



As you head into your child's 22nd month, you are entering the next stage of parenting: The Authority Stage. Because this stage requires specific skills and a greater understanding of what "parental authority" really entails, this issue of KinderKronicle focuses entirely on this concept of authority.

PARENT LEADERSHIP: The *Authority* Stage of Parenting

"Becoming an authority for most is a process of making mistakes and rectifying them."

—Ellen Galinsky, *"The Six Stages of Parenthood"*

In KinderKronicle Month 20, we mentioned Ellen Galinsky's Six Stages of Parenthood. Briefly, they are:

Stage 1: The Image-Making Stage: During pregnancy, parents "form and re-form images" of the upcoming birth and the changes they anticipate. This is a period of preparation.

Stage 2: The Nurturing Stage: Parents compare image and actual experience during the time from baby's birth to toddler's first use of the word "no" (about age 18 to 24 months). This is a period of attachment and also of questioning. Parents may question their priorities and also how they spend their time.

Stage 3: The Authority Stage: When the child is between 2 years and 4 - 5 years, parents decide "what kind of authority to be." This is a period of developing and setting rules, as well as enforcing them. With this Month 22 issue of KinderKronicle, and with Months 23 and 24, we will review ideas to help you add "authority," compatible with your child's continued need to be nurtured, to your parenting.

Stage 4: The Interpretive Stage: The Interpretive Stage starts around the time your child begins school and ends as your child approaches adolescence. In this stage, parents figure out how they want to interpret reality for their children and more firmly decide on the values they want to promote.

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Stage 5: The Interdependent Stage: The Interdependent Stage begins as your child enters adolescence and lasts throughout the child's teenage years. This stage involves a lot of the same issues as in the Authority stage, reworked to fit the older child's needs.

Stage 6: The Departure Stage: The Departure Stage happens when the child leaves home and is usually a time when parents evaluate how their parenting has been and what successes and failures they've had.

THE AUTHORITY STAGE

For the past 22 months you have been in the Nurturing Stage. When your child utters her first “no,” that is your signal that change is on the horizon. You are now entering the third stage—*The Authority Stage*. According to Ellen Galinsky, the Authority Stage is the time when the *parent* must “[accept] his or her authority over the child,”¹ as the leader of the home. This is important and worth repeating because it is a change that you, as the parent, must make. You must accept that you are the leader of your child and family.

Galinsky points out that all parents have ideas on how parenting “should” be, gathered from our experiences, from observing others in our community, and from our personal and cultural ideals, whether we realize we have these expectations or not.

The task, then, is to identify the expectations you have about authority and parenting, and then decide which ones work for you, and which ones need to be changed or abandoned to fit real life. As you do this, you are better able to face problems “consciously and deliberately” rather than “muddling through, day by day, situation by situation.”² You are able to be parent leaders, and the authority in your home.

Galinsky suggests that there are three steps that will help you become the authority in the home and in your child's life:

Step # 1: Establish family rules to govern your child and yourselves as the parents.

Step #2: Communicate with your child the family rules that apply to him.

