

Man was created for social intercourse, but social intercourse cannot be maintained without a sense of justice; then man must have been created with a sense of justice.

--Thomas Jefferson

Principle Thirteen

FAMILY HARMONY IS ENHANCED BY ESTABLISHED RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All around us we observe the marvelous laws of nature in action. There are--laws of health, laws of gardening, laws of baking, laws of mathematics. In wisdom we accept these laws and live within their boundaries; they in turn create an environment that is safe and predictable. Man-made laws or rules also contribute to the safety and security of all. Imagine what would happen if there were no rules to the game of football, or if decisions and judgments were left to the roar of the crowd. Chaos, anger, and frustration would result!

In sports, written rules--agreed upon by both teams--establish fairness and justice. Without the squabbling over what is fair and who is right the participants are free to exercise their athletic skills. The family has the same need for just and established laws, and yet, we often run our families on whim and impulse--causing headaches, stress, and anxiety for both parent and child. John Adams said, "No man will contend that a nation can be free that is not governed by fixed laws. All other government than that of permanent known laws is the government of mere will and pleasure."

Law and order contributes to the harmony in sports, society, and the family. Parents who govern by law and principle are free from the stress of constant decision-making. Children who are governed by

law and principle are free from parent's arbitrary rule. Both benefit. Aristotle said, "Even the best of men in authority are liable to be corrupted by passion. We may conclude then that the law is reason without passion, and it is therefore preferable to any individual."

There is a saying attributed to lawyers, but it could be said equally by parents:

When I have reason on my side, I use reason.

When I have the law on my side, I use the law.

When I have neither, I yell damn loud.

Parents who have reason on their side seldom have to yell, for principles that establish justice themselves command respect and compliance. The parent rarely needs to say, "Because I said so," the principle itself says, "It is right."

Parents who govern by written law do so with confidence: "We have already decided on that issue. . . . You know our family rules. . . . We strive to develop our talents in our family; that's why you need to practice the violin. . . . You know there is a rule about talking too long on the phone. . . . In our family we don't take each other's clothes without asking. . . . The rule is: if you don't care for your bike, it gets locked up."

Children have an innate respect for law, order and justice. If you listen to them playing on the school playground, you will hear such comments as "You're breaking the rules. . . . We're not supposed to leave the school grounds during lunch--it's a rule. . . . You're not playing by the rules."

One day a friend came to play with Adam, who was then about six-years of age. As they were playing in the sandbox, his friend began to use foul language. Adam said, "You can't talk like that while you're at our home. We have a family rule against using those words." His friend responded, "Oh, I didn't know. O.K., I won't use those words."

Children have a right and need to grow up in an orderly and predictable environment--knowing the rules will be the same tomorrow as they were today. And yet, there is a tendency in all parents--because they are human--to be subject to mood swings that

cause an anything-goes attitude one minute to nothing-goes the next. So it is in the best interest, of both parent and child, to establish a bill of rights, responsibilities, and rules in the clear light of day, when reason--rather than passion--is at the helm. Clear-cut definitions of parent's rights and child's rights protect the rights of all, and create and environment of order, enhancing goodwill and freedom.

John Locke wrote, "The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all the states of created beings, capable laws, where there is no law there is no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others, which cannot be when there is not law."

As an example, when the first wave of Sorensen children became teenagers, I believed and feared that I would have to endure the popular and abrasive rock music. I somehow had the idea planted into my mind that it was their right to listen to whatever music they chose--however loud, however, degrading to the spirit of the home. There were times when I wanted to walk out in order to restore peace of mind!

Then I heard the expression, "Your children live with you; you don't live with your children." This simple statement--logical and reasonable--sparked other conclusions in my mind, helping me to see the error of my thinking. "That's right!" I said to myself, "This is my home--I'm the parent around here--I wouldn't let them bring obscene posters into my home, and yet, I've allowed them to play obscene music. If I don't parent, no one else will!

