

## Some Good Ideas from *The Rules of Parenting*

*Clean your room.*

*I did.*

*No you didn't—look at the mess.*

Have you as a parent had this kind of dialogue with your kids? And maybe you have wondered why the kids don't do things even when you keep telling them time after time. Or have you thought, how on earth do I stop my children from arguing?

British Author Richard Templar addresses these three concerns—and 97 others—in his book, *The Rules of Parenting: A Personal Code of Raising Happy, Confident Children*. He would identify the “Clean your room . . . I did” problem as the need for the parent to Set Clear Targets (Rule 29), a term he borrowed from the business world. He states:

Which sounds more convincing to you: “Don't spend so long on that computer” or “You can have two hours a day on the computer”? And which is easier for your child to understand . . . ?  
“Clean the rabbit [pen] out more often” might seem perfectly explicit to you, but they might be clueless as to what you actually want. Does it mean clean it once a week or once a month? Or give it fresh hay twice a week and change the sawdust every fortnight? You have to specify if you want your kids to feel motivated to do as you ask, and to feel as if you care. And—most importantly—actually to do what you're asking. (p. 68)

Rule 30 (Don't Be a Nag) looks at the problem of getting our kids to do things without nagging. But how do we know when we are nagging? Templar suggests that nagging has an irritable tone to it and that it might turn into telling children what they **are** rather than what they do.

So “You didn't shut the door” is a reasonable reprimand, but “You never shut the door” is a nag. Even worse is condemning their natural character: “You never think about anyone else” or “You're just clumsy.” If you do this to your kids, you'll make them worse. And who can blame them? (p.70).

Now let's look at the third above-mentioned concern about our children arguing. Templar calls it “squabbling,” and in Rule 52 he asks that we Recognize That Squabbling Is Healthy (Within Reason). When brothers and sisters are arguing over the computer game or who goes out the door first, they are learning diplomacy, compromise, and:

[A]ll those related skills that young children (and far too many adults) aren't too good at . . . Squabbling teaches you how you can and can't get other people to cooperate with you. Over the years children can learn that their brother becomes less accommodating if you punch him . . . , or that their sister won't let you in her room unless you allow her into yours. It's much harder for them to find these things out by practicing on their friends, because it's a pretty good way of ending up with no friends. Siblings, on the other hand, can't say “I won't be your brother if you don't play with me.” They are endlessly forgiving, if only because they have no choice. (p. 127)

So the next time we hear our children arguing, let's remind ourselves that they may be learning some essential skills for life!

All of the 100 rules cannot be listed here, but Adlerians will recognize many of the concepts such as: No one is perfect; treat your child with respect; see things from their point of view; teach them to think for themselves; communicate; carrots beat sticks; be consistent; focus on the problem, not the person; if you lose your temper, you're the loser; every child should have something they know they're good at; their attitude is as important as their achievements; don't try to have a perfect child; never compare children with each other; all your actions speak louder than any of your words; encourage them regardless.

Templar does not cite his sources, so this raises the question: If these very familiar concepts originated from Adler, Dreikurs, and our other many fine writers, why aren't they acknowledged for them?

*[The Rules of Parenting* loaned to me was published in 2007 by Pearson in Harlow, Great Britain, so I wrongly assumed that it was not available here. However, McNally Robinson Bookstore in Saskatoon can order it in for \$19.99, and it is also available online from various sources.]

Janice Solem