

## Frequently asked questions

### **Does my pine tree have a future?**

**Q:** My pine tree child wants to become a dog groomer! He works at a doggy parlour during school holidays. He smells, earns almost no money, and only socialises with four-footed friends. How can I be the least bit enthusiastic about this? Am I allowed to at least impress on him that he will never be able to provide for a family doing this?

**A:** If money, what one smells like, and socialising are your highest values, you may emphasise these. However, if personal accomplishment, service, and living out your passion are your highest values, I suggest you support him, buy a good deodorant, and encourage him to share his passion with a friend. Socialising is not the biggest source of fulfilment. Of course you are allowed to pray that he reaches the top of his chosen profession. Pet grooming is definitely an evolving business. Someone has to own that doggy parlour! It might as well be your son!

### **What will make my teenager listen?**

**Q:** Do I understand correctly that palm tree teenagers don't really listen to us but rather test everything and therefore get into trouble often? I don't want to see my child have to learn from his painful mistakes the whole time. Isn't there any other way?

**A:** Unfortunately, painful experiences are the main way most palm trees learn. (Even grown-up palm trees aren't known for listening to others ...)

However, there is another powerful way: examples and stories of their role models. Palm trees tend to follow strong examples and usually have heroes or role models with whom they strongly identify. They would rather listen to their favourite sports star discussing the dangers of drugs than listen to their parents doing the same. Because their peer group plays such an important role, they will understand the implications of teenage pregnancy much better if a friend who got pregnant shares her battle with them rather than if they are bombarded by warnings from teachers, parents, and the media. Pamphlets on AIDS will be folded into paper planes, but when they stand next to the bed of another seventeen-year-old in a hospital and can see for themselves how the disease destroys a body, their eyes and ears will open up. It is our duty to organise opportunities for these hard-of-hearing children to experience such direct confrontations with harsh realities.

### **Should I break my lollipop's mould?**

**Q:** My lollipop daughter's behaviour is ritualistic. She always eats her food in the same sequence, keeps everything in her room in the same place, packs her schoolbag the same way every day, and also wants to dictate to me how to do things. A psychologist recommended that I move her room around, change her routine, and surprise her sometimes so that she doesn't stay so rigid. Is that a good idea?

**A:** It may be too harsh to say her behaviour is rigid. She must be allowed to order things as she likes them within her personal space. However, you mustn't allow her habits to affect the rest of the family, because she has to learn that her perfectionism shouldn't complicate life for other people. When she dictates to you, you can respond patiently that you want to do things your way and that you will also allow her to do things her way. If you feel that she needs lessons in flexibility, I suggest that you make one small change at a time and support her if it is difficult for her to handle.

### **Why is this pre-schooler out of control?**

**Q:** There is a three-year-old girl in my nursery school class. She does things she knows very well are not allowed: she bothers and teases friends by grabbing their belongings or pushing them without reason. She will scribble in a book or break things just to get attention. She is clever and energetic and thrives when I give her responsible chores. How should I handle her?

**A:** There is enough convincing evidence from her behaviour that she is an outspoken rose bush. Her behaviour is normal seen in light of her temperament and age, but obviously it is unacceptable because it distracts the other children and damages property. Her behaviour is definitely aimed at testing the boundaries and establishing her role in the class. At the moment she is auditioning for your part! Her second choice is that of class bully. The positive alternative is the role of class leader. When you give her chores she feels she is succeeding. As soon as she has the role of helper she doesn't feel the need to act unsuitably, and she becomes a different child. If you feel it is unfair to always make her the leader while other children never get the opportunity, you must remember that some children have no desire to lead!

Bullying works for her because it ensures that she gets all your attention. This is how she controls you and the other children. You have to make a very clear distinction between your reactions to her good behaviour and your reactions to her unacceptable behaviour. React immediately and in a loud voice to her good behaviour in front of the whole class. Especially emphasise the behaviour that reveals love and help to friends. On the other hand, react as slowly, unemotionally and privately as possible to the unacceptable behaviour. You have to focus your attention on the victim every time and ignore her. For example, immediately go and console the child whose lunch-box was snatched. Then wait a few minutes before you take the bully aside. She must tell you in her own simple words what she did wrong, what she should have done instead, and what she will do to set things right. You have to insist that she at least apologise. The longer you can postpone giving attention, the better. You can even wait until break time or the afternoon nap before you talk to her about the unacceptable behaviour. However, never ignore it.

