

Are You Letting Your Children Manipulate You?

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**Are You Letting Your Children Manipulate You?**

**By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.**

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Title: Are You Letting Your Children Manipulate You?

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Rachael is the young mother of Nathan, who just turned two. Rachael is a stay-at-home mother who works part-time at home and has the help of a housekeeper five days a week. Rachael consulted with me because of her problems with Nathan.

"When Nathan is with David (her husband), he's fine. He adores David and listens well to him. When he's with Amalia (her housekeeper), he's fine. He loves her and plays calmly with her. But when he's with me, he's impossible. He throws temper tantrums when he doesn't get his way. He goes to sleep easily at night for David but not for me. I want so much to be a good mother and I can't figure out what I'm doing wrong. I never get angry with him but sometimes I feel like throwing him across the room! I need help!"

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"Rachael, when you are with Nathan, what do you think is more important to you - to get him to love you or to be loving to yourself?"

Rachael replied instantly. "To get him to love me. I never think about loving myself. I just want him to love me. If he loves me, then I know that I'm a good mother."

"And what does it say about you if you are a good mother?"

"It means that I'm okay,"

"So you have handed to Nathan the job of defining your worth. He has to love you for you to be okay. What do you think is most important to David?"

"Oh, David takes good care of himself. He really doesn't seem concerned about whether or not Nathan loves him. He's very loving to Nathan, but if David wants to eat dinner when Nathan want to play with him, he just eat dinner and Nathan seems to accept it. If I want to have my breakfast when Nathan wants to play, Nathan has a tantrum."

"Rachael, Nathan has learned that he can manipulate you because you are so concerned with how he feels about you. As long as his loving you is more important to you than taking loving care of yourself, he will be able to manipulate you. This is not good for him or for you. It is too big a burden on him to have the responsibility of defining your worth. As long as your worth is attached to being a good mother, Nathan will be able to manipulate you."

"I can see that. Amalia is like David. If she has work to do, she just expects Nathan to play by himself, and he does. She loves him, but she is firm about what she needs to do. I can see that I give in all the time because I don't want him to be upset with me. What can I do now to change this?"

"First of all, you need to consciously detach your worth from being a good mother. You need to do some inner work on defining your worth separately from being a mother. Your sense of worth needs to be attached to who you are - your kindness, compassion, empathy, warmth, aliveness. You need to take responsibility for defining your own worth rather than making Nathan, David, or anyone else responsible.

"Second, you need to care about taking care of yourself as much as you care about taking care of Nathan. Nathan is a brat with you because you don't care about yourself when you are with him, so he has learned to not care about you. You are teaching him not to care about you when you do not care about yourself."

"Okay, I think I get this. I'm really going to try to do it differently."

Next week when we spoke in our phone session, Rachael reported that things had already dramatically changed. Nathan was listening to her, going right to sleep when she put him down, and seemed happier in general. His tantrums had not yet completely stopped, but they were far fewer. Rachael, too, felt happier because she was finally taking care of herself and her own needs. For the first time since

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giving birth to Nathan, she was having some time to herself.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding emotional and spiritual healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course: <http://www.innerbonding.com> or <mailto:margaret@innerbonding.com>. Phone Sessions Available.

### **Validating vs. Indulging Children's Feelings**

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### **VALIDATING VS. INDULGING CHILDREN'S FEELINGS**

Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

I grew up at a time when children's feelings were not important. I was supposed to go along with the program without complaint, regardless of how I felt. If I was upset about something, my mother generally responded with, "Don't be ridiculous," while my father just ignored me. Many of my counseling clients had similar experiences in their growing-up years.

Those of us on a personal growth path don't want to do the same thing to our children. We want our children to feel safe in expressing their feelings. We want them to know that what they feel matters to us, that their feelings are important to us. The problem is that sometimes children use their feelings to manipulate their parents, and parents sometimes get confused between validating their children's authentic feelings and indulging the feelings intended to manipulate.

All feelings are not created equal. As parents, we need to learn to discern the difference in intent regarding our children's expression of feelings. Authentic feelings are generated by life experiences, such as the loss of a pet, difficulties with friends, problems with learning, and so on. These feelings need to be attended to with caring and compassion. Manipulative feelings are generated by thoughts such as, "I want attention," "I want new clothes," or "I have a right to have whatever I want." The

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expression of these feelings need to be ignored, or the child needs to be told that we don't like the complaining, so that we are not indulging our children in using their feelings to manipulate.

Joanne is struggling with her 6 year old daughter, Rachael, regarding this issue of feelings. "I don't want to squash her feelings the way mine were squashed." However, Rachael has learned to use her feelings to control Joanne. For example, Rachael often cries bitterly in the mornings while getting dressed for school because she can't seem to find the right combination of clothes. Joanne then spends lots of time trying to help Rachael and mornings have become a nightmare. The same thing happens regarding food. If Joanne doesn't have the food Rachael wants, or doesn't like the meal Joanne has prepared, Rachael often complains and carries on. If Joanne and her husband Dan want

to go out alone for dinner or with friends, Rachael is outraged at being left out. Joanne consistently validates Rachael's feelings by saying things like, "I really understand how you feel," or "I really understand that this is important to you."

However, in continuing to attend to Rachael's feelings and giving them a lot of her time, Joanne is indulging Rachael and teaching her to use her feelings as a form of control. In addition, Joanne is not helping Rachael learn to manage her feelings rather than dump them on others. Just because we feel something doesn't mean we need to act on the feelings. As adults, just because we may feel like having a ice cream for breakfast, doesn't mean we indulge ourselves in having it. Just because we feel like sleeping in when we need to go to work doesn't mean we allow our feelings to determine our behavior. Just because we feel like punching someone in the nose doesn't mean we do it. Hopefully, we've learned to acknowledge and release our feelings without letting them control us.

The same needs to be true with our children. We need to learn to comfort our children's authentic feelings, such as the pain over the loss of a friendship, while not giving much attention to feelings expressed to control. When Joanne takes responsibility for fixing Rachael's feelings, Rachael does not have to learn to take care of her own feelings. Joanne needs to walk away from or ignore Rachael's tantrums and complaints when they are about things like her clothes or food. She needs to let Rachael know that, while she understands her feelings, Rachael also needs to learn to accept things as they are. Accepting how things are is part of learning to manage feelings.

If Joanne wants Rachael to grow up with good values, she needs to not give energy to issues such as the clothes. Indulging Rachael in thinking the right clothes are so important is not good for Rachael. Indulging Rachael in controlling whether or not she is included in adult activities is also not good for Rachael. Rachael needs to learn to accept things even if she doesn't like them - we all need to learn this. By indulging Rachael's manipulative behavior through giving all her feeling so much importance, Joanne is creating a child with entitlement issues.

Before we can help our children manage their feelings in healthy ways, we need to learn to manage our feelings in healthy ways. If you are indulgent with your feelings, your children will learn to do the same. If you are using your feelings to manipulate others, or allowing other to manipulate you with their feelings, your children will learn this from you. One of the best things you can do for your children is to become a role model regarding taking personal responsibility for your feelings.

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