

We Let Them Learn

When pushing our children brought the wrong results, we tried an approach that respected their agency.

BY LAVERD AND FLORA JOHN*

In our old age we more fully understand the joyous blessings that come through parenthood. During our early years as parents, we behaved as if our children had been born *to* us—to have, to hold, and to mold. It was so easy to tell them what to say



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY, POSED BY MODELS

Pushing our children can generate feelings of resentment and resistance. We let our children learn by working with them or allowing them to do their assignments on their own.

and do, and if our directions were correct, we shared part of the credit for their successes. Eventually, we learned that pushing them—“do your homework,” “clean your room,” “do the dishes,” “take out the garbage,” “mow the lawn,” and so on—generated feelings of resentment and resistance.

Leading Instead of Pushing

The day our family home evening lesson included the scripture “let every man learn his duty” (D&C 107:99), our eyes were opened, and our approach changed. To *let them learn*, we had to acknowledge that our children had been born *through* us with agency and the potential to unfold. We needed to develop greater self-discipline. We had already learned that the buds on our rose bushes would unfold into beautiful blossoms if we planted them in ample sunlight, kept them free from weeds, appropriately nourished them, and carefully trimmed them. So we began arranging situations for our children where they could unfold on their own. While this approach may not be equally successful with all children or in every situation, it proved to be effective in our family.

We began by working *with* our children as we led them into each assignment. “Do you need help with your homework?” “Do you have time to help us make the beds?” “We need some help in the yard.” This fulfilled their strong internal need to be needed. In addition, our leading moved them into action, which made it possible

for us to effectively guide them. Our former pushing approach was often a futile attempt to guide them while they were stopped. After we had established a routine, we generally withdrew and let them do the assignments on their own. In a short time, each of us was doing whatever needed to be done without being assigned to do it. In this way we were able to complete the household chores on weekdays and were able to enjoy a chore-free Saturday.

Why We Go to Church

The *let them learn* concept helped us when Rose Marie, our 11-year-old, asked, “Do I have to go to church today?”

Our first impulse was to say, “Yes, you do!” But we quickly regained control and

let her learn by saying, “We can’t answer that question.”

“Why can’t you?” she asked.

“If we say you have to go, you may go, but with a negative attitude toward learning. If we say you don’t have to go, you may stay home, and then the responsibility is ours. We lose either way. So you will have to decide whether or not to go.”

She pleaded: “Then can you tell me why you’re going? I don’t understand why it’s important to go.”

This question we could answer. We explained that six days each week are ours to do what we need to do or want to do. The Lord has reserved one day each week. On the Lord’s day we rest from our six days of labor, give thanks to the Lord, and learn what He wants us to know and do. When we meet with others to worship the Lord, His Spirit is present (see Matthew 18:20). In addition, during sacrament meeting we have an opportunity to review our actions of the past week, correct any mistakes we have made in keeping our promises to the Lord, partake of the sacrament, and renew our covenants with Him. By making these corrections and renewing our covenants, we lift ourselves to a higher level of righteousness. The Lord promises if we keep the Sabbath day holy, with thanksgiving and



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. Lay a piece of string on a table and push one end with your finger. Does it go in the direction you want it to go? Now pull the string with your fingers. Does it go where you want it to go? Use this object lesson to introduce the principles taught in the “Leading Instead of Pushing” section of the article.

2. After reviewing the “Financial Accountability” section, have each family member plan an activity using a limited budget. List in detail how the money is to be spent. As a family, choose the best activity and enjoy it together.

a cheerful heart and countenance, the fulness of the earth is ours (see D&C 59:15–17). These are the main reasons we attend our meetings on the Lord’s day.

Our explanation *let her learn* the appropriate answer to her question. Her response was, “I want to go to church with you.”

Financial Accountability

Letting our children learn helped us cope with the never-ending challenge of providing for their financial needs. As they got older they needed money almost every day for one reason or another. We studied, pondered, and prayed for help in developing a plan that would *let them learn* how to budget their own finances. During a family council we were prompted to estimate the basic financial needs of each child for one year, divide that number into 12 equal payments, and give that amount to each child at the beginning of each month. We agreed they would pay tithing on their share of the family income; pay for school lunches, books, and other school-related needs; save enough to buy clothing; save some for special events; and allocate some for recreation. We would budget for home expenses, family events, and any help they might need with unexpected expenses.

Their response was enthusiastic. “This is a good idea! We will learn to pay our tithing, budget for our own needs, eliminate the need to ask you for every penny, and it will probably cost you less than you are spending now.”

A few months into the plan, Janene, who was attending junior high school, brought her budget to our family council. She had recorded every item she had purchased, including 25 cents for an ice cream cone. Her careful accounting easily convinced us she needed an increase.

The Blessings

We savored every experience as we let our children learn the warm feelings of satisfaction and the unbelievable blessings that come from keeping the Sabbath day holy, paying tithing, budgeting money, cooking meals, cleaning the house, keeping the yard in good shape, and belonging to a supportive eternal family.

Other experiences pale when compared to the experiences we have shared with our children. The simple phrase *let them learn* brought incredible blessings of satisfaction, joy, peace, and love into our lives. ■

** Author Flora Jobn has passed away since writing this article.*

Letting children learn and keep the principles of the gospel can yield marvelous blessings of peace, joy, and happiness.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH

