THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE CURRENT CRISIS OF “OFF THE DERECH” ADOLESCENTS: DARE WE DISCUSS IT? CAN WE AFFORD NOT TO?

The frum community has been struggling with the problem of rebellious adolescents. Many factors have been cited as possible causes for this problem. A prominent therapist recently stated at a professional conference that we currently do not know what causes this problem. This paper will seek to demonstrate that it is deficiencies in the parent-child relationship that lie at the root of adolescent rebelliousness. The impact of other risk factors is mediated via their effect on the parent-child relationship. The resistance to acknowledging the central role of parents in this problem, and the repercussions of this resistance, are discussed.

The problem of rebellious adolescents has become a major area of concern for the frum community. Many articles have been written on this subject and it is rare for a community organization to hold a conference without workshops devoted to this topic. While accurate statistics are not available, most educators and activists feel that the problem is growing at an alarming rate. Many knowledgeable activists use the term "epidemic." This paper will review the items commonly mentioned as risk factors in frum children becoming rebellious ("going off the derech"). I will demonstrate that there is a strong tendency - albeit with the best of intentions - to downplay the role of parents in this problem. The reasons for this avoidance and how it can impede efforts to alleviate the problem will be explored.


The author wishes to thank the many psychotherapists and mechanchim who have commented on, agreed with, challenged and disputed earlier versions of this article. A special thanks to my patients who trusted me enough to tolerate the pain of looking into dark, hidden alcoves of their memories.
It is axiomatic when dealing with complex social issues, that these problems are multi-determined. It then follows that the interventions also have to be multi-pronged. However, acknowledging the multi-factorial nature of a problem does not preclude us from recognizing that some factors are more significant and crucial than others are.

**RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH REBELLIOUS ADOLESCENTS**

Among the general public, the most common causative factors mentioned in regards to rebellious adolescents are distant environmental ones. The vulgar and decadent media, the Internet and western culture in general, are portrayed as being too appealing for many contemporary teenagers to resist. The assumption is that the pull from the outside is so strong, that even well adjusted, happy youngsters who have positive relationships with their parents can easily be influenced to abandon their family’s way of life.

**Exposure to the media**

It is undeniable that exposure to the media negatively impacts our moral standards and sensitivities. The question of what is an optimal or acceptable level of exposure to the outside world is, therefore, an important one (see e.g., the February 1995 special issue of the *Jewish Observer* on *The world around us: The risk of exposure, the cost of insularity*) but it is not directly relevant to our topic.

The question we are addressing is not what has caused a lowering of moral sensitivities. Rather, the specific issue we are dealing with at the moment is why children rebel against their parents’ way of life. To the best of my knowledge, the relative number of *off the derech* teens among Orthodox families that permit higher levels of exposure to the media is no higher than in families that strictly insulate their homes from outside influences. This should serve as conclusive evidence that exposure to the media is not a major causative factor in the *off the derech* phenomenon, although it can certainly have other negative consequences. (We will return to the Internet issue below).

It is true that youngsters who rebel often become heavily involved in *on the edge*, cultural activities. However, this is the effect of rebelliousness rather than the cause. It is very doubtful that exposure to the media, in itself, can make it worthwhile for children to abandon their parents’ way of life. The price they pay in feelings of guilt, rejection and failure, to say nothing of the loss of approval of parents, would prevent such a step. Rather, it is only after a buildup of feelings of hurt, resentment, anger, rejection and alienation from family and community that they feel that they have nothing to lose by dropping out. As Rav Matisyohu Salomon recently stated, *it isn’t accurate to call them dropouts,* rather, they should be called *pushed-outs.***

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1 Rav Matisyohu Salomon, *With Hearts Full of Love* (Mesorah, 2009): It is not an easy thing for anyone to sit through a whole day of school, especially a child, and the mother has to be waiting to shower him with rachmanus when he comes home. If, however, the home to which he returns is stressful and judgmental, if he goes to sleep with resentment and frustration, his resentments will be directed toward his parents, his brothers and sisters, his
The influence of “bad friends” and an overactive yetzer hora

Another oft-mentioned factor in youngsters rejecting their parents’ Torah values is the influence of bad friends. The obvious question to ask is what makes this particular child vulnerable to this negative influence? There may be 25 boys in a class of whom 23 feel little or no temptation to follow the example of the bad boy, while one particular child is strongly tempted to follow in his footsteps. What is unique about this child to make him especially vulnerable to negative influence?

When a second child in a family goes off the derech\[2] of the parents will declare that it is the result of the bad influence of the older brother. I ask them the obvious question: From which brother did the older child learn it from? The thought that both brothers are reacting to the same cause, i.e., an emotionally unhealthy situation in the home, doesn’t occur to them.

Rav Wolbe makes the point quite forcefully: "If someone has a child who acts inappropriately, he can’t attribute it to the negative influence of bad friend - this is simply an excuse." It is obvious that Rav Wolbe is not minimizing the negative influence of deviant friends. Rather, he is emphasizing that parents play a more central and decisive role. Research studies have documented the association between deviant friends and delinquency. However, the research also highlights the family variables that act as moderators. As Viatro et al., (2000) discovered in their research:

[A]ttachment to parents reduced the influence of deviant friends. At a certain point, it becomes difficult and even impossible to prevent teenagers from becoming exposed to deviant friends. Hence, it may be [more] effective in the long run to foster the parent-child bond through communication, support, and shared activities in addition to monitoring the child’s behavior. Adolescents with unfavorable attitudes toward deviancy are not influenced by deviant friends [pp. 321-322].

When children are easily influenced by bad friends or when rebellious teenagers become involved in illicit and immoral behaviors, parents will often claim that their children were born with an unusually powerful yetzer hora and, therefore, they as parents were powerless to prevent the inevitable downward spiral. Eisav is usually pointed to as the prototype of someone born pre-destined to be a rosha. However, according to Rav Dessler this is a misperception. Clearly, says Rav Dessler, Eisav was not born predestined to be a rosha, otherwise we would have to say that he had no bechira. At most, we can say that he was born with a temperament that made

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*rebeim* and teachers, the Torah and even the Ribbono Shel Olam, Heaven forbid. And then we\[2] were surprised when some children become dropouts. I don’t call them dropouts. I call them pushouts. How can we blame them when they were pushed out by the way we treated them, albeit without malicious intent [p. 73]?
positive behavior more difficult for him and raising him properly a more challenging (but not impossible) task for his parents.3

There is an interesting phenomenon I have observed with those who explain a child’s negative behavior by attributing it to an unusually powerful yetzer hora. The belief that a child was born with a factor making it more difficult for him or her to behave properly doesn’t seem to mitigate the anger parents feel toward the child. The belief seems to serve the sole purpose of avoiding a more thorough (and perhaps painful) search for the true causes for the child’s behavior. In contrast, when Rav Dessler speaks of Eisav having a more difficult temperament, he also makes it clear that less was expected of him as a result (at least initially).4

Other factors

A recent report from a professional conference of frum therapists dealing with children in crisis speaks of child risk factors such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), hyperactivity, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, learning disabilities, poor academic abilities and poor social skills. Another factor noted under child risk factors is the depressed child, which includes anxious and perfectionistic children.5

The second basic category listed is the family risk factors which includes lack of family cohesiveness, poor parenting skills and families with high expressed emotions (i.e., criticism and hostility) and marital conflict. The third category listed is environmental risk factors which includes families with major medical and or economic problems and children with a history of sexual and/or physical abuse. My impression from reading the above-mentioned report and from a conversation with one of its editors is that poor parenting skills is not considered the major contributing factor in most cases of at-risk children.

THE ROLE OF PARENTING

My own view is that in the vast majority of cases of acting-out adolescents, the major causative factor is deficits in parenting and the resulting deficiencies in the parent–child relationship. (As discussed below in the Parental Attitudes section, the problem is usually with parental attitudes more than with parenting skills). The many risk factors noted in the above-mentioned report certainly contribute to the problem. In my opinion, however, they do so mainly by making it more difficult for the parent to maintain a positive and supportive attitude toward their children. In addition, many of the symptoms noted in the report (e.g., anxiety, perfectionism, Oppositional Defiant Disorder), are most often themselves reactions to poor parenting practices. The necessary ingredient that actually causes a child to rebel is the anger and frustration resulting from feeling unaccepted and rejected, by his or her parents.

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The Torah is transmitted via the mesorah from parent to child. When the relationship with the parents is defective, the transmission is corrupted, setting the stage for the child's rejection of the mesorah. I once heard a rov use this concept to explain a difficult halacha: A ben sofer u'moreh is executed only if his parents don't forgive him. This is difficult to understand since the penalty is a result of our assumptions regarding his future behavior and not his disrespect for his parents. The rov answered (based on the Shem MeShmuel comments here) that if parents have such a relationship with their son that they won't forgive him, then they have disconnected him from the mesorah and therefore there is no chance that he could do teshuvah.6

The question is often asked: What has changed in the frum family that so many children feel rejected? My own feeling, based on my clinical experience, is that children are finding it increasingly difficult to be good enough to please their parents. The fact that standards have risen, for Orthodox Judaism in general and for Torah studies in particular, is certainly a cause for celebration. However, it can also be a source of unrelenting pressure on children. For example, on a number of occasions parents have complained to me regarding a child: He never opens a seifer! From the initial complaint, I get the impression that the child never learns at all. Upon further examination it turns out that these children are fairly good students who learn well in yeshiva. When they come home after a long day in yeshiva and just want to relax, their parents become upset, and criticize them for never opening a seifer just because they don't learn in front of them.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner emphasizes the crucial importance of maintaining a sense of satisfaction from everyday, average ruchnious activities even in the face of rising standards and expectations.7

Children who feel that they are a disappointment to their parents (I am referring to the feeling of being a disappointment to parents, not to disappointing them with a specific act) are children in serious emotional pain, a pain often repressed or denied. This pain often results in resentment and anger, making these youngsters extremely vulnerable to depression and to rebelliousness (via the influence of bad friends etc.).

