

# In search of the Culture of Respect

Have you ever met someone who does something repeatedly, and they don't know they are doing it? They are not aware of their habit, it just doesn't show up on their radar.

Or conversely, do you know someone who doesn't do something but they swear they do?

*"I always put my clothes out in the wash.*

*Honest. And I always hang up the towels."*

Most of us are just as sure we respect our babies, we certainly mean to. But maybe when we shine a light on our habits things look a bit different.



*Find a pen and do this short quiz.*

## **Have you ever? and Would you like it?**

*Answer each question honestly - simply circle yes or no.*

**Yes/No** Have you ever picked up a baby or a child from behind?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to pick you up from behind?

**Yes/No** Have you ever picked up a baby or a child without telling him or her?

**Yes/No** Would you like to be picked up by someone who didn't tell you they were about to pick you up?

**Yes/No** Have you ever picked up a baby or a child without asking him or her?

**Yes/No** Would you like to be picked up by someone who hadn't asked you if that was OK?

**Yes/No** Have you ever picked up a baby or a child without waiting for them to accept your invitation?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to pick you up before you agreed and were ready?

**Yes/No** Have you ever wiped a baby's nose without telling him or her?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to wipe your nose without telling you?

**Yes/No** Have you ever put a hat on a baby or child without asking them if you could?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to put a hat on you without asking if they could?

**Yes/No** Have you ever put a baby or child into a carseat without telling or asking them?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to put you in the car's seat and do up the seat belt without warning or invitation?

**Yes/No** Have you ever taken a sweatshirt off a baby or child without first telling them?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to take a sweatshirt off you without first asking you?

**Yes/No** Have you ever taken something out of a baby's or child's hand?

**Yes/No** Would you like someone to take something out of your hand without asking and waiting for you to give it up?

## Something doesn't add up

Now that you have answered the questions, you will probably notice two things: Firstly, all (or most) of the red questions are circled 'Yes', and all (or most) of the black questions are circled 'No'. Why is that? Why is it okay to treat a baby one way, while at the same time we would not like any of it done to us? Are babies not human? Are they not the same species with all of the human sensitivities and emotions? Of course they are, so the mismatch doesn't make sense.

## Stories are powerful, especially hidden stories

The other thing you may have noticed as you were answering the questions is that you may have had stories in your head as to why you did or did not invite baby to be picked up, or why it was "stupidity to ask a baby to give something to you, because what if he swallowed it and choked?" *Hearing* these stories alerts you to our culture's subconscious stories around babies and children. And it is good, because it means your **sub**conscious habits are up on your radar screen when you notice your stories. When they are up on your radar you can revise and upgrade the stories, but you can't do that when they are hidden. For now, just be aware of them, awareness is the beginning of change.

## Got any ideas?

The bit to really wonder about is why there is such a mismatch of what we *think* we do and what we *actually* do. Why is there such a mismatch in our behaviour - respectful for adults, and disrespectful for babies?

## Respect your Youngers

We have had it drummed into us - 'respect your elders'. It might be time to turn that adage around and start drumming it into our brains that our role as 'elders' is to respect our babies and children. Being respectful with babies and children can teach us the really important lessons about being human, lessons around respect, consideration, sensitivity, empathy, compassion and partnership. If we are up for it, we will need to make a shift in the ways we view children, we need to view them as partners we dance *with*, not little people we do things *to*. When we dance *with* our babies and children, we are planting the seeds of happiness and health for the child, in the short and long term. When we do things *to* babies and children we are planting the seeds of abuse.

## Onwards and upwards

When we were children we 'downloaded' what it is to be a child in our culture from the way the big people treated us, and the other children around us. That download is still there, operating as our default setting. But we can 'get conscious' and begin to change things from the **power-dynamic of domination** to the **power-dynamic of partnership**. When enough of us in New Zealand begin to change the way we behave with babies and children, we can look forward to climbing up from our dismal position of last on the table of OECD countries for child abuse, neglect and fatalities. I look forward to that day with all my heart.