

The children of law and order

By Beverly Goldsmith

Published in the *Christian Science Sentinel*. July 25, 2005, pp 18-20

In households around Australia, the issue of how to deal with tantrum-throwing children is a hot topic of discussion. This is due to the success of the reality show *Supernanny*, starring English childminder Jo Frost. Such is Frost's popularity Down Under that the sixth episode of *Supernanny* scored 1.86 million viewers around the country – just a fraction behind *Desperate Housewives*. And 38,000 copies of Frost's book *How to Get the Best from Your Children* were sold in just three weeks.

According to newspaper reports, *Supernanny* viewers in Britain, Australia, and the United States, have been impressed with Frost's sensible tips. Britons also loved the television series *Driving Mum and Dad Mad*, starring "Australia's own Supernanny," Professor Matt Sanders, a child behavior specialist at Queensland University's Parenting and Family Support Centre. And now, there's *Nanny 911*.

The popularity of these TV shows indicates that many parents are looking for ways to reduce the stress levels associated with parenting. They want their families to be happy, and they're making an effort to establish a balance between loving relationships and discipline. But many professionals disagree over ways to achieve this. One approach I've found successful in my experience as a Christian Science practitioner and former high-school teacher is the system of spiritual healing in Mary Baker Eddy's book *Science and Health*.

This Bible-based healing system has been helping adults and children around the world to live together more peacefully. Studying and practicing Christian Science have shown me that spirituality is the basis for self-discipline. It's natural to be loving and cooperative. That's how God made everyone. No one is born disruptive or out of control. Parents and children, in their true nature, are the image of their Father-Mother, God. Since this divine Parent is both Principle and Love, each individual has the innate ability to be gentle, respectful, and in command of their actions.

Christ Jesus put it this way: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). To me this means that within me, and every individual, are the Godlike qualities of peace, orderliness, self-control, and obedience. These are permanent. No one in God's image can lose his or her cool, or become unruly or undisciplined. Characteristics such as bad temper or lack of restraint are not from the Divine, and they aren't true about a child – or an adult. God created each of us to be composed, balanced, and thoughtful. A knowledge of this promotes family peace and helps restore harmony. Here's an example.

One Saturday morning, a distressed mother telephoned me at my practitioner's office. Her primary-school child had just thrown a huge tantrum and threatened to trash the house. Shocked at this uncharacteristic outburst of anger and aggression, and concerned over his loss of control, she asked me if I would pray with her and the child.

I went to my desk and sat down. Looking for inspiration, I turned on my computer, typed in the word *children* in my Concord Study Program, and searched the Bible and the writings of Mary Baker Eddy. There were many comforting and inspiring ideas. But this one really struck a chord: "The divine children are born of law and order, and Truth knows only such" (Mary Baker Eddy, *Unity of Good*, p. 23).

In thinking about this, I could see that self-control and self-discipline spring from a divine source. God is divine Principle, Love. He is law-creating, law-abiding. He created His children to be obedient, loving, and good, just like Him. This means that both parent and child are created in the divine likeness and so have within them the capacity to act toward each other in appropriate ways.

This led me to pray along these lines: "Dear Father-Mother, all Your children in their true nature are spiritual and good. They don't inherit mortal traits such as bad temper and self-will. They can't be influenced by any aggressive behavior depicted in TV shows, or suggested by other schoolchildren. Their natural inclination is to be gentle not destructive, calm not enraged. Your law of harmony is operating in this household. There is not a battle of wills, only the exercise of Your divine purpose for each person. I know that You have ideas that will eliminate discordant behavior and bring peace."

Soon the phone rang again. It was the mother. She had recovered from the shock. She knew that this behavior was not at all like her son. Her fear of an out-of-control child was gone. The boy, too, had regained his composure, and things were peaceful again. She said that while I'd been praying, she'd realized something. Her son had been watching a lot of television unsupervised. It had come to her to remove the TV set to the backyard shed, for the time being. While this may not have been the solution for every family, she felt it was for hers. Several weeks later, the mother reported that the child's behavior was once more happy and normal.

All children are naturally loving and obedient. Good parenting recognizes this and teaches a child not only to understand the boundaries of acceptable behavior, but how to guard against bad influences. In helping parents, *Science and Health* gives this counsel: "Children should obey their parents, insubordination is an evil, blighting the buddings of self-government. Parents should teach their children at the earliest possible period the truths of health and holiness. Children are more tractable than adults, and learn more readily to love the simple verities that will make them happy and good" (p. 236).

Yet, for some parents, teaching their children the value of restraint is often tinged with fear. Many of the parents featured on *Supernanny*, for example, have been afraid of losing their child's affection. This fear has allowed the child to indulge in fits of temper and defy normal instructions.

But no adult has to be held hostage to fear. Whenever I've had to deal with discipline problems, I've kept in mind that I'm not putting self-control or good behavior into a child. Instead, I'm drawing out what is already within him or her as God's offspring. Remembering this removes fear. It reminds me that when I request a child to do something necessary, it's perfectly natural for him or her to respond in a cooperative way. It's not something foreign to a child's natural inclinations. God's children are well-behaved.

Standing up to fear, and teaching a child to be happy and balanced, does sometimes demand courage. Yet being loving doesn't mean being weak when appropriate action needs to be taken. Divine Love is always tender and caring, but at the same time, principled and strong. God has an answer for every troubling situation that arises. There are ways of promoting good behavior that do not destroy the bonds of love between parent and child.

Learning is a part of everyone's development. Maintaining order, having a daily routine, and being disciplined are important life-lessons. The period when children are growing up need not be a time of conflict. God's consistency and grace enable every parent and child to work together to achieve a joyful and harmonious family life.