6 Csikszentmihalyi (1999) makes a similar point from a secular perspective in an article titled If we are so rich, why aren't we happy? [Csikszentmihalyi (1999) makes a similar point from a secular perspective in an article titled If we are so rich, why aren't we happy?]
The current crisis and its root causes were predicted over two decades ago! In an almost prophetic article on the "crisis in parent–child relations," Rabbi Aaron Brafman (1977), a noted mechanech, stated:

I know of crises in every neighborhood, in every sub-culture [of the Orthodox community]. The common denominator in all of these situations would seem to be a lack of communication and a growing hostility between parents and children. While this may be analyzed from many perspectives, the fundamental needs not being met in all of these situations are those of understanding, respect, and too often, the patience of parents toward children. Every child needs to be loved by his parents, and most important to be accepted for what he is. This seems to be such a simple solution. And yet how often … this is overlooked! [p.14, emphasis added]

More recently, Rabbi Brafman (1998) stated that: "The consensus of professional and lay-activists working with at-risk teenagers and dropouts, has been that the overwhelming majority of their clients come from broken homes, orphaned homes, dysfunctional homes, or unhappy homes [p. 8]. I would only add that a broken home or orphaned home creates a dropout only when it leads to a dysfunctional/unhappy home.

Love or acceptance and respect?

Many mechanchim emphasize the importance of children feeling loved by their parents. The Chazon Ish is quoted as saying that acceptance and respect are more critical for a child than love. After all, the love that parents feel for children is a natural instinct. Viewing children positively and accepting them in a non-critical manner is a much more difficult challenge. (As a mother once told me in regard to her teenage son, "I love him but I don't like him"). It is my impression that excessive criticism is the major factor poisoning the parent-child relationship in our times. This criticism is most often rendered in the name of love!

When children feel that their parents are critical of them in a global sense, they are much more likely to act in an oppositional manner. This, in turn, prompts parents to react negatively, which then further escalates the children's acting out. Regardless of the level of reasonableness or unreasonableness in the parent's critical attitude, children will inevitably blame themselves (Gartner, 1999, p. 38), (even if the child is overtly proclaiming that it is everyone else's fault). This leads children either to perfectionism, where they try to be perfect in order to win their parents' approval, or to giving up when they feel that nothing they can do will ever be enough to escape parental criticism.
Range of parenting deficiencies

It needs to be emphasized that when I refer to poor parenting practices, I am referring to a wide range of phenomena. At one end of the spectrum, are the overtly abusive parents, either physically or emotionally. This includes parents who believe that their children’s purpose in life is to fulfill their own, often immature, emotional needs. They do not hesitate to manipulate their children’s emotions to this end. Even this type of overt abuse is not always obvious to others, since these same parents are often very pleasant to other people as they have a strong need to gain the approval of others.

In the midrange of the spectrum, are parents who are not initially abusive. However, they are rigid and inflexible and so tend to over-react to their children’s difficulties resulting from learning problems, lack of motivation, or even normal childhood misbehavior. They tend to see these problem behaviors in a very negative light, and even more significantly, they often attribute malicious intent to the child (Strassberg, 1997). These parents can often be identified by the negative and disparaging manner in which they refer to their children: “He’s a self-indulgent truant; she’s a free loader; he’s using his learning disability as a convenient excuse for his laziness, etc. (This issue is discussed in more detail below in the section Parental attitudes).

At the other, more positive end of the spectrum, are parents who are very caring and giving to their children and rarely have negative interactions with them. However, they are mostly focused on their children’s behavior and cognitive development with little attention paid to their emotional life. Research has shown that a dismissive attitude on the part of parents to their children’s emotional life has far-reaching negative implications for their later adjustment (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996).

Baumrind (1978) proposed a very helpful distinction in parenting styles, between Authoritative parenting and Authoritarian parenting. An authoritative parent is demanding and responsive. Authoritative parents understand how their children are feeling and help them to regulate their feelings and solve their problems. They encourage their children to be independent but still place limits on their actions. The parents encourage discussion and try to be warm and nurturing. They allow their children to explore more freely, thus having them make their own decisions based upon their own reasoning. Authoritative parents tend to produce children who are more independent and self-reliant. An authoritative parenting style mainly results when there is high parental responsiveness coupled with age-appropriate parental expectations. Authoritarian parenting, in contrast, is demanding but not responsive. It is characterized by high expectations of conformity and compliance to parental rules and directions, while allowing little open dialogue between parent and child. Authoritarian parenting is a restrictive, punitive parenting style in which parents make their children follow their directions. Authoritarian parents expect much of their child, but generally do not explain the reasoning for the rules or boundaries. Authoritarian parents are less responsive to their child’s needs, and are more likely to ground their child rather than discuss the problem. The children of authoritarian parents often are less socially competent because the parent generally tells the child what to do instead of allowing the child to choose by him or herself. Some children of authoritarian parents may develop insecurities and display anti-social behavior.
Children whose feelings are neglected or negated respond by neglecting their own emotional needs and focus instead on being well behaved (Miller, 1996). Many become perfectionistic, striving to please their parents at all costs (Sorotzkin, 1985, 1998, 1999a). Eventually and inevitably, it becomes clear to them that they cannot be perfect, and so they give up their quest and become depressed and/or act out their resentment and frustration. It is easy to see that when a rebellious child comes from such a family, it would be difficult to perceive the connection to his or her family life, since these families are indeed high functioning, “good families.”

One acting-out youngster had been a well behaved, “A student.” His parents were very giving and attentive to him. However, whenever he did something for the sake of fun (e.g., bowling) or dressed informally (e.g., wearing a sweatshirt to an amusement park) he felt he was disappointing his father who was very low-keyed and straight-laced. The father never told his son that he has to be a carbon copy of his father, but that is exactly what the son felt that he had to do in order to win his father’s approval. Since his personality was very different from that of his father – he was gregarious and outgoing - he constantly experienced a deep sense of shame for not being as serious as his father. Since the parents never overtly demanded it, I searched for the source of his perceived need to be exactly like his father. After speaking to the father a number of times, he acknowledged that both he and his wife were ultra-sensitive to the opinion of others and have always felt a great need to please others and fit in. When his son spent time in fun activities the father felt very critical, to a large degree, he acknowledged, because he imagined the disapproval of neighbors. While at first he protested to me that he most often didn’t verbalize these negative reactions, he did concede that it was unlikely that his son was unaware of his feelings. Clearly, these parents did not value their own sense of individuality and so it isn’t surprising that their son felt the same way.

The pressure to bring nachas to parents

A less obvious form of less-than-adaptulate parenting is the subtle pressure to bring nachas to parents. Many children in our community grow up with the idea that their main purpose in life is to bring their parents nachas, rather than to be successful in their service of Hashem etc. To them, the problem with doing something wrong is not because of its inherent wrongness, i.e., it negates the rotzon Hashem. No! The main issue is that it will aggravate and disappoint their parents. In fact the most common brocho given to a bar mitzvoh bochur is that he bring nachas to his parents.

What’s wrong with a child trying to bring nachas to his parents? Don’t they wantwhat’s best for him? From a hashkofo perspective there is serious problem with parents feeling that their child’s purpose in life is to bring them nachas. Rabbi Yissocher Frand (1999) recounts the following story that he heard from Rav Moshe Shapiro.
A man came to visit his nephew in Yerushalayim. This nephew was a young talmid chochom with a large family. The uncle was impressed with how attentive and patient his nephew was with all the children. “How will your children ever repay you for what you have done for them?” asked the uncle. “By giving me a measure of immortality, by carrying my name forward” answered the nephew. Later the nephew asked the Brisker Rov what he thought about the question and his response. The Brisker Rov shook his head in disapproval. “The answer you gave is close to apikorsus. Children have nothing to do with repayment. They are not an investment for future nachas. You can daven for nachas, just like you daven for health and prosperity, but that is not why you have children. Children are about giving. It’s the way Hashem wants us to emulate His ways” [pp. 105-106].

Growing up with the idea that your main purpose in life is to bring your parents nachas is certainly not conducive to developing a healthy sense of self.9

The attitude that underlies this expectation that a child function is to bring his parents nachas is that parents have ŏRights of the Parents’ on their children, similar to the voting rights a share holder has in a company. The idea that parents have rights in regard to their children does not come from Torah hashkafah which emphasizes the obligations parents have to properly take care of the pikodon entrusted to them by Hashem.

In discussing with me issues they are having with their children, parents often protest: ŏDon’t I have the right to demand from my child [not learned enough] and so he didn’t listen to me? I have the right to demand from my child. They are not behaving properly! ŏ. Parents shouldn’t interfere after a couple marries. What between the couple, parents are not permitted to interfere with. Does the parent own the child!? Does one person own another person? No one does!10

Harav Aharon Leib Shteinman was asked by a group of rabbonim involved with a sholom bayis organization in regard to parents who got involved in their son’s marital conflict, implying that they will no longer offer him emotional support if he doesn’t divorce his wife: Harav Shteinman responded: ŏThey are not behaving properly! ŏ. Parents shouldn’t interfere after a couple marries. What between the couple, parents are not permitted to interfere with. Does the parent own the child!? Does one person own another person? No one does!10

Rav Shteinman related that one of the gedolim from the previous generation whose daughter wanted to marry a certain bochur and the father felt this bochur wasn’t a big enough lamdon [not learned enough] and so he didn’t want to let them marry. They came to ask Rav

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Chaim Brisker who told the father, “Do you own your daughter? She’s an adult. You are not permitted to interfere if she wants to marry him.”