I realized, with this weapon of truth, that I had the right to control the music in my home. I explained to the children, "When you have your own home you will be able to choose the music, but while you are in this home, we must be able to agree on the type of music played. If we cannot agree, it is my choice, because it is my home."

I expected that they would demand equal representation, equal time, equal rights, but after a few complaints everyone calmed down. The first few days were difficult, but I stood my ground, confident in my position--in time the rule settled in. The beauty of instilling right and reasonable law is that children will sense their rightness and inwardly agree to them--even if they outwardly oppose--and once

they are firmly cemented in family thought, they seem to enforce themselves. Occasionally a teenage friend will begin to play offensive music, but before I need to speak out, one of our children will announce, "You'd better turn that off; we don't listen to that kind of music in our home." If one of our children breaks the rule, I merely say, "Mutually agreeable music," and they understand and comply. We are not offended by all rock music; in fact it is often the stimulus for the family gathering together to dance. We do, however, screen music that is morally degrading.

Rights and Responsibilities

The establishment of rights in family or society can be compared to the foundation of a building. From these rights, responsibilities are derived, and from responsibilities, rules are formed. Examples of rights and corresponding responsibilities that can be incorporated into home government are as follows:

Parental Rights:

1. To govern, by divine decree, in their own kingdom (home).
2. To have privacy of person and possessions.
3. To have family members participate in the care, maintenance, and activities of the home.
4. To be treated with kindness and respect.

Parental Responsibilities:

1. To govern according to the steward principle.
2. To provide clothing, food, and other material support for the care of young children.
3. To organize, fairly, the tasks of the home.
4. To treat spouse and children with kindness and respect.

Children's Rights

1. To have the teaching, direction and counsel of parents.
2. To have food, clothing, housing, and health expenses (young children).
3. To be safe in person and possessions.
4. To use and enjoy the family resources: home, yard, tools, etc. (if child is not abusive).
5. To enjoy a peaceful, loving home.
6. To progress toward self-reliance and independence.

Children's Responsibilities

1. To follow the direction of parents.
2. To not waste food or clothing, to assist in the preparation and clean up of meals, and to strive to maintain physical health.
3. To protect the well-being and possessions of others.
4. To preserve and assist in the maintenance of family resources.
5. To contribute to the harmony and spirit of the home.
6. To progress toward self-reliance and independence.

Governing By Right Reason Promotes Confidence and Obedience

While some of these rights and responsibilities of both parent and child are self-explanatory, others require further explanation.

1. Safety of person indicates that family members have the right to their well-being. This means that no one has a right to demean or trample upon another, either emotionally or physically.

2. Safety of possessions suggests that each family member--including the little ones--have the right to own and control their own property. When little ones are forced to share they become even more anxious about their possessions--and, therefore, more reluctant

to share. Children, who are given the right to ownership, are more likely willing to share.

However, if children abuse the right to ownership--such as leaving their toys out in the rain, it is the right of the parent to remove the toy (for the protection of the toy) until it is properly maintained.

3. While children have a right to food, clothing, and medical expenses, they do not have the right to abuse these privileges. For instance, if children indulge in sweets that cause cavities, they will be expected to assist in the cost of dental care. If children want the higher priced shoes or clothing, they should be required to pay the difference in cost by doing extra chores around the house.

4. Within a home there are personal possessions and family possessions. There are personal tasks in the maintenance of personal possessions and family tasks in the maintenance of family possessions. While, technically, the home and grounds are the private property of parents, they are enjoyed by all, and therefore, should be maintained by all. The preparation of a meal for one person should be cleaned up by that person; the preparation of a family meal should be cleaned up by the family. In our home we have the tradition; the person who assists in the meal preparation is exempt from the clean up. The emphasis being that the family is a team--enjoying team privileges and sharing team responsibilities.

5. Children have the right to live in a peaceful and harmonious environment that promotes emotional and spiritual well being, likewise, they have the corresponding obligation to sustain this type of environment. Children who are irritable or disagreeable can be excused to rest in their room. One of our children would become terribly irritable when tired. I would say, "You need to go to your room to rest." He would often counter, "But I'm not tired." I would respond, "Emotionally, you are; now go and rest in your room for an hour." After his rest, he would return with a changed nature. Older children are asked to go for a walk until they are "themselves" again.

6. Little children naturally seek to progress and become self-reliant. Watch a little babe strive with all his might, mind and strength to grasp, to pull up, to crawl, to walk, and then to run. The fulfillment of this drive provides the child with great satisfaction and self esteem. Wise parents recognize the child's need to grow toward independence and, therefore, promote self-reliance. A mother once said, "You should never do anything for your children that they can do for themselves." I thought to myself, "What? Isn't it the parent's responsibility to do everything for the child?"

I came to realize the wisdom of her statement. Parents who do for a child what that child can do for himself contribute to weakness.

As an example; I would wash, fold, and put away my fourteen-year-old's clothes, only to find the same clothes--having never been worn--back in the dirty clothes hamper a few days later. Then and there, I laid down the law. Henceforth and forever, this child would do his own laundry.

A couple days later, while walking to his room with a load of clothes, he said, "You know, Mom, when you did my laundry I didn't really appreciate it very much; clean clothes just seemed to happen. I really like taking care of my own clothes. Now I know exactly where they are. Besides, it's kinda fun."

My service had been, in fact, a disservice. I was fostering ingratitude, weakness, and dependency. On this subject, Benjamin Franklin said: "Compassion which breeds debilitating dependency and weakness is counter productive. Compassion, which blunts the desire or necessity to work for a living, is counter productive. Compassion which smothers the instinct to strive and excel is counter productive."

7. In the area of finance: children learn and grow to become self-reliant by first earning money for wants, then needs. Of course a three-year-old cannot earn enough money to provide for his needs, but he can experience the elation of earning a quarter to buy an ice cream cone. An older child, earning money on a regular basis, could purchase personal wants, and needs, and in time contribute to the family budget.

8. Parents often will stand firm on the protection of their child's rights, yet submit to infringement of their own rights. They frequently recoil and retreat when made to feel stingy or selfish. Children need to learn that parents have rights too--the right to privacy, right to their own pursuits and possessions. Older children often expect the free use of clothes, money, and the car; younger children expect the free use of parent's time. Perhaps this is not so much a sign of covetness as of closeness, but in any case, it is important that parents enforce the same standards of privacy for themselves as they do for their children. Children cannot expect free rein of a parent's belongings, neither should they expect free rein of a parent's time.

It is not wrong, selfish, or immoral to maintain and enforce personal rights. In fact, children who live in a home in which parents respect themselves are taught: parents are respectable.

Principles In Practice

Since the most effective way to understand and implement the concepts of rights, privileges, and responsibilities is in their application, I have extended the "principles in practice" to amplify these concepts.

The family consists of parents and three adult children who still reside at home. Two sons have purchased a boat.

Son: "Mother, there is no place to keep the boat except in the garage. If we leave it out, the finish will be ruined. So can we keep it in the garage?"

Mother: "The garage holds only two cars--your father's and mine. So there is no room for your boat. I suggest you buy a cover for it and park it beside the garage."

While children may enjoy the privilege of using the home, they do not have the rights of ownership--which belong to the parents. Parents do not need to feel stingy or uncomfortable about asserting their rights; in so doing they teach the value of rights for all.

A teenager persists in neglecting to clean his room.

Parent: "Be sure to have your room cleaned before breakfast."

Child: "It's my room and I like it this way."

Parent: "You may like it messy, but the rest of the family have the right to live in a neat, orderly home."

Child: "But it's my room. I ought to be able to keep it anyway that I want."

Parent: "No, you may enjoy the privileges of the room, but you do not own it. It is a part of the house, which your mom and dad own. Have it cleaned before breakfast."

