THE WAY

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FROM THE SENIOR SCHOOL DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recently my church held a combined service with three congregations. Unlike our usual services where the children head out to Sunday School after 15 minutes, this was designed to be a family-friendly service. Children were encouraged to stay with their families, equipped with activity booklets and colouring materials, and many gathered happily on the carpet at the front. There must have been 30-40 children, aged between 3-10 years.

It was a beautiful picture of children being welcomed, just as Jesus himself did (Matthew 19:13-15). I remember at times staying in church services when I was young as well. But as I watched, I noticed something different: the children were chatty, lively, and full of energy. At points, the minister needed to raise his voice to be heard above them. Many parents, however, seemed quite relaxed and untroubled by the noise.

This highlighted for me how much parenting styles have changed over the last 30-40 years. Where once parents might have quickly hushed their children or insisted they sit quietly, many now take a gentler approach. Parenting has moved away from the authoritarian models of the past towards styles that are often more permissive or relaxed.

There are certainly positives in this shift: children often feel freer to express themselves, can develop creativity, and grow up with a strong sense of self-worth. At the same time, researchers point out that there are challenges too. A more permissive style of parenting can sometimes lead to difficulties with boundaries, self-control, or responsibility.

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As a teacher for more than 30 years, I've often seen how this plays out in schools. Children are happiest and thrive best when they know where the boundaries are. Limits give them security and help them focus on learning. Most parents know that balance is key: no one wants to return to overly harsh parenting styles of the past, but neither do we want to swing so far in the other direction that children miss out on the security of clear expectations.

At Thomas Hassall, we value discipline and high standards, not for their own sake, but because they create a safe, orderly environment in which students can flourish. Parents play a vital role in supporting this. Advocating for your child when a genuine mistake has been made is important, but so too is helping them accept responsibility when they've crossed a line.

The most loving thing we can do as parents is to be both supportive and consistent: be warm, be encouraging, be loving, but also set boundaries and uphold them. In short, be friendly with your children, but don't feel you need to be their "friend."

Further Reading

parents.com

newyorker.com

researchgate.net 1

researchgate.net 2

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