A manifestation of parental feelings of ownership is the double standard that many finished risk youngsters experienced in dealing with their parents. These parents seem to feel that their rights as parents entitle them to simply make different rules for themselves even when there are no logical bases for such differences. Two examples of these double standards:

“Chaim’s” mother yells at him for being “so irresponsible.” He tries to defend himself: “How can you expect me to act normal when I grew up with parents who were always fighting?!” His mother doesn’t deny these facts but insists that he shouldn’t “live in the past” (although it was actually still continuing into the present) and he shouldn’t use these difficulties as “a convenient excuse.” Later that day, Chaim tells his mother that he can never forgive his father for the emotional devastation he inflicted on the family with his abusive behavior. “You shouldn’t be so upset with him” she retorted, “After all, when he was growing up his parents were so busy trying to start a school they were unable to pay him any attention.”

“Tuli” has had a conflicted relationship with his mother for many years. A significant part of this conflict resulted from Tuli maintaining a relationship with his father’s relatives whom the mother has tremendous anger at because of an incident that occurred when she first got married. It had recently been uncovered in therapy that Tuli had been molested by an older sibling over a period of many years. During one argument with his mother he attributed his behavioral difficulties to the trauma of the abuse. “You can’t live in the past, and use that as an excuse, you have to move forward” she retorted angrily without a trace of sympathy. Her own years of unrelenting anger at her husband’s relatives over an incident from 25 years ago was somehow not considered “living in the past” or “a convenient excuse.”

Kibud av v’eim

The concept of ownership over children is often justified as being conferred on them by the mitzvah of kibud av v’eim. This perversion of the mitzvah of kibud av v’eim was condemned years ago in the Sefer Habris (Rav Pinchos Eliyohu of Vilna, 5547):

There are people who are careful not to hurt anyone’s feelings; in fact, they treat everyone with love. Yet they hurt their own children’s feelings. They say that his behavior isn’t sinful since Hashem put them in his hands and He compelled them to accept my discipline as it says Honor your father... and my intention is to discipline them in the ways of the Torah. But, in truth, their words are...
neither logical nor according to the Torah, for why should their children not be included in the commandment of ḍove your neighbor as yourself? The truth is that one is punished more severely for hurting a relative, and therefore one who unjustly causes pain to his own child will be punished more harshly. ד

(This issue is discussed at length in my article on Honoring Abusive Parents. ד)

**The over-valuing of external behaviors**

Associated with parental neglect of children's emotional life, is the exaggerated importance given to external behavior. Many parents (and educators) believe that positive external behaviors are guaranteed to become internalized. This view seems to be supported by the statement of chazal that metoch shelo leshmo bo leshmo (one who develops the habit of doing a positive act for extrinsic reasons will eventually come to do so with intrinsic motivation). Often quoted too are the words of the Chinuch (Mitzvah 16) that achrei hapeulos nimshuchim halevovos (a person's heart follows his actions). These divrei chazal would indeed seem to justify an emphasis on superficial positive behaviors without any need to concern ourselves with the internalization of the values associated with these behaviors. We can just sit back and let the positive behaviors be magically internalized.

This, unfortunately, is not the case. The late mashgiach of the Ponevich Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Friedlander z"l, for example, clearly states that it is obvious that the Chinuch's yesod implies that a person's motivations follow his actions can only apply when the person identifies with the ideals associated with those actions. He relates that Rav Yisroel Salanter made this same point citing evidence from the Cossacks. The Cossacks were the elite troops of Europe. They were drafted at a young age and served for 30 years before retiring on a government pension. During their many years of army service these troops were highly disciplined, energetic and productive. However, after retiring, these soldiers spent the rest of their lives in a drunken stupor. What happened to the good habits that they practiced for 30 years?! Since they never identified with these values, answers Rav Yisroel, their external behaviors could not have the power to influence their internal values. Contrast this with the common, naive belief that forcing someone to behave in a certain way will automatically cause him to internalize the values associated with that behavior.
Rav Dessler makes a similar point regarding chazal’s declaration that metoch sheloshmo bo leshmo. Lo leshmo itself is dangerous, says Rav Dessler, and he decries the common misconception that all forms of lo leshmo automatically transform into leshmo. The truth is that there has to be an element of leshmo (at the very least, a strong desire to learn leshmo) that already exists in the person’s motivation, and it is this kernel of leshmo that then develops into a more substantial form of leshmo. (I discuss this issue extensively in my article on rewards and competition).

RESISTANCE TO ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF PARENTS

There is a great deal of resistance, both among professionals (frum and secular) and the general public, to acknowledging the central role played by parents in the development of emotional difficulties in their children. I will cite a few examples of this reluctance; first in the secular, professional community:

Researchers have found clear evidence of the high degree of childhood sexual victimization among severely mentally ill women. The reluctance to report these figures was openly expressed by some of the major researchers in this area. At the same time, clinical researchers working in the area of severe mental illness have been understandably wary of focusing on the problem of early abuse in this population. There has been a reluctance, for example, to disinter the theoretical trend of blaming families for causing major psychiatric disorders. Current treatment models emphasize enhancing current adjustment rather than understanding past events (Rosenberg, Drake, & Mueser, 1997, p. 261).

Can you imagine trying to treat an emotionally disturbed adult without relating to the sexual abuse he or she suffered as a child!? How effective can such treatment be? Yet this is what some experts are recommending.

Another example is research done in the area of expressed emotions [EE] and psychiatric illness. Years of research clearly show that a psychiatric patient released from the hospital to live with his or her high EE family is twice as likely to relapse and return to the hospital as the patient returning to a low EE family. As noted by a prominent researcher in this area (Hooley, 1998): The term EE [expressed emotion] is rather misleading since EE is not a measure of how willing a relative is to express emotion or to vent feelings. Rather EE is a reflection of the extent to which the relative expresses critical, hostile, or emotionally over...
involved attitudes toward the patient (p. 631). Note the reluctance of researchers to be honest and open about the fact that they are speaking about a critical family. Instead, they camouflage this information behind the euphemism expressed emotion.

The above-mentioned researcher, after noting the powerful effect of EE on the relapse rate of psychiatric patients, adds: These data do not, of course, mean that families cause schizophrenia. I wrote to this researcher and asked if there was any research evidence that high EE does not cause schizophrenia? She replied that the appropriate studies have not been done [but] because of the past tradition of blaming families for causing schizophrenia, it is important that researchers in this area do not go beyond the science in making any unwarranted inferences. To me it seems highly improbable that high EE should have such an impact in causing relapse of schizophrenia and yet not be involved in causing the condition in the first place. The truth is that contrary to this researcher’s assertion, there is evidence that children in high EE families are more likely to suffer from serious mental illness in adolescence (see studies cited in Karon & Widener, 1994).

There is more recent evidence of the connection between an emotionally unhealthy childhood home environment and the development of schizophrenia. A recent review of schizophrenia research in the prestigious journal Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica - described by many as earth shattering - provides evidence that at least two-thirds (in some studies up to 97%) of the individuals suffering from schizophrenia suffered childhood physical or sexual trauma.

The authors of this study (Read, van Os, Morrison, & Ross, 2005) cite many studies that point to a significant overlap between the diagnostic constructs of schizophrenia, dissociative disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Since many contemporary clinicians are biased in their perception of schizophrenia as a biological disease - in my understanding, a bias reflecting the emotional resistance in the community at large to acknowledge the trauma that many children suffer in their own families - they do not ask the questions that would uncover the history of abuse that would allow the diagnosis of PTSD. This bias has serious clinical implications as effective, evidence-based psychosocial treatments for psychosis are abandoned for exclusively psychopharmacological treatments. The authors report on a large, multi-centre study [that found] that psychological approaches are more effective than medication for psychotic people who suffered childhood trauma. For some, simply making a connection between their life history and their previously incomprehensible symptoms may have a significant therapeutic effect [p. 344]. Unfortunately, the traumatic history underlying the psychosis is so often left undiscovered, depriving the patients of needed psychological treatment.

It is interesting to note that almost every article or book on chinuch written by a contemporary Rov or mechanech emphasizes the importance of a positive and warm parent-child relationship, acceptance of a child’s individuality, and a reduction of excessive pressure and criticism, as the surest means of avoiding rebellious children. Yet, when children do rebel, we

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16 For example, see Rav Shlomo Wolbe's Planting and Building in Chinuch: and Chinuch in Turbulent Times: Practical Strategies for Parents and Educators by Rabbi Dov Brezak (ArtScroll, 2002); and The Heart of Parenting: Understanding What It Takes to Raise Successful Children in Today's Challenging Times by Rabbi Moshe Don Kestenbaum (Menucha, 2013).
hesitate to draw the logical conclusion that the parents probably did not follow this advice. A few years ago, at a conference of frum professionals, a prominent mechanech confided to me that he was not going to publicly state his opinion that parents play the major causative role in the problem of rebellious adolescents. He was concerned with the anticipated negative reaction of the audience.

Likewise, when a prominent frum periodical published a series of articles addressing the topic of teen dropouts, it published the viewpoints of all parties involved except those of the children themselves. At the encouragement of his former mashgiach, a young adult wrote a very moving and eloquent letter relating how the difficulties he had with his parents led him to abandon Yidishkeit. At first, the periodical rejected the letter. After some pressure was brought to bear on the editor, the letter was indeed published, but only in a censored and heavily edited manner, which portrayed the letter writer in a very negative and distorted light. In fact, the editor implied, without any evidence, that the writer had a serious problem with his perception of reality. It was a classical case of trying to deny the message by killing the messenger. When the young man’s therapist wrote a letter to the editor in order to set the record straight, the editor refused to publish the therapist’s letter because of his concern of causing additional pain to the parents of rebellious children. Similar concern for the feelings of the unjustly maligned youngster was sadly missing!

Another frum publication once asked a noted mechanech to write an article highlighting the dangers of the Internet. This mechanech spent a great deal of time researching the issue. He then wrote an article based on his research. After methodically documenting all the dangers associated with the Internet, he noted under the heading of "The necessity of identifying risk factors":

Ultimately, restricting Internet access is a necessary but insufficient solution. What is needed is healing the personality weaknesses that virtually guarantee some individuals will fall victim to Internet temptations. Studies show that those most likely to get into trouble are not deterred by limits on Internet access. Therefore, a key challenge to parents and educators is identifying the risk factors. Researchers describe four pre-existing conditions that put an individual at high risk for getting into trouble on the Internet. They are lack of family bonds; low self-esteem; inability to express opinions and questions; and inability to socialize. [Emphasis added]

A prominent Rosh Yeshiva read the article and said that he felt that the article should be printed. When the article was, in fact, printed, the section on "The necessity of identifying risk factors" was mysteriously missing!

These incidents reflect the need of some people to externalize the blame for the difficulties many of our youngsters face onto external factors rather than to honestly face the reality of what some children face in their own homes. Some may justify this distortion as a means of prompting parents to do more to protect their homes from the indisputable corrosive influence of the media. What harm is there to some "scare tactics," even if it distorts the facts, if it is for a good cause?
However, there is, in fact, a tremendous harm that is inflicted on the community by these distortions. The mistaken impression a reader of the printed version of the article would be left with is that the danger is totally external, and that the only defense is protection from the outside world. Is it any wonder that parents who are very careful to protect their children from the outside environment, but neglect the family environment are then shocked when their child goes off the derech r”l. Because they did everything that they were told to do in order to avoid such tragedies, to no avail, the only possible conclusion is that fit can happen to anybody. In their minds, therefore, there is nothing one can do to reduce the risk other than to protect their family from external influences.

More recently, a prominent mechanech in Bnei Brak wrote a sefer on chinuch where he breaks the pattern of denial and spells out the painful truth clearly [free translation]:

The mechanchim who deal with at-risk youngsters report that all of the youngsters who dropped out did so only because they received insufficient love and respect at home. Not even one of these youngsters claims that that he dropped out because of complaints ch”v against Hashem or against the Torah. A child who receives sufficient love and acceptance at home will never go off the derech.

Rav Shmuel Zalman Auerbach was also quoted as saying that in the majority of cases mistakes made by the parents is a major factor in causing youngsters to rebel.

REASONS FOR NOT ATTRIBUTING ACTING-OUT TO PARENTAL FACTORS

When a respected mechanech recently attributed, in print, adolescent rebelliousness to parental factors, there was a strong reaction. He was accused of, (a) being inaccurate (fit happens even in the best of homes) and, (b) insensitive (why add to the pain of parents who are already suffering). Let us examine these objections.
The myth of “It happens in the best of families”

In the context of understanding why a child rebels, the term ływgood familył would have to be limited to parents who have a positive and emotionally healthy relationship with their children, in addition to whatever other fine qualities they might have. The fact that parents are well-known in the community, support worthy causes, are prominent educators and the like does not, by itself, qualify for ływgood familył in the context of discussing possible parental influences in a child going ływoff the derechł if, in relation to their children, they are also overly demanding, punitive and rejecting. When people say that the problem of ływoff the derechł children happens in the ływbest of familiesł they are almost always referring to the family’s public persona. They usually have no idea of what goes on within the family. They simply assume that such parents ływmust beł wonderful parents.

We can avoid making this unwarranted assumption if we note the comment of my uncle, the late Telzer Rosh HaYeshiva, Rav Boruch Sorotzkin. In his ływseferł on Chumash he notes that negative character traits exist, to some minimal degree, even in great people. They would be most vigilant to not give expression to these traits in the company of their students or colleagues. Rather, these traits are more likely to find expression within the family.19 Similarly, Rav Eliyahu Lopian comments that if you want to know if someone is a ływkapdonł (impatient, hot-tempered) you have to observe his behavior with his wife and children, over whom he may feel a sense of ownership and expect them to jump at his every command, and not his behavior with non-family members.20

It is clear from these comments that one cannot know, with any degree of certainty, that people who have reputations as ływthe nicest peopleł in the public arena necessarily act in the same manner in the privacy of their homes. In fact, there are enough instances of the opposite being true to cause the Ari zl to state that someone who does ływchesedł with the public at large but not with his family members, his acts of uvwxyzchesedł are not considered as uvwxyzzechusimł and he is not rewarded for them.21

I find it somewhat surprising that even experienced therapists, who should know better, make this mistake, claiming that it isn’t unusual for children from ływgood familiesł to ływgo off the derechł. The implication is that since it is ływgood familył there cannot be parental factors involved in the child rebelling. Experienced therapists should certainly be aware that parents in ływgood familiesł sometimes act in bad ways within their families. (Our community’s experience with the problem of spousal abuse should have at least taught us that much). Every experienced therapist in the ływfrumł community has encountered incidents of undisputed emotional and physical abuse of children in families that are highly respected in the community. The strict rules of...
confidentiality tie the therapist’s hands when he hears that very same family being mentioned as an example of the tragedy of rebellious adolescents happening in the “best of families.”

In spite of the above, the myth persists, even among therapists, that it is common for children who are loved, respected and treated with sensitivity for their emotional needs by their parents, to rebel against these very parents to the point of rejecting their way of life. It seems that it is less threatening to believe that something bad can happen to a “good family” (e.g., when a child rebels) than to acknowledge that a person who is looked up to in the community can be abusive to his or her children. After all, it isn’t only children who have a need for idealization (Kohut, 1987; Lee & Martin, 1991). The fact that parents who are perceived in our collective unconscious as the prototype of the loving and caring individual can be abusive to their children can be difficult for us to accept. Consider, for example, the years of denial that sexual abuse could actually occur within the frum family. Therapists are not immune to these feelings and it is not surprising, therefore, if, at times, they unconsciously collude with patients and/or parents in denying this reality. As Gartner (1999) states:

> Therapists frequently experience the impulse to reel back from the shock and deny the horror of the material being described. This is a natural reaction in any therapist who is empathically attuned to the patient’s. Like the patient, the therapist may try to keep the experience unformulated and unsynthesized. After all, trauma by definition is an event that seemed impossible in the patient’s worldview, and may seem equally impossible to the therapist. The dilemma is that it is in experiencing the therapist’s struggle to listen to the impossible that the patient gets freed from it.  

[p. 257]

There have been times that I have also been convinced that I had encountered an example of a youngster from a “good home” (in both the public persona and within the family, emotional-health sense) that “went off the derech.” But inevitably it turns out that my initial conclusion was premature. It was only because I found it difficult to believe that a youngster from a loving home would have a sufficient reason to take such a drastic step that I kept asking questions (while being careful not to be suggestive) until I was able to indeed understand why it happened.

_I once treated a young man from a highly respected family who had gone “off the derech.” During the first months of therapy he reported that there had not been any difficulties in his relationship with his parents before he became irreligious. His father was a highly respected religious figure with a reputation for gentle kindness to all those who came to him for advice and guidance. At one point, the patient’s mother came for a consultation (with the patient’s consent) regarding another sibling. In our conversation she related that my patient wasn’t as bright as his brilliant father or his other siblings and as a result, he didn’t perform in yeshiva as well as his father expected him to. His father would become so angry that he would get into physical confrontations with his son. As the mother described these fights I became overwhelmed with a discomforting feeling. The image of a man revered by the community (including myself) for his piousness and gentleness rolling on the floor in a physical altercation with his son just because he wasn’t making his father proud was almost too painful to tolerate._
The negative impact of the myth

The need to uphold the myth of the all-loving parent can be a source of tremendous hurt and damage to the abused children of these families. How do adolescents understand their own rebelliousness if they are led to believe that their parents treated them in the most loving and caring fashion, even while they were actually maltreated?

First of all, the tendency of all children to prefer to blame themselves for being "bad" rather than see their parents as abusive (Gartner, 1999, p. 38) is greatly intensified by this societal denial. They will therefore, be compelled to see themselves as particularly evil and ungrateful to be so problematic when they were treated so wonderfully. Abusive parents are especially prone to constantly reiterate this message to their children. This is consistent with the general tendency of aggressors to portray their victims as the persecutors (Grand, 2000, p. 94). A typical example is when parents are overly harsh and punitive with their children. Not surprisingly, the children become less than honest in their dealings with their parents. The parents, in turn, then criticize their children for the grave offense of lying, often commenting to them in anger that they can\\u2019t imagine how they picked up such a terrible character trait.

