

## Have You Let Your Child Be Naughty Today?

“He kept flicking the light switch on and off. It was driving me nuts so I sent him to his room.”

“We were having a nice quiet picnic by the river, and she kept swinging her knife around like she was conducting an orchestra. The more I told her to stop, the more she did it.”

“I found out that he lied about where he was. He told me he was at his friend’s but they went to another friend’s to watch a movie. I will not tolerate lies.”

“I can’t let my children out of my sight because something will happen when I’m not there, I just know it.”

Do you find yourself a nervous wreck when your children are acting up, acting their age, or demanding more independence? Can you let go as your children grow up or do you clutch at the thought of what could happen if...?

Remember what it was like to be a child and be careful not to set rules that cannot be broken without fear of harsh punishment. Give your children room to be naughty once in awhile.

Remember doing something you knew your mother or father would disapprove of? Jumping over the back fence and sneaking into the neighbors yard? Staying out with friends knowing you were going to be late but risking anyway? Snatching a cookie from the store? Telling your parents you were one place and going to another? Maybe even letting your grades drop for a year or two just to see what would happen?

Please understand, I am not advocating irresponsible behavior and turning your children out to the streets. But I *am* advocating lightening up if you catch yourself focusing intently on every little thing your children are doing, fearing where it will lead, and reacting harshly. We have a new term for that now—helicopter parenting. When we hover and watch our children like little science projects, we tend to make mountains out of molehills adding unneeded pressure to their lives.

Were you carefully scrutinized as a child, paid little attention, or somewhere in between? Never allowed to take overnights with friends or go on school trips, allowed to wander the town anytime day or night? Or somewhere in between? It’s that in between

place where children feel loved and cared for, yet trusted to right their wrongs and make amends for their mistakes. Where missing a curfew is not acceptable but is also not punished with severe groundings. Lightening up means coming from a mindset of understanding that children want what they want. They probably do not mean to be disrespectful, disobedient, or defiant. But that often results when we interpret their behavior that way.

Mischievous behavior likely won't hurt anyone, and it might teach your child how to deal with uncomfortable situations. If she breaks the neighbor's window with a baseball, she will need to talk to the neighbor and pay for a new window. She will have her own embarrassment for a most important lesson. But she won't learn anything constructive from your fury, embarrassment, grounding, withdrawal of privileges or judgments of her character.

Do we want our children to grow up willing and able to take risks, to develop an internal sense of right and wrong, or do we want them to be dependent on external authority to tell them what they can and cannot do? Do we want them to develop self-confidence or to always fear what someone else will think of them? Sometimes disobeying the rules helps to build conscience.

Please note that this advice is not meant for those children heading toward serious trouble or for the parent who is in danger of not providing enough limits and structure. This advice is meant for the parents of generally good kids and especially of very good kids. Maintain your standards, let your children know what you expect, but make room for error without harsh reproof. Keep your rules, just don't expect them to be followed diligently and cheerfully 100% of the time. If you expect mischievousness, you can calmly correct without losing it when it happens. We want our children to learn that mistakes are acceptable and that taking risks builds courage. Children of super-vigilant parents are more likely to take dangerous risks when they are out from under.

In these dog-days of summer, see if you can step back and observe. Your children are probably more capable of responsible behavior than you think. Choose your battles, let the small stuff go, turn your head now and then, and let your children be a little bit naughty. You may find you'll enjoy parenting a little more.