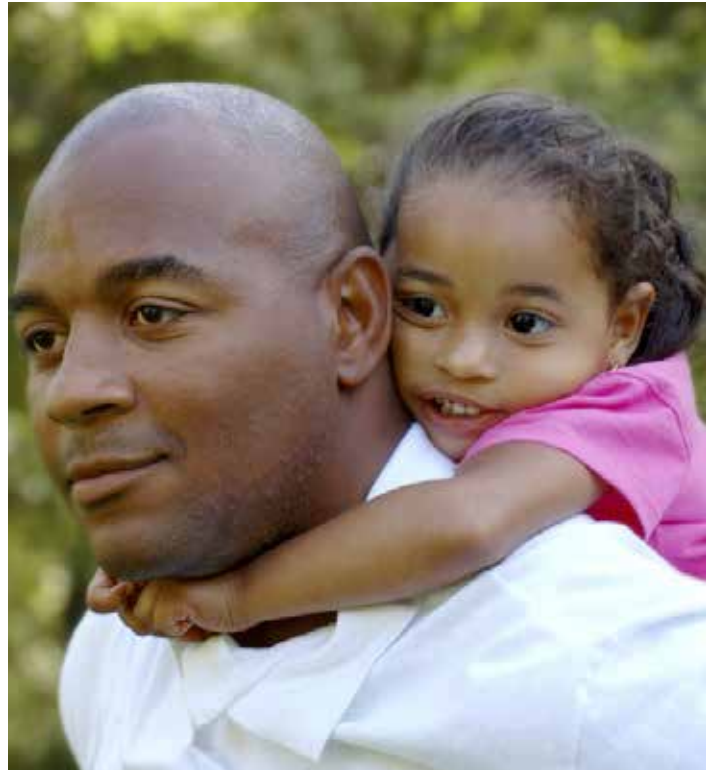
Step #3: Enforce the family rules with consistency.

For ease of reference and identity, let's call it the “ECE” formula: Establish, Communicate, and Enforce.

LET'S TALK A BIT ABOUT EACH STEP.

Step #1: Establish family rules

In the DVD *A Chat with your Baby*, a 12-year-old girl discussed how our lives are governed by rules or laws in nearly every aspect of life.



Then she said, “*It's important that we have family rules. Write them down.*”

As your child becomes more independent, more mobile, and more curious about the world around him, it becomes imperative to have limits and boundaries, clearly explained. In other words, family rules. You, as the parent, are establishing yourself as the authority that makes and enforces the limits and boundaries—the rules.

The child who comes to understand rules and boundaries within the same environment where she is loved and nurtured will be more receptive of your parenting authority. Keep in mind that if she is raised in a home without boundaries, the world outside the home can be scary and dangerous for her. Why? Because a child who has not been taught authority, rules, and boundaries in the home has no way of knowing what is acceptable and what is not outside the home.

On the other hand, boundaries that are too limiting don't allow your child to grow and learn. As with so much of parenting, it is a balancing act. KinderKronicle will continue to discuss authority, boundaries, rules and discipline, coupled with nurturing, in future issues.

Step #2: Communicate with your child the family rules that apply to him.

Galinsky gives the following examples: “Is the child told what to do? Is the child told the reasons behind the limit, or is only the limit itself stated? In what tone of voice?”³

For example, do you use a commanding, or even angry, voice to say ‘You will do what I say!’ Or, do you calmly and kindly state the limit or rule? For example, ‘Jimmy, balls are for outside. We can play with the ball outside, or we can play something else inside.’

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When do you communicate your rules? Do you tell your child what his limits are before a problem occurs, or are your rules created in the moment, when a stressful situation or problem is already happening? Do you tell your child what his limits are before a problem occurs, or are your rules created in the moment, when a stressful situation or problem is already happening?

In future issues, KinderKronicle will discuss ways to effectively communicate with a two-year-old. We will also explain how the communication style you adopt affects your child. For example, next month's KinderKronicle will discuss the four basic "parenting disciplines," which are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Each of these disciplines includes a different way of communicating expectations to children. KinderKronicle advocates for authoritative parenting, and we will discuss "why" in Month 23.

Step # 3: Enforce the family rules with consistency.

As Galinsky says, "Ultimately, this means, what happens when the child loses control? And what happens when the parent feels like losing control?"⁴ "How do you help your child learn to deal with frustration when it occurs?"⁵

This step deals with the child's, and parents', choices and consequences:

- How do you want your child to learn from her mistakes?
- How will you react when your child tests her limits?
- What is your goal in the consequence you choose?
- Will you be consistent?
- How strongly do you want to enforce the rules you have set?

- Are you making sure to connect with your child, to show your love even when corrections to behavior are necessary?

