

## WinkWorld July 2005

Kohn, A. (2005). *Unconditional parenting: Moving from rewards and punishment to love and reason*. Atria Books: New York.

review by Charles Schroeder

### **Chapter 1: Conditional Parenting**

This chapter discusses with the concept of meeting a child's needs, feelings, and development rather than a child's wants. That most books on parenting that are in circulation are about a "blanket acceptance of parental prerogative" and not about what is best for the child is the basis of discussion. Dr. Kohn points out that even the titles of most of the books are slanted at re-affirming the back-to-the-good-old-days approach to assertive discipline; rewards and punishment as a means to handle our children. The main point of this chapter is to ask "What do we mean by effective?" regarding the raising of children. Do we want them to be concerned about their actions or just to be obedient?

### **Chapter 2: Giving and Withholding Love**

Dr. Kohn takes on the time-honored tradition of time-out in this chapter. Time-out is part of what he terms "love withdrawal". Time-out and some of the other more mild forms of discipline are discussed at length and by using the research, he is able to walk the reader through the maze of concepts to the end point; time out and other mild forms of discipline are still part of the system of rewards and punishment. He points out that withholding love can be even more damaging to a child than physical punishment. Also discussed are the problems with positive reinforcement. The over-application of positive reinforcement can cause as many problems as the use of too much discipline to a child's self-efficacy. Praise must be sincere and earned to be effective. A child's self-esteem needs to be fueled from within, not without.

### **Chapter 3: Too Much Control**

The controlling of children is the topic of this chapter. Actually, the over-control of children is the topic of this chapter. Children are kept, for the most part, on too tight a leash; especially in public. The main concern is that children tend to believe that they are only loved when they do as they are told and act as they are expected to act. The researcher points out that children that behave the best tend to be from parents that rely on warm and secure relationships with their children rather than parents that rely on power, and that the opposite is also true; parents that rely on power to control their children are forced to use power to control them. Also discussed are the health and mental problems that can enter into the picture with power-based child management.

### **Chapter 4: Punitive Damages**

Why does punishment fail? This is the topic of this chapter. Dr. Kohn uses the research to walk us through the reasons that punishment is not the long-term answer to the way to raise our children. He lists the following reasons for why punishment fails: It makes people mad. It models the use of power. It eventually loses its effectiveness. It erodes our relationships with our kids. It distracts kids from the important issues. It makes kids more self-centered.

### **Chapter 5: Punish to Succeed**

The use of punishment to succeed is broken down in this chapter. Dr. Kohn discusses the

use of punishment to help children succeed in school, play, and at home. He points out the paradox of the striving to get good grades, while at the heart of it, we need to teach our children that the grade is not what is important, it is the learning. At play, it is not the winning that is important, it is the enjoyment and benefits of play itself. At home, it is building a strong relationship with ones loved ones and friends, not complying with rules used to control them. He refers to the use of punishment to control in the different areas of a child's life as "toxic messages".

### **Chapter 6: What Holds Us Back**

In this chapter, Dr. Kohn discusses why we parent the way we parent. He divides the reasons into four distinct groups: What we see and hear, what we believe, what we feel, and what we fear. Specifics on the different categories are discussed, with the factors that influence us broken down. A large portion of this chapter is focused on the fears that we parents feel about raising our children, and ways to overcome them.

### **Chapter 7: Principles of Unconditional Parenting**

This chapter is dedicated to 13 principles that are both useful and practical for raising children. The concept of "Unconditional Parenting" is based on these. As Dr. Kohn points out, these principles can be "more surprising and challenging than its capsule description would imply". 1. Be reflective. 2. Reconsider your requests. 3. Keep you eye on your long-term goals. 4. Put the relationship first. 5. Change how you see, not just how you act. 6. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. 7. Be authentic. 8. Talk less, ask more. 9. Keep their ages in mind. 10. Attribute to children the best possible motive consistent with the facts. 11. Don't stick your no's in unnecessarily. 12. Don't be rigid. 13. Don't be in a hurry.

### **Chapter 8: Love Without Strings Attached**

Treat children the way you want to be treated. Think about what you say, and how you would react to that statement if you were your child. This chapter tries to give hints on things to minimize and things to maximize in order to build a relationship based on love not control with one's children. In the area of things to minimize, Dr. Kohn lists: Limit the number of your criticisms; limit the scope of your criticism; limit the intensity of each criticism; look for alternatives to criticism.

### **Chapter 9: Choices for Children**

This chapter is about including the children in the choices that affect them. Rather than deciding as an omnipotent power, include the child in the decision-making process. Guide them reinforce them, decide together on matters that they have an opinion on or that they will feel the effect of the decision. Including them in the decision-making process will have many benefits, not the least of which is the development of higher level decision making and thought processing.

### **Chapter 10: The Child's Perspective**

Talking to your children, modeling moral and proper behavior, discussing ideas and concepts of what affects their world are all part of considering a child's perspective. The so-like-I-say-not-like-I-do model sends the wrong message to a child. As role models, we have to be consistent in both message and deed. The consideration of the child's perspective is all-important to help a child grow in a positive way. By considering what a child sees and hears, a parent can be more attuned to what the child is thinking.