Some children would not be motivated by breakfast, but they would be motivated by being put on restriction. Others need a parent to work by their side. "O.K., let's get to it. I'll pick up the things on this side of the room, you start on the other side." I've had many great conversations while helping a child clean their room. The key to avoiding chaos is to be consistent. (One time I discovered almost all the lost socks in my nine-year-old's closet--over forty pairs.) Children sometimes just need help getting started--that which is in motion tends to stay in motion.

One teacher provides the initial energy by dumping everything out of the child's desk.

Back to the under girding principle: While children enjoy the privileges of the room, they do not have the right to abuse that privilege. Ownership implies an investment of time and energy--of which only parents have invested.

Child (age eight): "Shut up, Amy, you stupid head!"

Parent: "We don't talk that way in our home."

Child: "You mean we don't have freedom of speech?"

Parent: "Some words take away the freedom of others, and their right to a peaceful home."

Children and parents have a right to an environment where they are not physically or emotionally abused. They also have the corresponding responsibility to contribute to a harmonious environment. When one violates the rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the idea of natural consequences applies: the consequence is to be alone.

Child (age ten): "It's not fair. My friends don't have to practice the piano every day."

Parent: "That's because your friends live in a different family. Different families have different rules. In our family we develop our talents, and you sure have a talent for the piano."

Parents have the right to govern in their own home, so they need not feel threatened by a child's constant pleas, "My friends don't have to . . ." Parents, in their maturity, have a vision that children in their immaturity cannot possibly have, therefore, parents have the right and responsibility to share that vision. Last year we had to remind Anna, our sixteen-year-old to practice the piano. She would complain, "I don't want to take piano lessons; I don't want to practice. I don't like

the piano anymore.” This year, she loves it and often will play for over an hour a day in sweet solitude.

While the family is traveling to their vacation spot, the teenage son turns up his radio with loud rock music.

Parent: I realize you want to listen to your music, but I want to listen to silence, so you’ll have to turn the volume down so that only you can hear it.”

Parents have the right to control the environment. Often teenagers will want to debate the issue, “This is great music. What’s wrong with this music?” It is unwise, however, to become entangled in arguments of opinion because arguments of opinion cannot be resolved. The key point is that parent’s ownership, and right to control the environment, trumps all others; sliding into an argument of opinion merely weakens their position.

Child (age fourteen): “My friend Tom wants me to go to the movie with him on Friday night. Can I go?”

Parent: “Sure, if it’s a good movie, your chores are done, and you earn the money.”

Child: “I can’t earn the money. It’s only two dollars; why can’t you pay?”

Parent: “Because I don’t want to take away the great satisfaction that comes from earning your own way. You can wash the car, and if you do a great job I’ll pay you five dollars.”

Children do not always understand their need to progress toward self-reliance, but parents realize that it is the very key to confidence

and self-esteem. So although children may be inclined to lean on parents-- emotionally, physically and financially--it is the parent's responsibility to guide the child toward independence. Baby birds being pushed out of the nest might question their mother's intent, but understanding comes when they freely soar through the air.

Child (age eighteen): "I need some money to buy clothes."

Parent: "Well, do you want me to hire you, or lend you some money? If I lend it to you, I'll need you to pay it back by next Friday."

Adult children have the right and the responsibility to attain full financial independence, except in exceptional cases, such as school. Parents, fully aware of the child's need for self-reliance, will calmly, but assuredly assist the child towards that goal; never allowing themselves to feel guilty or intimidated by those who choose to give their child a new car for graduation from high school, a vacation around the world upon college graduation, and a fully-furnished house when the child marries. Different families have different goals, but, when parents contribute knowingly to the dependence and weakness of their children, they do so at the sacrifice of the children's self-esteem.

Parent: "I've listed the chores on the refrigerator."

Child (age eleven): "I don't see why I have to clean the garage; I never use it."

Parent: "In our home we take care of our own rooms, we also maintain other parts of the house."

Children have a right to enjoy the resources of the family--house, yard--and should have the corresponding responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of those resources.