Even more insidious is the corrupting effect this myth can have on the thought process of its victims. When youngsters experience abuse yet are told that, in fact, they are being treated with the utmost kindness and sensitivity, they begin to distrust their sense of reality. As a result, many of these children, even if they are fortunate enough to escape the ravages of a serious thought disorder, suffer from cognitive disabilities, seriously impacting their academic abilities (in addition to their other emotional problems). It is for this reason that Grand (2000) emphasizes:

The establishment of the actual historicity of trauma is particularly necessary with child abuse. Child abuse is a trauma uniquely characterized by the falsification of reality; it has invariably occurred secretly, in family systems that deny its very existence. Survivors of other forms of malignant trauma, such as war or violent crime, all received the profound support of consensual validation from survivor cohorts and the larger culture. The child abuse survivor has been robbed of reality and of history; cure requires its restoration. [p. 42]

Likewise, Orange (citing Alice Miller) explains why some people who were abused as children suffer less long-term psychological damage than others:

[T]he crucial difference in the outcome of severe child abuse depends on the presence of someone in the child\\u2019s life who witnesses, and thus gives the child the opportunity and ability to experience, the child\\u2019s pain. Without such a witness...
the child cannot experience the abuse as abuse. Instead it is torture that must be endured. The child often feels she or he deserves treatment that an observer would see as cruel and outrageous. In the presence of some, even minimally, validating witness, the child can experience the abuse as mistreatment and, thereby, find ways to express it. [p. 136]

It is for this reason that, paradoxically, the trauma a person went through that everyone knows about is often the lesser of his or her problems. A young man I once worked with suffered from a number of emotional difficulties. It was commonly assumed that these difficulties were the result of the trauma of losing his parents at a young age in an auto accident. In fact, since he received a great deal of validation and emotional support from his family and community for this trauma he was able to successfully get past it. In contrast, for the abuse he suffered at the hands of the family that was *kind enough* to take in an orphan, he never received any recognition for and that was a trauma he was never able to process.

Minimizing the extent or unfairness of abuse (in the attitude of observers and by extension, in the mind of the victim) is also the single most significant factor in a victim of abuse becoming an abuser. Briggs (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996) conducted extensive research to try to determine what it was that allowed some molested children to not go on to molest other children, unlike the great number of victims of molestation who do become molesters. She found that the most prominent difference distinguishing those molested children who went on to be molesters from those who didn’t was the degree of their recognition of the terribleness of what was done to them. The ones who minimized the injustice and damaging effect (I wasn’t forced, He was nice to me, I enjoyed it, etc.) were much more likely to become molesters. It as if the victim tells himself if what was done to me was not so terrible then it’s alright if I also do it.

**Why only one sibling?**

The most common *evidence* cited to prove that parenting practices are not significant factors in causing adolescents to rebel, is that often only one of many siblings rebels. As one *mechanach* challenged me, if the parents were cold and distant how did they manage to succeed with their other children?

The assumption that parents succeeded with their other children is often based on superficial criteria, for example, the fact that the other children didn’t rebel against *yidishkeit*. It is often the case however, that the other children have also been hurt, but in less obvious ways. Perhaps the other children lack self-confidence or suffer from low self-esteem. Sometimes some of the other children are quite depressed, but not to the point that it is obvious to other people. Even more misleading is when some of the other children become highly functioning perfectionists as a guilt-ridden reaction to constant criticism. What is clear is that one should not assume that the other children were not hurt based on superficial impressions alone. No one ever claimed that errors in parenting have to result in children going *off the derech*. It is only one of many possible negative consequences.

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24 Often eventually resulting in psychosomatic disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder etc. (Sarno, 2006; Sorotzkin, 1985, 1988, 1999a).
Even if it were clear that, in a particular case, the parents were successful in raising their other children, what relevance would that have to the parents’ impact on one particular child’s life? There are cases of undisputed, serious parental abuse where some of the children seem to have survived without major psychological damage. Does that prove that the problems that the other children suffer from were not caused by the abuse? If four people are in a car accident, and one passenger gets hurt while the other three escape unscathed, does that prove that it couldn’t have been the accident that caused the injury?

Parents never treat all their children identically (e.g., boys vs. girls, youngest vs. oldest, etc.) and there can be other external factors unique to one of the siblings (as noted above from Alice Miller) that may make him more immune to the negative impact of parental maltreatment. Likewise, parents sometimes learn from their mistakes with one of their children and therefore are more successful with other children. Based on informal surveys that I have conducted, for example, it seems that the vast majority of parents are significantly less strict with their later children than they were with their oldest children since they learn from experience that being overly rigid and strict is counterproductive. In such a situation, perhaps only the older child would develop a serious problem.

We don’t know what causes the problem

Another common myth is that we don’t know the cause of the problem. In fact, I believe that it is more accurate to say that we rather not know the cause of the problem. This refusal to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth is reminiscent of the study commissioned a few years ago by the secular Jewish establishment to study the problem of assimilation. The published results presented clear evidence that the major factor combating assimilation was an Orthodox Jewish education. Yet the study concluded that assimilation was a complex issue and that they had not been able to ascertain the specific causes of this problem and further study was necessary! A writer in the secular journal Commentary chided the study for ignoring the uncomfortable truth they themselves uncovered.

The assumption [of the intermarriage task force] is that intermarriage is present in every Jewish family; that it appears at random; that all sectors of the community are equally vulnerable. Why are American Jewish leaders disposed to see all-pervading crisis when the data they are drawing upon suggest a number of subpopulations behaving in different ways [with the Orthodox having a substantially smaller percentage of intermarriage]? [Because] distinguishing between core Jews and peripheral ones would imply that some Jews behave in a fashion that is “better” than others. Such judgmentalism goes against the neutrality-seeking culture [so they] banned discussion about the most divisive i.e., most important issues.25

A similar phenomenon can be observed when AIDS activists insist that AIDS can happen to anyone, denying the obvious but uncomfortable reality that - in the vast majority of

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cases - there are limited and specific behaviors that bring about this disease. The well-known columnist, John Leo (2000), describes what happened when a (formally) liberal journalist challenged the notion that AIDS is just as much a threat to heterosexuals as it is to homosexuals, by quoting a researcher who said, "By and large, people who are responsible will not get AIDS."

His statement was met with "outrage and denunciation" for casting doubt on liberal dogma.

When I hear a prominent therapist at a professional conference state that "we have no idea what causes adolescents to go off the derech," and "it can happen in any family," etc., I ask the same question asked by the writer in Commentary. Why are we disposed to see all-pervading crisis when there is clear evidence – for those willing to see it – that, in the vast majority of cases, it is faulty parenting that causes this tragedy? To paraphrase the AIDS researcher (and the mechanech from Bnei Brak cited above); "By and large, parents who act responsibly – by being sensitive and responsive to their children’s emotional needs – will not suffer from rebellious children.

Another version of this myth is that there aren't any natural causes of this problem (e.g., it can happen in the finest family, etc.). Rather the causes are spiritual and/or mystical in nature. To reinforce this view, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon has been quoted (from a Tisha B'Av speech) as describing the current epidemic of rebellious youngsters as a geziera of golus. This has been interpreted by some as suggesting that this tragedy can happen to anyone without natural reasons of cause and effect. Recently, I had an opportunity to ask Rabbi Salomon about his statement. He explained that he did not mean that this tragedy strikes at random, without rhyme or reason. Rather, he meant that the conditions that bring about this problem are the result of the geziera of golus (e.g., the absence of the Beis Hamikdash).

ACKNOWLEDGING CAUSE AND EFFECT vs. ASSIGNING BLAME

The second major objection to attributing the problem of adolescent rebelliousness to parenting factors is that it makes parents feel bad. I find it difficult to comprehend this reasoning. Would we ever consider not telling an ignorant smoker that his habit is endangering his life, for the sake of not hurting his feelings? If parents are not made aware that their approach is contributing to their child’s problem, why should they be motivated to change it? At a recent conference, a mother of a youngster who went off the derech, and is currently abusing drugs, wondered how this tragedy could happen in a beautiful family such as hers. Yet, in the same breath, she noted that her husband still tells their son that he still expects him to be a big talmid chacham and tzadik! Would it not be an act of kindness to at least discuss with these parents the possibility that their excessive expectations may have been a major contributing factor to their son’s troubles?

Most importantly, should we not tell them that if they become more accepting of their son and have realistic expectations of him, they might be able to save him?
It is important to emphasize that acknowledging the role of parents in the development of their children’s emotional difficulties and acting out behaviors is not an issue of moral condemnation or assigning blame. In fact, I wholeheartedly agree with the words of an eminent therapist (Karon, 2000) who spoke of the need to enlist the aid of parents in the treatment of emotionally disturbed patients:

This may seem strange because so many of the therapeutic issues have to do with hurtful experiences concerning their [parents], but typically the destructive parenting experiences have derived from [the] unconscious defenses of the parent. The parents had no conscious knowledge or control of these defenses, and in most cases are very decent people who would never consciously hurt their child. Often they will go to great lengths to help their child... [p. 43]27

There are often circumstances that make it particularly difficult for parents to be appropriately responsive to their children. Wahler and Dumas (1989) identify three factors that can inhibit and distort parental responsiveness; (a) a child with a "difficult" temperament; (b) the nuclear family is a constant source of aversive experiences for the parents; (c) the community setting is a constant source of aversive experiences for the parents. Regardless of the distal cause, it is crucial for parents to realize that, at the proximal level, it is the lack of appropriate responsiveness on their part that causes children to suffer from emotional distress and/or acting out. For example, no one doubts that a child with a strong-willed temperament is a greater challenge for parents than a more compliant child, but it is the parents’ responsiveness to this challenge that will ultimately determine this child’s future. Will his strong-willed nature be channeled by the parents so that it will be used by the child to persevere in difficult undertakings, where others would give up, or will the parents’ punitive over-reaction to his "stubbornness" create a rift in the parent-child relationship so that the stubbornness will be turned against the parents?

When Rav Matisyohu Salomon was asked in a chinuch vaad how to deal with a stubborn child, he responded: "Stubbornness is like a muscle, the more you exercise it the stronger it gets, so try to avoid getting into situations where he will be stubborn."

