

currencies for a child,” he adds, “is the parents’ acceptance and approval.”

Likewise, Jo Frost of “Supernanny,” in her book of the same name, says, “The best rewards are attention, praise and love,” and these should be held back “when the child behaves badly until she says she is sorry,” at which point the love is turned back on.

Conditional parenting isn’t limited to old-school authoritarians (独裁主义者). Some people who wouldn’t dream of spanking (一顿揍) choose instead to discipline their young children by forcibly isolating them, a tactic (策略) we prefer to call “time out”. Conversely, “positive reinforcement” teaches children that they are loved, and lovable, only when they do whatever we decide is a “good job”.

This raises the intriguing (引人入胜的) possibility that the problem with praise isn’t that it is done the wrong way — or handed out too easily, as social conservatives insist. Rather, it might be just another method of control, analogous (相似的) to punishment. The primary message of all types of conditional parenting is that children must earn a parent’s love. A steady diet of that, Rogers warned, and children might eventually need a therapist to provide the unconditional acceptance they didn’t get when it counted.

But was Rogers right? Before we toss out mainstream discipline, it would be nice to have some evidence. And now we do.

In 2004, two Israeli researchers, Avi Assor and Guy Roth, joined Edward L. Deci, a leading American expert on the psychology of motivation, in asking more than 100 college students whether the love they had received from their parents had seemed to depend on whether they had succeeded in school, practiced hard for sports, been considerate toward others or suppressed emotions like anger and fear.

It turned out that children who received conditional approval were indeed somewhat more likely to act as the parent wanted. But compliance (顺从) came at a steep price. First, these children tended to resent and dislike their parents. Second, they were likely to say that the way they acted was often due more to a “strong internal pressure” than to “a real sense of choice.” Moreover, their happiness after succeeding at something was usually short-lived, and they often felt guilty or ashamed.

In a companion study, Dr. Assor and his colleagues interviewed mothers of grown children. With this generation, too, conditional parenting proved damaging. Those mothers who, as children, sensed that they were loved only when they lived up to their parents’ expectations now felt less worthy as adults. Yet despite the negative effects, these mothers were more likely to use conditional affection with their own children.

This July, the same researchers, now joined by two of Dr. Deci’s colleagues at the University of Rochester, published two replications (复现) and extensions of the 2004 study. This time the subjects were ninth graders, and this time giving more approval when children did what parents wanted was carefully distinguished from giving less when they did not.

The studies found that both positive and negative conditional parenting were harmful, but in slightly different ways. The positive kind sometimes succeeded in getting children to work harder on

academic tasks, but at the cost of unhealthy feelings of “internal compulsion.” Negative conditional parenting didn’t even work in the short run; it just increased the teenagers’ negative feelings about their parents.

What these and other studies tell us, if we’re able to hear the news, is that praising children for doing something right isn’t a meaningful alternative to pulling back or punishing when they do something wrong. Both are examples of conditional parenting, and both are counterproductive (产生相反的结果的).

The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who readily acknowledged that the version of negative conditional parenting known as time-out can cause “deep feelings of anxiety”, nevertheless upheld it for that very reason. “When our words are not enough,” he said, “the threat of the withdrawal of our love and affection is the only sound method to impress on him that he had better conform (遵从) to our request.”

But the data suggest that love withdrawal isn’t particularly effective at getting compliance, much less at promoting moral development. Even if we did succeed in making children obey us, though — say, by using positive reinforcement — is obedience worth the possible long-term psychological harm? Should parental love be used as a tool for controlling children? (918 words)

### ⇒ *Statements*

- \_\_\_ 1. The psychologist Carl Rogers suggested that we should love our children for who they are, not for what they do.
- \_\_\_ 2. In conditional parenting, the parents’ affection is either turned up or withheld, depending on whether the children behave themselves or not.
- \_\_\_ 3. “Time out” is physical punishment used by parents to discipline their children.
- \_\_\_ 4. All types of conditional parenting deliver to children the primary message that they are loved for whatever they do.
- \_\_\_ 5. The 2004 study revealed that conditional approval had negative effects on children.
- \_\_\_ 6. In the companion study, researchers found that mothers who had received conditional parenting refused to use conditional affection with their own children.
- \_\_\_ 7. 120 ninth graders became the subjects in the two replications and extensions of the 2004 study.
- \_\_\_ 8. According to the studies, positive conditional parenting may result in the unhealthy feelings of “internal compulsion” despite its possible benefits.
- \_\_\_ 9. The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim criticized “time-out”, because it did no good to children.
- \_\_\_ 10. Data suggest that love withdrawal works effectively to help parents gain children’s obedience as well as promote their moral development.

### ◀ Passage 2 ▶ Parenting for a Better World

A few years ago I was speaking to a friend who had just had a vasectomy (输精管切除术). I asked him why he took such a drastic measure and he indicated that, “He just couldn’t bring another child into this world; it’s just a horrible place.”

When pressed he elaborated, “The wars, violence, dishonesty, look at the news every night, I just couldn’t do it.” He then asked me if my wife and I were planning to have more than the three children we had at the time. I told him yes. Then I told him that I agreed that the world was sometimes very unpleasant, but that I could not think of a better way to improve the world than to bring perfect, innocent children into the world and raise them up to be the kind of people that would have a positive impact on the world. Granted, this is a tall order. Especially now, some 10 years since that discussion took place, with the world in a seemingly worse state, new forms of media telling our children what they should look like and act like.

As a parent, I feel it is my responsibility to raise my children up so that they can think for themselves. To teach them right from wrong. To help them know that they can make a difference by being a good person, and by being willing to stand up for what they believe to be true. I can also teach them how to be polite, to treat others as they would have others treat them. I can teach them how to be compassionate (有同情心的) and how to serve their fellow men. I can teach them how to serve their community and their country. Not only can I teach them these things, but also I must teach them these things.

The old phrase, “Actions speak louder than words” is very relevant to my ability as a parent to do this teaching. I am always reminding my older children, that no matter what, they are an example to their younger brothers and sisters. Their choice is to either be a good example or a bad example. As I am reminding my children of this, I think about whether I am being a good or bad example at that moment, or what I was being earlier in the day.

My Father taught me many important lessons while I was growing up; in particular, he taught me the value of “Acting” rather than “Re-acting”. In today’s vernacular (通俗语), he would have told me to be “Pro-active.” Thinking about this while I was growing up, and still today, helps me weather the trials and challenges I face. This was like “teaching me to fish” rather than “feeding me for a day”. Instilling (灌输) these fundamental values and virtues in our children is our challenge and opportunity. If we can accomplish this, if we can help our children set a course that will lead them to being caring, compassionate, thinking, acting individuals this world will be a better place, and it will continue to get better as they instill their values and virtues in their children, and on and on.

Parenting is the most “activist” thing that I or any of us can do. For us to have the kind of impact I have been describing, we must realize that parenting is what we are doing 24 hours a day. It is not something that we do when we get home from work, or on the weekends. Once you are a parent you are constantly teaching by your example. In all aspects of our life, our actions teach our children, religions, work, home, leisure. The choices we make minute-to-minute will translate into behaviors in our children. What an awesome responsibility, and what a wonderful opportunity.

I truly believe that I can make the world a better place by being a good parent. I believe that all parents can make the world a better place. Think about your priorities, think about your choices, think about the kind of example you are setting for your children. If you determine, as I have, that you really do have an impact, make sure that the choices you are making will have the result that you sincerely desire.

(737 words)