

“It is because I love you that I have to say ‘no’ ”

by Loretta Patricia Jeremiah

Crash..... and not before long, Tracy’s whole world suddenly came to a halt, as her husband, Peter tragically departed for his heavenly abode. Tracy was completely devastated and was left all alone to carry on with life, at a time when her eldest, John was just three, and she was five months into expecting her second, Tina. While brooding over the loss, Tracy contemplated on how life can be cruel at times and expected herself to give up, but then she realised that she needs to be strong for her little ones and therefore she resolved to get on with life, which took a couple of years to strengthen, thanks to the support of her family and friends.

Pulling herself together, Tracy decided to look ahead for the sake of her kids and very soon she landed a job overseas. She was everything to them now and life at first seemed to be difficult with no loved ones around but slowly regained its pace. Being brought up in a closely knit family, she felt secure by the reassurance of their parents, knowing that they were in control irrespective of their attitude and behaviour. Tracy always looked up to her parents as authority figures to provide that control.

It was Tracy’s turn now to provide that control as she knew that it was just the three of them in another land completely uncertain of

what lay ahead in life. However, the years rolled on and slowly her kids started getting along with school and Tracy too had the opportunity to set aside the past and become stronger in her resolve. During this time, holding the reins was extremely easy as her kids were naïve and were involved in learning and manifesting their talents. These years brought joy and happiness with the many medals and trophies won by them during this part of their primary school life. Of course, there were times when there were minor squabbles and hiccups which could be handled very easily without much difficulty.

Everything seemed to go well as Tracy seemed to have everything under control but not for long before circumstances made her decide to move to another country. In the course of all this, little did Tracy realise that her children were growing up fast in age and mind and her eldest was now a teen. It was now the beginning of another phase of life where settling down once again seemed to be a challenge. Fighting against all odds, things slowly started to fall in place. John, now a teen, and Tina, now in primary school, began to settle in and started to get along well with their friends. As the years rolled on, they did receive accolades, medals and praises for their increasing talents. As behaviour and attitude was never an issue with John and Tina, Voila! Tracy thought she had everything under control until one day John, mustering a lot of courage, asked his mother if he could go out with his friends for a sleep over.

Fearing that her control would weaken, she immediately replied in the negative. “Why not ?” snapped John. “Watch your tone,” Tracy retorted. “You are not going, period”.

Tracy now realised that she was dealing with teen pressure and she had to establish firm rules and regulations to set the scene for future behaviour. She ensured there were boundaries and John often fell in line although now and again he would throw his tantrums. Tina, who was still young; however, knew that her mother was not going to give in that easily. To Tracy’s dismay, things turned out for the worse with John. This incident was the beginning of many more incidents to follow as the changing times, peer pressure and prevailing culture started to influence John’s thinking and way of life. Tracy had to make a decision as to whether to continue with her management style or adopt a different approach as John started to interact less with the family and spent most of his time either by himself or with his laptop. To make matters worse, Tracy one day stumbled on a love letter written by a female admirer of John’s. Faced with these ever increasing challenges, Tracy found it difficult to come to terms with her parenting style. However, she was very clear about what she expected from her children and when something was important and when it was not. John’s inability to understand his mother due to peer pressure made him more adverse towards her, of course without much evidence of the same.

Not everything was negative about John. In spite of all the distractions, courtesy of his peers, John did focus on his studies when it was required of him as he did have an objective for his next level of education. Apparently, during this time, his longing to be free and independent also became quite evident as he would sometimes tell his sister of his intention to do his further studies elsewhere. His desire became stronger as his peers also discussed their intentions to leave home to study abroad. The culmination of school life now opened an opportunity for his much - awaited desire to be independent and away from controlled parenting according to John's perspective.

John ultimately succeeded in getting admission into an engineering college and the joy of being independent for the first time knew no bounds. Weeks passed by and John became well known not only among his peers but also his seniors, thanks to his friendly nature and innumerable talents. Life seemed to be very rosy and enjoyable so much so that his communication with his mother in the beginning was merely, the barest minimum. Tracy however, still continued to have a watchful eye through her brother whom she made as John's guardian. As the months passed by, John started to realise that even though he was independent and on his own, he missed the closeness and touch of his mother and sister. Being a boy who spoke very little, he did not communicate much but in his actions he expressed a lot. Life didn't seem to be as rosy as he

imagined but his ability to manage, be successful and independent is what he attributes now to his mother's parenting style- "FIRM LOVE".

The story still goes on as Tracy has now her next challenge; Tina, who is a teen now is already throwing tantrums. Apparently, with John's success I am sure Tracy will be able to handle Tina with ease. Moreover, children learn by example since the behaviour, values and attitudes of parents and siblings have a strong influence on children.

So as a parent, what is your parenting style? Don't lose hope. Nothing is lost; it is just about tweaking your approach to parenting. It is said that "permissive parenting is what leads to children with poor discipline. Parents who are firm and able to set appropriate boundaries and rules raise better behaved children". Children of parents who are permissive often view their parents as uncaring. As parents, therefore, it is our responsibility to set the rules, be firm and be the villain from time to time. We are responsible for guiding our children and sometimes that means making them do things they don't like.

Needless to say, therefore, it is imperative for parents to adopt a parenting style to empower children to develop self-discipline and fit into the world. Most children thrive in a family where they are loved and respected. Ensuring that discipline is part of this actually

shows you care. Parents have to identify what is really important to the family. Parents must have a proper parenting style. The optimum style is to be clear about what is expected and when something is important and when it is not. As Steve Biddulph rightly states, “parents must aim for a style that combines setting of limits balanced with love, which is known as **Firm Love**”.

To ensure proper functioning of this style, some things need to be followed. Parents have to be consistent and follow through. Don't say no unless you mean it: teaching and guiding children about how to express or show their feelings; spending time with children helps them know they are valued; the warmth of touch and positive body language are also great ways to show approval, support and security. Consequences, however, should not be forgotten and if it is needed, it should be immediate and brief and one that fits the crime, for it's their behaviour that needs to be resurrected, and not the children.

Parental love needs to be given unconditionally to establish trust and a firm foundation of emotional intimacy in a child's life. The emotional foundation we give our children at home is foundation to their life. We cannot underestimate the value of home and the power of parental love. Yes, it is tough being a parent and I think it's harder to say “no” than it is to say “yes”. At times like these, I

remember my mother's words, **“It is because I love you that I have to say ‘no’.”**

Therefore to conclude, as parents do we say “No” too? I have and it has worked. How about you?

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