I also identify with the words of Rav Matisyohu Salomon who after elucidating the underlying psychological causes of lashon horah apologized for pointing out the shortcomings of his readers: "This is the place to apologize that we didn’t come here to uncover the shame and

27 A student in a special education training program for frum teachers shared with me the following email from her instructor to the class. The email clearly expresses my true feelings regarding blaming parents better than I have been able to so I am including it here. "I have a very eye-opening article for you to read on the role of parents in the current crisis of rebellious teens in our community [referring to this article]. After reading and contemplating the article, you will surely appreciate the time you spent on it. Most likely, you will initially be appalled by what you are reading. Your first reaction will be to defend all of those wonderful people you know whose children are for some reason or another not acting the way their parents hoped they would. Calm down, and realize that Dr. Sorotzkin is being very levelheaded. His purpose is NOT to attack parents, or blame them in a disparaging way! He is merely tracing the roots of these problems to deficiencies in the parent-child relationships, which can come about from many different and complex circumstances. But by being blunt and saying what people do not want to hear or believe, he is, in my opinion, bringing us closer to rectification and prevention of this growing problem. This is Dr. Sorotzkin’s only goal."
dishonor of people, chas veshalom. On the contrary, because they are spiritual people who want to improve themselves, therefore we dared to raise this issue in print.\textsuperscript{28}

**THE PRICE WE PAY FOR IGNORING THE ROLE OF PARENTING**

I used to be hesitant to openly attribute adolescent acting out to parental attitudes and behaviors because I was sure that parents would be defensive and reject this approach out of hand. Over time, I began to realize the high price parents were paying in order to avoid the unpleasantness of acknowledging their role in their children’s problems. When therapists collude in avoiding connecting their adolescent patients’ problems to their past history, this encourages the patients to unjustly take full responsibility for their problems, which in turn further lowers their already depressed self-esteem. As a result, the likelihood of recovery is reduced. The parents, for their part, have no reason to work on improving their relationship with their children since it isn’t presented as contributing to the problem. As a result, the problem gets worse.

Some therapists try to have their cake and eat it too\textsuperscript{29} by telling parents that you were not part of the problem, but you are part of the solution.\textsuperscript{30} In other words, they didn’t contribute in any way to the development of their child’s difficulties but they can be helpful in the treatment. The problem I have found with this approach is that it does not allow patients to put their past behind them. It is only when parents acknowledge the hurt that they have inflicted and express regret for it that their children can come to terms with the past and focus on the future.\textsuperscript{29} In addition, taking this step sets an example for children to take responsibility for their actions (see Sorotzkin, 1999b).

My original hesitancy to explore the effect of parenting practices on my patients’ current problem behaviors was also influenced by current treatment models [that] emphasize enhancing current adjustment rather than understanding past events.\textsuperscript{30} However, past events are not merely historical artifacts. Rather, they are events that have created psychological structures (e.g., low self-esteem, and chronic feelings of rejection) that shape current attitudes and behaviors. As Gillman (1986) put it, trauma is an organizer for development. Although whole or part of trauma may be out of awareness, something is embedded in the personality, a focus that draws into it posttraumatic events, to be dealt with over and over again(p. 75). As a result, when I tried to enhance current adjustment without uncovering the underlying psychological structures, it resulted in temporary and superficial improvement, at best.

An analogy I have often used to explain this point is what happens when you drive a car without oil. Eventually the engine burns out (i.e., structural damage). It is no longer sufficient to just add oil. The engine has to be rebuilt. Likewise, when children suffer psychic structural damage from mishandling it is usually not sufficient to start treating them nicely from now on. It

\textsuperscript{28} See Appendix.

\textsuperscript{30} Rosenberg, Drake, & Mueser, 1997, p. 261.
is necessary to undo the damage to the psychic structure, by addressing the hurt from the past in psychotherapy.

A 21 year-old young man had a history of a mild learning disorder and conflict with his father who had always attributed his poor academic performance to laziness and lack of motivation. This young man was struggling with college. His father, who by now realized the unjust nature of his past criticism, assured his son that it would be perfectly acceptable to him if he dropped out of college. Unfortunately, because of the long history of criticism, the son no longer believed his father that he really meant it. He became very anxious worrying that his father would reject him if he left college.

As a result of the above considerations, I began to more directly (albeit, gently) point out to parents how their parenting approach (e.g., being overly critical and negative) directly contributed to their children's problem. To my surprise, I found that the majority of parents were quite receptive if this was presented in a sympathetic and respectful manner. In fact, many of the parents began to admonish me for not getting the word out to other parents. It is mostly in response to their prompting that this paper was written.

There is another reason why I am troubled by the well-meaning effort to spare parents from the painful truth. Why don't we have the same sensitivity and consideration for the children's pain? If we take the attitude that parenting practices is not a significant factor in their children's problems, then the child is left to take full responsibility. In fact, as discussed above, this only reinforces the attitude children already have that it must be their own fault.

I would venture two reasons why we often feel more concern for the pain of the adult perpetrators than that of the child victims. First of all, as adults we identify more closely with other adults. Secondly, if we attribute malicious intent to acting-out children while denying the role of parents, as discussed above, then it is no wonder that we have little sympathy for the children.

RESPONSIBILITY

Some mechanchim fear that attributing children's problem behaviors to parental errors might reduce the youngsters's sense of responsibility. If they don't feel that it is their fault, they won't be motivated to improve.\(^{31}\) This concern is unwarranted. Anyone who has worked closely with these youngsters and has developed an open relationship with them, knows that they are not at all happy with their state, and would give anything to become normal, regardless of the amount of responsibility they assume. The fact that they often act in self-defeating ways is indicative of low self-esteem and lack of confidence (i.e., they see themselves as too-far gone, or too bad to be saved) rather than a lack of caring. Even youngsters who claim that they don't care, are only being defensive about their caring.

\(^{31}\) Here again, there doesn't seem to be a similar concern that the parents take responsibility for what they did wrong.
When adolescent patients insist to me that they don’t care about their dismal state, I ask them the following question. If someone offered you a magic pill that would change you to be like other normal youngsters, would you accept it? I have yet to have a patient turn the offer down. This serves to make it clear to patients that their not caring only reflects their lack of hope for improvement.

As indicated above, many youngsters arrive at the point of rebelliousness after going through a period of perfectionism. They have often taken upon themselves too much responsibility rather than too little. These feelings of responsibility are most often accompanied by feelings of profound shame and relentless and unreasonable guilt. Only after being overwhelmed by these feelings, have they finely given up hope. Helping them become aware of the familial conditions that promoted their rebelliousness is often an important step in their recovery (Sorotzkin, 1996). When patients are helped to express their anger over past parental hurts and when parents make a sincere effort to repair their relationship with their children, it is specifically this process that most often leads to a significantly improved relationship with the parents.

**WORKING WITH PARENTS IN THERAPY**

In my practice, when I speak to parents of rebellious children, I ask direct and often difficult questions. I focus on the early relationship with the child. Were the parents very demanding, critical, or difficult to please? Did the child feel that nothing he or she would do would be enough to please the parent?

It needs to be emphasized that if the clinician merely asks the parents of rebellious youngsters if they had a good relationship with their children, they would most often answer yes, regardless of the true historical nature of the relationship. The clinician needs to ask specific and direct questions.

The following event is typical. A parent who attributed his son’s problem behaviors to school issues, at first claimed that he had a good relationship with his son. It was only after some direct, probing questions that he opened up and admitted to being a very negative person (he saw himself as very similar to his own father in this regard). As he spoke about this problem at length, he was able to actually see how this had impacted negatively on his son. He also resolved to try and repair his relationship with his son. Would I have been kinder to him if I would have spared him this information?

When speaking to youngsters, it is also necessary to ask specific and direct questions regarding their relationship with their parents, since they also tend to repress and/or deny the negative aspects of these relationships. Young, et al. (2001) discuss at length the challenge of ascertaining whether patients suffered maltreatment during their childhood. On the basis of their study, Dill et al. (1991) also concluded that: Data suggest caution in accepting at face value, initial denials of abuse histories (p. 166) - (See my article on Chemical Imbalances). This is

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32 Based on the feedback I get from my referral sources, I am reassured that I do so in a respectful and sensitive manner.
another reason that even experienced clinicians are often convinced that the problem of rebellious adolescents can occur even in a home with the most positive and emotionally supportive parent-child relationships.

Recently, a young adult from a well-known and respected family stated, in our initial conversation that, ŠI didn’t have a particularly hard life.Š Only in response to a series of direct question did he state that there was Šabsolutely no shalom bayis in our house.Š His parents have not spoken to each other in years and live in separate rooms. In his younger years he often observed his father being physically abusive to his mother. Most of his siblings suffer from some form of emotional disorder. Nonetheless he sincerely believed, at some level, that he didn’t have a particularly hard life!

Once the therapist ascertains what it was in the child’s early home environment that made him or her vulnerable to becoming a rebellious teenager, the next step is to help the parents understand this without causing them to be overly defensive. It must be made clear to them that the purpose of this exercise is not to blame them but rather to set the foundation for repairing the relationship with their child and thus reduce the level of his or her problem behaviors.

