

Thoughts on Resolving the “Good-Bad Split”

By Barbara Moon

(This was written for parents about discipline, but the principle is true for all relationships. We have to internalize that others and ourselves are both “good and bad.”)

These thoughts are to help parents see why discipline is good and necessary. Learning the balance can be difficult but worth taking the effort to learn.

A newborn thinks that he and his mother are the same person. As he grows the first year he begins to know some separateness, but will need to internalize that he and mother are not the same.

THRIVE teaches us that the mother will begin to upset the baby around 12 months in order for him to learn return to joy from the Big Six negative emotions.

Around the age of 20 months to about 2 ½, depending on the child, the need for discipline will arise. Parents have to settle how they are going to discipline and learn to be firm and consistent while loving.

During these early years, the baby must learn that he and mother are not the same person, but two separate people. Discipline and frustration/upset are part of what helps the baby learn this.

He also must learn that mother is both “good and bad,” pleasurable and frustrating, loving and disciplining. If a mother is afraid to frustrate, discipline, or “look bad” then the child will not be able to resolve this issue and become his own person.

He must learn that he is also both good and bad. (This does not necessarily have to do with the spiritual aspects of good and bad)

As the process goes along, the child will “fuse” that mother is one person and he is one person even though they can act both “good and bad.” The same mother who scolds is the same mother who hugs. The same child who breaks a lamp is the same child who feeds himself. Life is both rewarding and frustrating.

This lesson is vital for a healthy self to emerge. If the mother clings to the child he will not be able to separate (individuate).

As the child grows and begins to explore, he will go back and forth between touching base with mother and going out to explore. This should increase with age.

The child must healthily settle that mother is neither going to abandon her or smother her. So mother has to support the struggle for the child to develop as a separate person.

The parents gradually build up the child’s confidence that the world is neither totally threatening nor totally pleasurable.

Around 18 months the child begins to do for herself things that mother did for her, like feed herself .

The child learns much of the above by learning he can't have his way all the time, he will fall and scrape his knee, he will get frustrated, he will learn how reality works—balanced with comfort, acceptance and support.

He must learn to cope with the world in his mother's absence, small bits at a time. This is one reason I think going to church at an early age is good practice. It is also the reason for teaching the child to bond with an object like a blanket or stuffed animal that they can have when away from mother, even in bed. Pacifiers should not be the only item as they will be taken away. The blanket or animal should not be taken away!

Daddy is a great asset for this individuating in the toddler years. He is adventurous and "not Mother" and helps the child practice going out into the world, away from Mother, safely. He must also discipline properly.

Parents help the child handle increasingly difficult levels of frustration so they learn that they don't get their way all the time which internalizes that this is a normal but disagreeable fact of life. If parents don't do this, children will not learn how the world works and they won't learn self control.

If mother can't handle seeing the child frustrated or showing negative emotions and only rewards when the emotions are the way she wants, the child will learn to stuff his feelings. If proper discipline is not done, the child will not learn self control.

If the toddler does not individuate and still feels he's connected to mother, he will project and blame other "parent" figures later in life.

Mother and infant bond securely in the beginning. Then the child begins to move out and explore, thinking she can do anything. We want to allow exploring, giving realistic boundaries without spoiling.

If the mother never separated from her mother, she will long for closeness, be needy and dependent.

About 18 months to 3 years, the child begins to learn "I can't do everything." He learns about reality.

The child needs to learn to hear a no and stay connected, give a no appropriately. Parents do not withdraw love based on behavior. I will love you no matter what, but I will discipline you when needed. Parents find a balance between over control and lack of limits. Children learn to suffer consequences.

There is a difference between hurt and harm. The dentist hurts me in order to help me. That is not harm. Discipline is like this when done properly.

Parents can believe the lie that says, To love means to always say yes.

SUMMARY: Discipline is a vital part of child rearing. We must learn that we can both enjoy our child *and* discipline him or her. We discipline SO we can enjoy. We must settle in our heart that discipline is not bad or mean and have the confidence to be consistent and firm when needed. Hopefully these nuggets above will help us with that debate. Proper, loving, firm discipline is God designed and best done in these toddler years. In the school years, our task will be character development and that will come much easier when the child has learned to obey and have some self control.

Adding some notes from *Search for the Real Self* by James Masterson

When this process stated above does not happen, a person will have a 'false self' and it will dominate because they did not get the dance of support to come and go. When a child is not expected to function autonomously, the failure will show up in the teen years. Mother must respond with positive emotional support and support the emerging self without her withdrawing and/or disapproving of his efforts. (If she is 'distracted' it will be harder.) Some mothers themselves fear separation and attempt to prevent it all costs. They encourage the child to remain dependent, cling to the child, in order to avoid her own abandonment fears. The child can cling or distance emotionally because he fears engulfment. This kind of mother does not want the father to 'interfere' or rescue.

Resolving the good/bad split enables the emergence of the real self. It settles-- I will not be engulfed nor abandoned. I don't have to block my feelings. Can experience a wide range of emotions; expect I can master my life and achievements. Identify my own dreams, goals, individuality, and take steps to achieve. Can identify if I effectively dealt with a problem or crises in a positive and creative way. I can soothe the painful feelings, not wallow in misery. Make and stick to commitments in relationships, career. Problem solve. I can experience intimacy without anxiety of engulfment or abandonment. I have a continuity of self—the same through time.

Around age 2 the toddler begins to practice the dance of go away and back to touch base. Comes to see he is a separate person, the real self emerges. There is ambivalence about engulf versus abandon. Asserts self (individuates). Needs support and acceptance. Learn to cope with the world without mother. Father is someone to practice on with adventures out into the world, and he's a safe haven where the child can test perceptions of reality.

An adult can have Guilt fed by guilt felt in early childhood from disappointment expressed by the mother for self actualization and individuation. Self expression can trigger the voice of disapproval. Teen/Adult may cling to mother or find a substitute. Some functions are not developed—reality perception—have to rely on another for how the world works. Impulse control—no self control. Frustration tolerance—experience emotional instability. Stable ego boundaries—can't tell internal from external feelings. They project, is defensive, regress, denial, clinging. Mother was more rewarding when did not show feelings. Or all is mother's fault (still connected to her). May project and blame another 'parent' figure. Addictions—self hurt- can be a defense against the abandonment depression. They are avoiding pain.

Children must separate and individuate. They receive increased levels of frustration to learn they don't get their way, they internalize that it's a normal but disagreeable fact of life.