

LEADER OR CONTROLLER?

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There are very important differences between being a parent who leads and a parent who controls. A person needs to be in 'control' of their own emotions, their own direction and their own life. A parent needs to be in control of his or her own household. Being 'in control' and being a controller are sometimes confused.

Let's consider effective leadership. A good parent leader demonstrates the following characteristics. They have the best interests of the whole family as their prime motivator. They provide direction, order, positive role modeling, training, praise and encouragement. They share responsibilities with the family, allowing children to learn skills and become dependable young adults. They welcome their children's ideas and opinions in an effort to provide a happy, productive and purposeful family. They encourage their children to be adventurous, to dream big and then support them in achieving their goals. They encourage freedom of thought and action.

A controller, on the other hand, has entirely different motives. This person is not always thinking of what is best for the family. He/she is thinking of what will suit his/her own needs first. He/she has a personal agenda that needs to be satisfied before anything else. This kind of behavior is often rooted in insecurity and the lack of a positive self-esteem. A controller does not like to delegate responsibility because that means he or she is no longer in control of any given situation. There is a fear that if someone else learns a particular skill then they might take over the control.

Controllers often feel so negative about themselves that they do not consider praise to be constructive. They may think that praise and encouragement only gives away ground that they were occupying, and that the receiver of such praise will begin to think more highly of themselves than they should. This would not suit his or her agenda. A controller will often set impossible expectations, making those around him or her feel that nothing they do is good enough. Family members lose all confidence and give up trying to contribute to family life. The controller makes all the decisions, accepting nobody else's ideas. Their favorite saying is, "It is my way or the highway." There is little or no joy in the home. By exhibiting controlling characteristics, this person has robbed the family of producing mature, well-adjusted contributors to adult society.

The key is to be in charge without being 'over controlling'. Only then will a healthy, ordered and constructive family environment be established. Over controlling brings resentment, even rebellion. The recipients feel powerless, disrespected and abused. It often leads to children seeking attention in a

negative way to bring shame on the family, or to 'get back' at the controlling parent. I have observed this often in such families...daughters becoming pregnant in their early teens, youths becoming involved in the drug culture or using alcohol inappropriately, girls becoming anorexic...anything, just to feel they have some level of control over their own lives or simply to hurt the controller. Only by being a positive, strong family leader does a parent give a child dignity, worth, hope and a desire to succeed.

If you think you are a controller, or that someone in your home shows controlling tendencies, you need to seek professional help for the good of yourself and your family.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.