“Tough love” vs. “gentle love”

Once parents appreciate the harm caused by a negative relationship, they are usually motivated to listen to suggestions on how to develop a positive relationship. Often, it is necessary to first dissuade them from following well-intentioned advice to apply Štough loveŠ treatment. The Štough loveŠ approach seems to me to be the natural consequence of attributing negative intent to children, as discussed below in the ŠParental AttitudesŠ section. These parents will often attribute children’s rebelliousness to the fact that they were Šspoiled.Š Not surprisingly, this is the one parenting mistake that parents have no problem ŠconfessingŠ to. It is especially appealing when a spouse can be blamed for spoiling the child. (It is astonishing and disheartening to hear parents claim that children who have been constantly yelled at and severely criticized were ŠspoiledŠ and have had it Štoo easyŠ just because they had an abundance of material objects).

When parents express concern that my advice may be tainted by secular, liberal influences, I suggest that they may feel more comfortable following the advice provided by the Chazon Ish:

When asked how parents should treat their children who have gone Šoff the derech,Š[the Chazon Ish] responded that they should try to draw them closer with bonds of love and not to push them away. A youth who became a mechalal Shabbos later asked his father to buy him a car. The father agreed with the condition that he promises not to drive on Shabbos. The son refused to promise and tension between father and son rose sharply. The Chazon Ish, however, advised the father to give his son the car without any conditions, because
enhancing their relationship in this way will increase the father's influence on his son. 33

Understand the cause before you discipline

It is important to remember that before one jumps to the conclusion that strict disciplinary measures are necessary, there is a chinuch obligation to investigate the possible causes for the misbehavior. In this regard, I would like to relate an amazing story with Rav Shach:

A yeshiva bochur was caught a number of times being mechalel shabbos in the dormitory. The roshei hayeshiva went to Rav Shach to obtain his approval to expel the bochur from the yeshiva. Rav Shach was very weak and frail in his advanced age. “What is the financial situation at home?” “What is the sholom bayis situation by his parents?” he asked. The roshei hayeshiva were surprised by these questions. “How should we know what is happening in his house?” they asked. Rav Shach became visibly agitated and with great difficulty, he pushed himself up on the table to his full height, and with tears streaming down his face, he yelled at them: Rodfim, gei avek ph (‘Pursuers (the halachik term for a person chasing someone for the purpose of killing him),’ get out of my house!!). “I don’t want to speak to you, you don’t know the home situation, you don’t delve into his personal life, and all you know how to do is to throw him into the street!! The staff hurried to investigate and discovered that the family suffered from extreme poverty and the parents had just recently divorced. [It is worth noting that Rav Shach didn’t assume that this behavior was simply due to the bochur’s yetzer horah, the assumption made by many teachers and parents in such circumstances]. 34

I once had the zechos of being present when Rav Matisyohu Salomon was explaining to parents of a rebellious bochur how their over-control of their son drove him away. He showed them an incredible vort from Rav Shimon Schwab on this issue (see note).  

I suggest to parents that, when it reaches a point where children rebel against the family and its way of life, then they need to show their children that they are more concerned with their feelings than with their behavior. If they can do this, there is a good chance that they can turn the situation around.

Parental attitudes

It is important for the therapist to keep in mind that improving the parent-child relationship is usually not just a matter of improving specific parenting techniques. The problem is more likely to be in the parents’ overall perception of, attitudes and emotional responsiveness toward their children (Wahler & Dumas, 1989; Wahler, 1990, 1997). Some parents, for example, will refuse, on principle, to accommodate a particular child’s likes and dislikes in food by preparing something different for him than the rest of the family. “This is not a restaurant!” they insist. As if treating a child with the courtesy afforded any guest would be unthinkable. Likewise, parents who are particularly negative and critical will obviously react punitively to behaviors that they perceive to be unusually deviant or purposely defiant (e.g., Hechsher taking the easy way out [by being dysfunctional!]; he has to show that he is the boss?). In fact, the parents are actually reacting quite reasonably considering what they perceive. (See Strassberg, 1997 for a fascinating study of the impact of parental attitudes and perceptions on disciplinary patterns).

A patient who had a severe stuttering problem related how he confided to his father about his feelings of terror and shame when speaking in public. His father reacted with criticism, “It is only because of your gadna (haughtiness) that it bothers you”. This father was reacting in a “reasonable” fashion considering what he saw as the obvious reality.

When speaking to parents, the therapist needs to listen closely for parental attitudes that undermine the healthy emotional development of children.
I mentioned to parents of an adolescent patient how a child who feels close to his parents would confide in them if he were troubled by something he did wrong. The mother objected, “If he respected his parents and had consideration for their feelings he wouldn’t burden them with information that would upset them.” One can only imagine that it is not likely that her children would have an open relationship with her.

Genetic factors, chemical imbalances, and child effects

In the ongoing attempts to avoid acknowledging the primary impact of deficient parenting practices on children’s future adjustment problems, many other factors have been suggested as primary factors. Often, parents feel that their children’s difficulties started at a very early age and probably reflect genetic influences. They therefore feel absolved from any responsibility. This attitude is reinforced by the fact that many contemporary clinicians attribute adolescent misbehavior to genetic factors or to a “chemical imbalance” either because they believe this and/or because they prefer a “no-fault” approach. The evidence for these assumptions, however, is tenuous at best and suspect at worst (see the studies cited in my article on “Chemical Imbalances”). Often, there are obvious familial explanations that they fail to uncover or choose to ignore.

Even when genetics does play a role, it does not preclude the importance of understanding the environmental factors. A noted genetic researcher (Mann, 1994) stated in a special issue of Science: “The interaction of genes and environment is much more complicated than the simple ‘violence genes’ and ‘intelligence genes’ touted in the popular press. The same data that show the effects of genes, also point to the enormous influence of non-genetic factors [p. 1687].” (See also Collins et al., 2000)

The following true incident illustrates the overriding impact of parental attitudes, even when dealing with behaviors with a clear genetic base.

[Identical twin] girls were separated in infancy and raised apart by different adoptive parents…. When the twins were two and a half years old, the adoptive mother was asked a variety of questions. Everything was fine with Shauna, she indicated, except for her eating habits. “The girl is impossible. Won’t touch anything I give her. No mashed potatoes, no bananas. Nothing without cinnamon. Everything has to have cinnamon on it. I’m really at my wit’s end with her about this. We fight at every meal. She wants cinnamon on everything!” In the house of the second twin, far away from the first, no eating problem was mentioned at all by the other mother. “Ellen eats well,” she said, adding after a moment: As a matter of fact, as long as I put cinnamon on her food she’ll eat anything.” (Neubauer & Neubauer, 1990, p. 20)

Another variation of the “attribute the cause of the problem to anyone or anything other than the parents” approach is to acknowledge deficient parenting practices, but to blame the
children for it. This is known as the \textit{child effects} (e.g., Lytton, 1990). These children are presumed to have been born with difficult temperaments, which cause their parents to be abusive to them. An early exponent of this approach was the Austrian psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein who died in London in 1960. Grotstein (1983) reports that:

Klein emphasizes the responsibility of the infant for the occurrence of breaks in the bonding [with the mother] and minimizes the responsibility of the mother. [p. 179]

It is certainly true that some children are born with more difficult temperaments and/or temperaments that happen to conflict more with that of the parents. But to lay the responsibility for developing a positive and emotionally healthy relationship on the infant instead of the parents seems to me totally ludicrous! In fact, the well-known posuk in Mishlei (22:6), "Chanoch l'na'ar al pi darko" specifically lays the responsibility on parents and mechanchim to adjust their own personality to the child's temperament and not the reverse! While this can be quite difficult at times (perhaps this is the meaning of \textit{Raza'ar gidul bonim} - Eiruvin, 100b), it is irrational to put the responsibility on the child!

**THE ROLE OF YESHIVOS AND SCHOOLS**

At conferences dealing with adolescents going off the derech, much criticism is heard regarding frum schools and yeshivos. They are criticized for, among other things, not being responsive to the needs of the individual. I find it interesting that therapists are very hesitant to criticize parents yet feel perfectly comfortable criticizing yeshivos. Perhaps, since most clinicians are also parents, they feel more threatened by the thought of parental responsibility. It is my feeling that it is the parents’ responsibility to give their children a sense of individuality while the school’s primary job is to socialize. It is only when parents themselves fail to promote their child’s sense of individuality (as is common with parents who are themselves unusually sensitive to the opinions of others) that the schools socialization process takes place at the expense of the child’s individuality.\footnote{37}

Similarly, when relating to the association between learning disabilities and rebelling adolescents, the tendency is to criticize the schools for not doing enough and for not being sufficiently sensitive to the child’s difficulties. Here again, I feel that parents play a more significant role than the school. When parents are emotionally supportive of their learning disabled children, then the children are better able to deal with the deficiencies of the schools. In fact, the learning difficulties themselves may be a result of emotional difficulties the child is carrying from home.\footnote{38}
It is significantly more painful for children to feel that they have disappointed their parents than to be told that they have disappointed their teacher. Unfortunately, many parents find it difficult to deal with the pressure exerted on them by the school when their child is unable keep up academically. They are unable to serve as a buffer between the school and their child. Instead, they direct their frustration against their child. Likewise, when the parents’ own ego is threatened by their child’s academic difficulties they will often deny the existence of the problem and will refuse the remedial services recommended by the schools.39

While I emphasize the role of the parents in the child's overall emotional health, it should go without saying that mechanchim also play a role in shaping a child's attitudes to school in general and to yidishkeit in particular. To many teens - especially those who either have parents who are less frum, or whose parents are not so close to them - mechanchim can be parent substitutes and they often represent the essence of yidishkeit to their students.40 When mechanchim are insensitive to their student's emotional needs it can undermine or even corrupt their emotional relationship to yidishkeit. Unfortunately, many adults still carry the scars of insensitive and even cruel treatment by mechanchim. This creates a negative association to yidishkeit with many negative repercussions even if it doesn’t result in going off the derech. Most of the observations and suggestions made here for parents are equally applicable to mechanchim and mechanchos.

