

A Super-Size of Parenting, Please?

Evidently, McDonalds is NOT the kind of place...for discipline and parental courage, that is.

Now, to be fair, McDonalds is far from being the only place where bad manners, inappropriate behavior and whining from children and teenagers are on display. The mall, the movie theatre and grocery stores are also prime locations for such behavior, but McDonalds just happens to be the setting for this story. I was recently looking for a good spot outside of my home to sit down, have breakfast and do some personal writing. Nowadays, just about every fast-food restaurant offers its patrons free Wi-Fi, so my options were plentiful. But we had just received coupons in the mail for McDonalds, so I was able to get a large coffee and a blueberry, banana-nut oatmeal for the grand total of \$1.06.

We have a winner!

It was a weekday, about 10 a.m., so I assumed that even McDonalds would be somewhat quiet, with the morning rush having moved through and the lunchtime folks yet to arrive. Well, you know what they say about assumptions. Although McDonalds wasn't packed, there was a noticeable din from people ordering food and talking. I could also clearly hear the shift manager harshly barking orders at the rest of the crew.

But above all of this, as I settled in to enjoy my breakfast, I could hear a woman trying to calm one of the two hysterical children within her jurisdiction. Evidently, the boy - I'm guessing he was about 8 years old - didn't like what was being ordered for him. At this point I could only hear him. Not long afterward, the boy along with his older brother and mother came around the corner and sat not far from me. Throughout their meal, the 8-year-old whined and complained, but he really let loose when Mom thought he was finished and threw away his food before he was able to finish his last pancake.

At the realization of this, the boy started crying so loudly that you would have thought someone slammed his hand in a door. The wailing reached a crescendo

pitch, causing other patrons in the restaurant to wince, including myself and another woman who was sitting by herself nearby. The mother tried to console her son, telling him they would be eating lunch in a few hours, that he had enough to eat anyway and that she only threw away his plate because she thought he was finished.

No dice. He would not be consoled.

The boy continued to howl loudly, to the point that the mother gave in and said she'd go check to see if she could get him ONE MORE PANCAKE. Since I was now in writing mode, I prayed that she'd be able to retrieve one to silence him. I was not so lucky. When she came back around the corner and sheepishly told her son (who had stopped crying by the way and was talking with his brother while Mom was up at the counter) that they were no longer making breakfast, it was like a switch being flipped – the boy immediately burst into tears again. I sat amazed and stunned that she allowed this behavior to continue for what seemed like forever but was probably more like 3-4 minutes. Finally, Mom threw up her hands and announced she was leaving the restaurant, her one screaming and one silent son following closely behind.

I nearly choked on my food laughing when the other woman who was sitting alone nearby, witnessing this entire sad display, said to the person to whom she was talking on the phone, "Oh, it's nothing. Just someone who needs a beat down!"

If I was that kid, I would have gotten one warning from my mother or father to shut my yapper and quickly (maybe two if they were in a really good mood). If I didn't, consequences would immediately follow, whether or not we were in public.

Now that I am a father, people have commented to me how well-behaved our children are at the store, in church or other public places. Now, I'm not saying my children are perfect little angels, because they are not. But as parents, my wife Jill and I haven't done anything special to have children who generally behave and are respectful of elders and authority. We've simply followed the golden rule of setting expectations and doling out consequences when necessary. It's a tried and true formula for discipline.

Parenting is a biblical discipline and the foundation of building strong families.

Children who benefit from discipline grow up to be good parents who used the tool of discipline with their children, and so on, and so on. “Discipline” often has a negative connotation, but it is simply training to follow rules and/or moral codes of conduct. People in the army are disciplined to become good soldiers; athletes are disciplined to become the best they can be on the field. Discipline also doesn’t have to be physical – I get my children’s attention when I threaten (and then follow through) to take things away from them like electronics or sleepovers if they do not do what they are told.

I don’t blame the 8-year-old-boy for his outburst. As parents, it is our Christian duty to impart discipline upon our children for their benefit. The apostle Paul wrote: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

Children need their parents to be parents, not friends.

I felt for the boy. It left me wondering if I could go to the counter and say, “Can I get an order of discipline, please, with a side order of respect?”