



# Parents In Partnership

Scottsville Primary School

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## ***Raising children – Boundaries, the chair, the ball and the sinker:***

Raising children is possibly the hardest job available, made even more difficult with the pressures and influences of modern society. Parents face immense stress, with financial and time scheduling difficulties weighing heavily on them. So often disciplining their children becomes the last thing that they want to have to do, often letting the boundaries slide as a result of their own exhaustion and just not having the energy to fight with a demanding, and strong-willed child. So here are three illustrations of where things tend to go wrong, and the impact it has on the children as a result:

### *The Chair:*

While you are reading this, you are likely sitting down on something. Now the question is, when you sat down, did you test whether the chair was stable and strong enough to hold you? Most likely not, as out of habit, we tend to just blindly trust that when you sit on a chair, it is going to hold you – that's its job! So what happens when it doesn't do that job? When you sit and suddenly find there is no support under you? Chances are, that chair, and all following chairs for a long period will not be trusted for their integrity. Now, many parents are like that chair that cannot be trusted, just giving in to children's demands, whether it is in the child's best interests or not. When these boundaries are weak, children learn to get their way, and struggle with authority in other environments. They struggle socially, as they cannot interact with their peers, tending to be demanding and struggling to make friends due to the need to be constantly in charge. At the same time, parents can also be unsupportive, like the untrustworthy chair. Children then learn that they cannot trust adults, as in the time of greatest need, the support was not there – influencing all future views of adults, much like how all chairs will be viewed with suspicion should one let you down.

### *The ball:*

Imagine sitting in a crowd, listening to someone speak, and they have threatened that they will throw a ball at any person that breaks the rules, but then does not tell you what the rules are. That would be a pretty harsh punishment, wouldn't it? Especially as the rules have not been explained! Most likely, you would sit there anxious as to whether you are doing something wrong, and end up planning on how to get angry should you get 'punished', rather than listening to what the person has to say. Parents sometimes treat their children in the same manner – having unclear and inconsistent rules and consequences, often not explaining their expectations of a child, but then harshly

punishing the child for breaking the rules, before giving the child an opportunity to correct their behaviour. Now imagine that two people in this crowd break the rules in the same manner, and one is punished, and one not. That would be unfair surely? Yet children have an intensely strong sense of fairness, and when they recognise that consequences for negative behaviour are not equal with siblings, they tend to resent the parent and act out even further with negative behaviours rather than responding to the parents' attempts to discipline them.

### *The sinker:*

Picture a fishing sinker (weight) attached to the end of a fishing line, swinging backwards and forwards. Our lives and emotions often follow that same path – people have ups and downs emotionally, moving from good to bad moods in relation to their environment. But, like the sinker, if merely moving back and forth, these situations are predictable, and children can learn to 'read' their parents' emotions and predict the likely response should they overstep the boundaries. It is the occasions when that pendulum swing of the sinker becomes unpredictable and erratic, going out of control, that it raises concern as to where it is going to end up, flying off the fishing line and hitting someone or something. Likewise, if children cannot predict parents' responses to their behaviour as their moods are unpredictable, they become anxious and withdrawn in fear, or act out and rebel. They become uncertain of how their parents' will react and so lose trust in that parent due to the lack of feeling secure around them.

### *So what do you do if you are a chair, a ball or a sinker parent?:*

- Spend time with your child, be there when they need you! Help them with their homework, play ball in the garden, take them for an ice-cream.
- Agree on rules before they are broken, and make a list if needed for the child to see and be reminded.
- Agree on consequences before rules are broken – and stick to them! Consequences need to be age appropriate and immediate, rather than delayed.
- Try rephrase rules into positive behaviours that can be encouraged and rewarded, rather than a list of 'don'ts'
- Reward with time and activities rather than 'toys' and things.
- Don't ever punish or react when angry – you will only teach your child it is ok to lash out when angry.
- Don't give your child everything they want, and have no rules because you think that is showing love. That only creates insecurity from the lack of boundaries, and results in negative consequences in other environments.
- ***Above all, love them and make sure they know that you love them, not only in words but in actions – never take this for granted and just presume they know it – they want you to show it!***

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