Mechanchim should (and many do) take advantage of any influence that they have on the parents of their talmidim to encourage them to be more positive, reasonable and emotionally supportive toward their children. The parents need to be informed that according to the Chazon Ish, the Steipler and almost all other gedolim, rebellious children in our generation should be approached in a positive, accepting and non-confrontational manner. 41

It is important for mechanchim, especially those who work with frum youngsters, to realize the role of the parent-child relationship in the youngsters' current difficulties. Mechanchim often see the talmidim's problems as originating exclusively within them (e.g., they are lazy etc.). They believe that you can more readily change someone with a positive approach
than a negative approach, so they are friendlier and more lenient than regular rebbeim, but they don’t get to the root of the problem. The youngsters try to respond to the friendlier approach but their unrecognized and unresolved family issues undermine these efforts. Eventually, the mechanchim become frustrated and they feel that the bochurim are taking advantage of their lenient approach. This can result in a dramatic end to the mechechim’s friendly attitude.

SUMMARY

To conclude, I would like to quote the renowned Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg (2000):

I agree with the educator who said that a child constructs his picture of the world through the experience he has with his mother. According to whether the mother is loving or unloving, the child will feel that the world is loving or unloving. When he is not loved, he fails to learn to love. Such children grow up finding it extremely difficult to understand the meaning of love. Show me the juvenile delinquent and in almost every case I will show you a person resorting to desperate means to attract the emotional warmth and attention he failed to get, but so much wants and needs. Aggressive behavior, when fully understood, is in fact nothing but love frustrated. It is a technique for compelling love, as well as a means for taking revenge on a society that has let the person down, leaving him disillusioned, deserted, and dehumanized. The best way to approach aggressive behavior in children is not by aggressive behavior toward them, but with love. If you find rebels in society today, it is because they were never given proper love. [p. 139]

Recent scientific research has also emphasized the critical role of parenting in preventing mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. In an article titled "The critical role of nurturing environments for promoting human well-being" in a recent issue of American Psychologist, Biglan, Flay, Embry & Sandler (2012) report that:

The recent Institute of Medicine report on prevention noted the substantial interrelationship among mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders and pointed out that, to a great extent, these problems stem from a set of common conditions.

However, despite the evidence, current research and practice continue to deal with the prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders as if they are unrelated and each stems from different conditions.

Psychological and behavioral disorders and related problems co-occur and these problems stem largely from the same conditions.

Biological, behavioral, etiological, and intervention evidence converges on a fairly simple and straightforward principle: If we want to prevent multiple problems and
increase the prevalence of young people who develop successfully, we must increase the prevalence of nurturing environments.

Yet despite the evidence, a disciplinary archipelago impedes progress and obscures the common origins of problems and the potential of comprehensive prevention. Public health practice is similarly fragmented. From federal to local levels, separate agencies deal with mental illness, drug abuse, and crime as if the three had nothing in common. Thus progress proceeds glacially. A new way of thinking would accelerate progress in preventing multiple and costly problems from continuing to plague society. [pp. 257-258]

Without a drastic shift away from a focus on individual problems to a focus on the prevalence of nurturing environments, progress in reducing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders will continue at a glacial pace. [p. 263]

Encouraging parents to take a honest look at how their relationship with their children contributed to their problem behaviors is beneficial both to the children and to the parents. Improving the relationship in a meaningful manner, together with the Zechos of tefilah, is the only way to bring about a lasting change in the child's condition.

APPENDIX

[The following is an edited version of a letter I wrote to a well-known mashgiach regarding some of the issues discussed in this article]  Lechvod HaMashgiach shlit"a:

As a follow up to our phone conversation this past erev Shabbos, I would like to elaborate on one important point.

I fully realize the controversial nature of, my therapeutic approach of (in many cases) encouraging/allowing patients to be aware of the role their parents played in the development of their emotional difficulties and/or behavioral problems.

I did not arrive at this approach because of theories I studied in school. In fact, when I first began practicing, I accepted the current treatment models that emphasize enhancing current adjustment, rather than understanding past events (to quote a well known researcher in 1997). However, I found that this approach was only putting a bandage on the wound. The person remained the same person - even if he could function a little better than before.

I felt that these bochurim - and others - deserved that we therapists actually try to cure them. This required getting to the root of why they almost all had such poor self-images and why they were certain that they were rejects in Hashem’s eyes. With increasing experience, I became convinced that in almost all cases these problems at the root were the result of deficiencies in parenting. However, (1) children are not capable of comprehending these issues, and (2) it is too emotionally painful for children to believe that their parents could be abusive to them and (3) abusive parents are likely to respond viciously to even legitimate complaints by their children. Therefore, even abused children grow up being convinced that they are being treated lovingly and respectfully.
So how does a child explain to himself why he is so unhappy, jealous, obsessive, angry, obsessed with hirhurim, etc.? It must be, the child tells himself, (often the parent tells it to him also), that he is lazy, stupid, defective, a ba'al taivah, etc. Being supportive and encouraging to such a patient will make him feel better for the moment, but it won't cure the underlying deficiency. It is therefore necessary, it seems to me, to help the patient develop a more honest and accurate picture of his early life. The anger that results is indeed disruptive (and upsetting to the parents when they lose the only leverage they ever had, since they never learned how to influence their children through a healthy relationship) but it is also curative.

Another reason is that often these patients have internalized from their parents unhealthy and erroneous attitudes (often under the guise of hashkafah) that feed the low self-esteem, paralyzing self-doubt, etc. In order to change these deeply imbedded cognitions it is, unfortunately, necessary to highlight the negative aspects of the parental attitudes (e.g., illogical, unfair, hypocritical, etc.). If they don't unlearn the unhealthy ideas they were taught growing up, they will continue suffering the negative emotional consequences of those ideas. They are also likely to inflict these ideas on their children even if they try not to raise their children in the way that they were raised. This is another major reason why it is important for maltreated children to be fully aware regarding the mistreatment they suffered at the hands of their parents. If they minimize the negative impact of such practices why should they even try to avoid treating their own children in the same manner?

Many mechanchim who work with troubled teens are very much aware of the role that misguided parenting played in the genesis of a particular child's problems, yet they feel uncomfortable acknowledging this to the child. However, when a person is in the process of becoming a baal teshuva we don't avoid telling him that his parents were wrong about their ideas regarding Judaism. We can explain that they didn't have the opportunity to get a Jewish education, etc. but, bottom line, they have to know that, in this area, their parents were mistaken. Otherwise, how can they be expected to forge a new path in yiddishkeit. Likewise, a child who internalized unhealthy and distorted views of himself and others can only develop healthier perceptions if he understands that what he was taught was wrong.

When parents are cooperative with this approach the end result is a truly close and respectful relationship. If they are not, then tragically, but in my opinion unavoidably, the child will become healthier but more distant from his parent (although the previous close relationship was only an illusion). I feel very strongly that this is the key to truly building the patient into an emotionally healthy oved Hashem who is capable of raising his own children without being abusive.

42 The ArtScroll Yom Kippur Machzor (p. 883) cites the Or Hachaim that a proper understanding of the aveiros of our ancestors is often a prerequisite of teshuvah. Sometimes we accept family or community traditions as a proper way of life because they have always been done and no one was ever punished. Thus we must acknowledge such aveiros of the past.
Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz, one of the foremost, authentic *mekubolim* in Eretz Yisroel today says the following in his *sefer* “Tiv HaTorah:”

[From the way Avrohom Avinu spoke to Yitzchok] we learn that it is important for parents to speak warmly and respectfully to their children. It is not only children who have to respect their parents; parents have to speak to their children in a respectful manner, because by showing them warmth and friendliness they will thus have a greater influence on them. Perhaps it is for this reason that Avrohom had such a great influence on his son Yitzchok.

I do a great deal of work with youngsters who have gone off the derech theif who then [search for happiness] in the larger decadent society. One sees clearly that the main cause of youngsters abandoning their parent’s way of life is because their parents didn’t respect them sufficiently, because the most critical need of the souls of today’s youngsters is to be understood and respected!

We need to realize that our expectations from contemporary youngsters to forgo the pleasures of the decadent culture and to instead totally dedicate themselves to studying Torah that this is equivalent to an *akidah*, and perhaps even more than that. It is only by parents drawing their children close and speaking to them in a friendly and respectful manner can they hope to have significant positive influence on their children.

As for what is said in the name of earlier generations that the *mesorah* is given over to a stick this is certainly not true of our generation, and the reality indicates the complete opposite, i.e., that only with love and respect can one successfully be *mechanach* children today. My mother always said that if the Torah was being given today, the *aseres hadibros* would say that parents should respect their children.

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz, *Sefer Tiv HaShidduchim*: Hagoan Rav Shmuel Rozovsky said to one father: “Instead of looking for a good husband for your daughter, I see that you are looking for a prestigious son-in-law for your self.” [Regarding a *bochur* who is self-centered] - later in life he will have difficulty getting along with his wife and children because he will compel them to act in ways that suit his need for control and his pride and not based on their true needs. Why is it that in recent times we see deterioration in respect for parents? I believe that the root of the problem lies in the heart of the parents. If we reflect upon the true motivation of many parents to have children, we will find, in many cases, that it isn’t a desire to care for a child.
needs but rather to fulfill their own needs. They want to be parents, but you can’t be a parent without having children so they have childrenâ€”The child subconsciously feels that his father didn’t really want him and he only serves as a means for his father to be a father and therefore he starts disrespecting himâ€”

References


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