reasonable) boundaries of behaviour, and if you are consistent with them every time, then the children feel safer and can relax within those boundaries. After visiting over 2000 families in the last two decades, it has become obvious that it is usually only a parent who is inattentive and passive, letting things slide, allowing the children to get out of hand, who then reaches frustration point and lashes out in anger.

**Be present:**My son in law, recently did a little experiment with a one year old who was in the habit of screaming. He had noticed the child never screamed when he was interacting with her. So while the child was in the room, he started web surfing on his iPhone, and within a minute or two the child was screaming. Then he put the iPhone down and began interacting with her, and she quietened down and was happy again. Children know when you are faking it (pretending to care for them but your mind is elsewhere).Obviously everyone needs 'some' time for themselves as well – but if you are never really 'present' or attentive to your children, then their need for love and relationship will always be depleted – resulting in poor behaviour. So it is worth assessing your own habits – are you fully present and attentive with your children; or must they always compete with your technical devices.

**On giving them choices:**
Another aspect of respecting the personhood of the child, is to help them to practice making right choices by giving them a simple choice. We have noticed some parents giving children too many choices – asking the child's opinion about what to eat, when they should be learning not to be fussy. But there are times when you can use choices rather than chastising.

My wife Karen was minding our three year old grand-daughter. At this house, we had a large lounge/rumpus room that was separate from the main house where the bedrooms were. The lounge room tended to be a more public space. On this day our grand-daughter wanted the freedom of walking around without clothes on, which Karen felt to be inappropriate since this part of the house was more public. Sensing a battle coming on, (but understanding both the child's desire for freedom, and her desire to be where all the family members were gathered) Karen decided to give her a choice. She could either stay in the more public area as long as she put clothes on; or alternatively, if she wanted some time without the restriction of clothes on a hot day, she could go back up to the main house that had a private lounge, and play there for a short while, until Nan says it is time to get dressed. She chose to go up to the private lounge and play.

The next day, the same thing happened, and grand-daughter was given the same choice. However, this time her desire to be where all the action was happening (in the public area) was a stronger desire than her desire for freedom, so she put her clothes on and stayed. By giving her a limited range of choices, Karen was 'strengthening' her will regarding her moral compass, so she was able to make appropriate choices about how to behave in public. And all of this without any battle of wills, because Karen was attentive to her needs, taught her about the difference between 'private and public spaces', and trained her to make wise choices rather than merely demanding compliance.

**Understanding the needs of your child:**
When a child is crying or acting up, first check if their needs are being met. Are they hungry, thirsty, tired, needing a nappy-change? Have you spent any quality time with them – or are you always somewhere else in your thoughts? Have they been inside too much – are you overdue for a nature walk, or playtime at the park. Karen and I found it useful to think in terms of a child's emotional fuel tank or batteries that might gradually get depleted and needs to be filled up again. This is important for all children, but it is absolutely vital to understand the needs and triggers of your child if they have Asperges. The Asperges child can still be trained in emotional intelligence – it just may take a little longer to see the improvement.

The household that is in chaos because a child rules the roost, usually has some other factors to tidy up as well:

* too much sugar, red cordial, etc
* no routine or daily schedule in the home, so the child is insecure about when or if they will get fed; or no set bedtime, so their body-clock is dysfunctional.
* Instead of getting angry at your child - come down to the child's level, look them in the eye, and speak in a low firm tone

**In Summary:**

Develop a warm loving atmosphere in the home where you are attentive to the children's various needs (and your own needs).

Be on the same page with your spouse – decide what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Decide on the consequences for poor behaviour.

Communicate the boundaries and consequences to your children.

Remind them only once (no counting to ten, or even to three).

Administer the consequence swiftly, firmly, and calmly.

Have a reconciliation time – teach them to apologise, and change to a better behaviour. Communicate your forgiveness and love.

**The discipline of habit:**
Apart from simple obedience, other habits that you should be constantly training your child in, include: focussed attention; always doing neat and accurate work; courtesy (speaking kindly; and also respecting others property or personal space); good manners and thinking of others first; perseverance (keep carrying on when head and hand are tired; also completing a job; tidying up afterward); patience (especially to stay calm when heart is hurt, scared, or upset). That's what we mean by 'emotional intelligence' – which also involves understanding the needs of others.

The principles are simple but require consistent attention. Although if you are diligent early on, you will reap the rewards later on, having a much happier and peaceful household in the years to come.

*“The mother who takes pains to endow her children with good habits secures for herself smooth and easy days; while she who lets their habits take care of themselves has a weary life of endless friction with the children. All day she is crying out, 'Do this!' and they do it not; 'Do that!' and they do the other”* (Mason paraphrased in Laurio, 2007, p.136).

Happy training for the children's sake - to raise confident, secure, and sociable children - and to ensure 'smooth and easy days' for yourself.

Blessings

Bruce & Karen McNeice