A six-year-old is having a birthday party. He has just finished opening his presents and all the children are sitting around the table.

Mother: "Johnny, let's show the children how thankful we are for the presents by letting everyone play with one of them.

Child: "I don't want them to play with my toys."

Mother: "Don't be selfish and rude in front of your friends. Pass them out, this minute!"

Forcing a child to share violates the child's right to control his own property. Parents may encourage, but not demand. One might object, "But if I don't make Johnny, he will never learn to share." The answer: There can be no forced charity. Being forced to share one's belongings makes the child even more reluctant to share. When he has confidence that what is his is his, then he will feel free to share, knowing that his belongings will be returned. The desire to share, give, and serve comes not by mandate, but from a caring heart and freedom of choice. Once again, forced charity is not charity but merely compliance to authority.

Child (age twelve): "Can I spend the night with my friend, Sally. She already asked her Mother."

Parent: "Let me think about it."

(later) "I've decided you cannot spend the night, but after your chores are done on Saturday, you're welcome to invite her over."

Child: "But that's not fair. You usually let me spend the night on Friday night. Why can't I this time?"

Parent: "For some reason I just don't feel good about it."

Parents, as stewards, have a divine right to receive inspiration, impressions, or just plain hunches regarding their children. At such times, they stand like a policeman directing traffic--they supersede tradition, common practice, or the usual law.

Children whose parents govern for the most part by right reason are more likely to submit to occasional rule by authority, for they will be confident that their parents prefer to govern by precept, but understand that they yield to impression.

However, parents who only use their position of authority--ruling without principle--will likely confront opposition. Children sense that there are principles of right reason for governing.

Teenage girl: "Why am I the only one who has to wait until sixteen to date? All my friends have been dating since they were thirteen."

Mother: "It's important to be mature enough to handle certain dating situations. In our family we have set the age as sixteen, other families make other rules."

Girl: "Well, I think it's a dumb rule. I'm mature enough to date, so I think the rule ought to be changed. Why can't you make exceptions when you see that someone is different than most fourteen-year-olds?"

Mother: "This is one rule that your father and I feel should be maintained regardless of the individual."

Girl: "Well, that's a dictatorship if I ever heard one."

Mother: "If I thought it would be the best thing for you, I would be willing to change the rule, but I don't see any advantage. You are welcome to invite him over on Friday night."

It is important to avoid lengthy confrontations with children over an issue that does not need to be debated, only enforced. The whys and wherefores of an issue deserve an explanation--not an argument.

Three-year-old girl: "I don't want to take a bath."

Mother: "It is time for your bath."

Girl: "I'm not going to take a bath! I want to watch T.V."

Mother: "It's bath time and bedtime. Let's go."

Directions for little ones should be kept short, simple, and positive. It is ridiculous to argue with a three-year-old over why he cannot stay up and watch television--especially, since tired children are usually cranky.

Mother is reading a book. Ten-year-old child enters the room and says: "Mom, I want you to make me a sandwich; I'm hungry."

Mother: "I'm right in the middle of my reading time, but you're welcome to make your own sandwich."

Child: "But I want you to make it! Now!"

Mother: "Maybe you didn't hear me. I am reading. You will have to make your own sandwich. I know you can do it. Good-bye."

(Mother returns to reading.)

Eight-year-old boy continually leaves toys on the floor. Mother, one day, boxes them up and puts them in the attic.

Boy: "Where are my toys?"

Mother; “I thought you didn’t want them anymore, so I put them away for a few weeks.”

Boy: “But they’re my toys!”

Mother: “I realize that, but they are not yours to leave lying around the house. The house belongs to Daddy and I and we like it kept neat. Besides, the toys are yours to enjoy, not to abuse. If you don’t care enough about them to put them away maybe they should be given to someone who would care.”

Boy: “But I want them back.”

Mother: “I will give them back to you in two weeks. Then, I’ll know that you will appreciate them enough not to leave them lying around.”