

LAURA ON LIFE

Learning by example

All the child-rearing experts say that children learn by example. The question for me has always been: When? When do they start implementing what they learn by example?

I may not have the cleanest house on the block, but my children have never seen me shove everything under the sofa or the dining room table when I clean. Yet, this is exactly how they "clean" their rooms. So when, exactly, does my example kick in?

I have 4 boys and one 11-year old daughter. For my boys, my example may not hold as much weight as my husband's example. I can live with that. However, if my daughter grows up to become a cretin, I've got no one but myself to blame. In light of my potential guilt, I feel that I need

to put more effort into civilizing my daughter. I only have one. I can afford to screw this up.

Yesterday, I decided to take her out to a nice restaurant for dinner. Just the two of us. It wasn't the kind of place that had valet parking, but it wasn't a chain restaurant either. I told her to dress nicely because we would be going somewhere special for dinner. I dressed my best to be a good example. She met me in the hall with pink sweatpants and a yellow t-shirt which had been autographed by all her friends from school last year. She looked at me expectantly. I raised my eyebrows. Sometimes you don't have to speak to say something.

She said, "Well, you wanted me to wear clean clothes, right?"

"Of course I do. But didn't you have any

other options?"

She raised her eyebrows - I suppose she learned that from me. Then I realized that I hadn't done laundry yet this week and last week was... well, so much for my example. We chose a less fancy restaurant.

When we arrived, she slouched in the booth. I looked her in the eyes and sat straight up in my seat, exaggerating my pose to make a point. She raised the table cloth and looked under the table because she thought something had bit me. I frowned and told her to sit up straight and put her napkin in her lap.

They didn't have Chicken McNuggets on the menu, but because it was the only meal that came with French fries, she decided on the beer battered Fish and Chips. She ordered a hot chocolate to drink



Laura Snyder

because she was cold, then proceeded to drink my iced tea because the hot chocolate was... hot. Who knew?

Our discussion was mostly about the decorations in the restaurant and the fact that one of the stalls in the restroom had no door on it. This was apparently a matter of great concern to her.

I tried to steer the conversation away from

the potty.

"Don't you think the mirrors over the waiter's station are pretty?"

"But who would use a stall with no door on it...?"

"Is your hot chocolate cool enough to drink yet?"

"...Everyone would be able to see, like, everything!"

My efforts were in vain.

When the food arrived, I ate with one hand on my fork and one in my lap. I chewed slowly and spoke only when my mouth was empty.

My daughter took her only napkin off her lap, placed it on the table and poured salt onto it. She took apart her fish with her hands and dabbed it into the salt on her napkin and shoved it into her mouth. No fork was involved. My eyebrows

were raised, but she was too busy dissecting her fish to notice. I didn't know where to start with my admonitions even if I were able to speak with my mouth full. Clearly, my example was not taking.

After I swallowed, I told her to use her fork. She decided she didn't like the beer batter, so she set about digging the fish out of the batter and thanked me for giving her the idea of using her fork.

As the mother of a daughter who behaves as if she was raised by a pack of wolves, I desperately pose this question once again: When?!

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Unitarian Universalist "The Uncommon Denomination." We are on summer break and plan to meet again in the fall at the United Church of Christ, 226 E. Main. Info: www.unitarianvermillion.blogspot.com

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