Now that we have explained the basics of Galinsky's ECE formula, the question is "now what?" How do you make it work in your day-to-day living? Ellen Galinsky suggests several ideas that help parents to achieve the ECE steps. Here are three of the ideas she recommends:

- 1 First, work to understand your child.⁶ What are his actions telling you? For example, is your child dealing with big emotions he doesn't understand? Is he hurt, mad, scared, tired, hungry, testing boundaries, or feeling lost? Is he asking for affection or attention, or is he experimenting with a new skill or idea? Often, a child this age doesn't have the words or understanding to convey the real problem, so it's important to try to see the situation from the child's point of view. You are better able to establish useful rules and communicate them effectively if you understand your child's needs, and you are better able to enforce the rules in an effective way, as well.

One of the reasons KinderKronicle includes the "Baby Chatter" and "Child Chatter" articles on a regular basis is because they help you understand your child's behavior better from a developmental viewpoint. When you can understand possible reasons for a particular behavior, it helps you to problem-solve and figure out how to help your child behave and communicate in more acceptable ways. For example, a two-year-old that hits isn't "bad"—she just needs to be taught how to communicate frustration in a better way.

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2 Another idea to help you become an authority using the ECE formula is to “Avoid Battles of Will.”⁷

Galinsky points out that you don’t have to exert control all the time, and you don’t have to always give in, either—that it is possible to find middle ground.

For instance:

Assume it is time to leave the park, but your child doesn’t want to go. You might change the focus from leaving to giving a choice about the next activity. Instead of saying “Sorry, Tommy, it’s time to go,” you might say “Okay, Tommy, it’s time to go eat lunch! Would you like a peanut butter sandwich, or a ham and cheese sandwich?”

Now, that doesn’t mean it will always be a breeze to leave. In that case, “Tommy” could either suggest a third acceptable lunch option, or you might say “I’m sorry you can’t keep playing at the park. If I could, I’d let you play all day long. That would be so fun! But right now, it’s time for lunch. You can choose one of the foods I offered, or I can choose.” This way, you are giving your child choices that are acceptable for both of you, you are empathizing with him, and you are avoiding a battle of will.⁸


3 A third idea in asserting your authority, according to Galinsky, is changing as the child changes.⁹

What works one day doesn’t always work the next, because children are always changing. As Galinsky’s statement at the beginning of this article points out, learning how to effectively exercise parental authority is, for most parents, a process of making mistakes and rectifying them. The important thing is to be flexible, and willing to try and try again as you work to figure out what your rules are, how you want to communicate with your child, and how you will enforce your rules in such a way that your child learns and grows in an environment of understanding and love.

Learning how to exercise the right degree of authority is essential in becoming an effective



family leader. As you learn, you’ll wonder how much is too much, and how much is too little? When should you let things go, and when should you hold firm? It’s definitely a lot to think about and process.

Because it’s a learning process and because it is so important, KinderKronicle will return to the subject of “authority” frequently during the next three years with ideas to help you grow into your role as the family authority in your home. Remember: it is your job to lovingly establish your family rules, communicate them to your child, and enforce them to help your child learn and grow. 

1. Galinsky, Ellen. *The Six Stages of Parenthood*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1987. Print. Pg. 120.

2. *Ibid.* pg. 135

3. *Ibid.* pg. 135-136

4. *Ibid.* pg. 136

5. *Ibid.* pg. 165

6. *Ibid.* pg. 139

7. *Ibid.* pg. 144

8. Faber, Adele, Elaine Mazlish, Kimberly Ann Coe, and Joanna Faber. *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk*. New York: Scribner, 1980. Print.

9. Galinsky, Ellen. *The Six Stages of Parenthood*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1987. Print. pg. 144

NEXT ISSUE - MONTH 23; LOOK FOR THESE EXCITING FEATURES AND ARTICLES

- BATTLE HYMN OF THE TIGER MOM!
The American Civil War Over Parenting
- PARENT LEADERSHIP: Selecting a Parenting Discipline

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