Create a system where her role as class bully is less attractive than the role as class leader. Choose a time when everyone is sitting nicely on the play mat. Explain that your class is a team who likes being nice to each other. Let the class mates give examples of pleasant behaviour. The child who reveals such behaviour will sit in front in a "nice" spot at story time, news time, or music time and will also get the next chore to do for the teacher (or replace it with something else you know will make her feel important). Make a rule that the one who isn't playing nicely may not participate in the playing, singing, or answering of questions and also won't be able to help you with the chores. Make sure all her worst "sins" are named as examples of "angry" behaviour, obviously without saying her name! Then also choose an "angry" spot – not somewhere in the corner where she can draw attention – rather somewhere in the back of the class. When she or other children misbehave, say something calm and unemotional like, "Unfortunately you have thrown Dave's bag around. That is not 'nice.' That is 'angry.' Therefore you will not join in the singing now. Go and sit in the 'angry' place. I am sure you will be nice enough to join the rest of your friends again soon."

You can also ask for a voluntary policeman who will ensure that the unacceptable behaviour doesn't continue without your knowledge. She will definitely volunteer. The responsibility should put a damper on her antics.

Advise her parents to act very firmly against any bullying and to give her lots of positive responsibilities at home.

### **How should I handle a two-year-old rose bush?**

**Q:** What should I do with a two-year-old rose bush who manipulates me by falling down and screaming but doesn't understand the word "manipulation" or the arguments around this yet?

**A:** Say "No, it doesn't work!" very firmly and send (or carry) the screaming bundle to a neutral corner where he can continue kicking or screaming without an audience. If he wants to "escape", take him back there with the words, "No, you are still wild." As soon as he calms down you can fetch him or call him. Say something like, "O, you are happy again" or "Yes, you can come back now." Even if you have to do this ten times in a row, he has to experience that manipulating behaviour has no effect on you. You must remain calm and your "no" must remain "no." You shouldn't just stand by flustered because an awestruck audience is fuel to the fire of a rose bush's outbursts!

### **What can I do besides screaming?**

**Q:** It feels to me as if I don't achieve anything if I don't raise my voice with my rose bush. Are there any alternatives?

**A:** We would love to get rid of our rose bushes' thorns in the maternity ward, wouldn't we? We can't do that, but we can take away one of their biggest weapons by not talking to them so loudly. It is difficult to volley if the serve is weak. Therefore, if you speak gently and calmly they can't retort easily. Instead of harsh words we can use firm conduct. In this way we serve aces that can't be returned. We will not win with our mouths against a rose bush. We have to do it with consistent action. Say, "We have talked about this already. Because you have done it, you will unfortunately have to be punished. You will now have to go to bed half an hour earlier (or get no pudding, lose R5 pocket money, get an extra turn at washing the dishes, etc.)." Push ahead with the punishment calmly and don't reason about it.

Scolding and shouting are not punishments. In fact, some children find these so amusing that they can even be rewarding. Unfortunately, they are also things that undermine your own authority. Children can never deserve a scolding. They deserve punishment. I often see rose bushes who choose the punishment rather than the obedience because no sanctions are bad enough to deter them. The punishment has to be unpleasant enough that the rose bush won't want to choose it.

### **Should I hide the doll and the dummy?**

**Q:** My pine tree daughter goes and sucks her ancient dummy when I scold her about something. This is how she consoles herself. But she is five years old! Should I forbid her to do this? She also still sleeps with a tattered old teddy bear. Isn't it time I took it away?

**A:** Your daughter finds comfort in the sucking action because it gave her a feeling of safety when she was a baby. Babies associate it with the calming effect of breastfeeding or with the endorphins (calming hormones) that are released when they feed. There is no reason to take the dummy away. She will feel grown up enough later on to do this on her own. Until then it can cause problems if you take away her "comforter," because she will have to replace it with something else – usually something equally unacceptable or worse. For the same reason her teddy is still important to her. Teddy bears have a way of getting lost or staying behind somewhere one day. Just wait for that day. If you take away the teddy it might be you who has to go to bed with her every night!

When children feel uncertain, they regress (go back) to an activity, place, or thing they associate with feeling safe. Some start talking like babies again, want to wear diapers again, want to get back into bed with Mom and Dad, look for their favourite blankets, which they have outgrown long ago, or secretly start sucking their thumbs. It is a sure sign of stress. Make sure that you or someone else in your five-year-old's life aren't expecting too much from her. Talk to her about things that make her feel scared or "pressured." Pine trees are the most sensitive to this and very prone to regression.

### **Should sensitive lollipops get away with murder?**

**Q:** Surely I can't let my lollipop get away with murder just because she tends to fall apart when there is the slightest bit of criticism. What is my alternative?

**A:** When you have to criticise or correct a lollipop, I suggest a "criticism sandwich." This means that we have to insert the criticism between two soft "slices of bread." We first say something nice; then we carefully criticise and close with something positive again to ensure the conversation ends pleasantly. For example, we can approach a lollipop teenager who dresses inappropriately as follows: "I am very proud to have you as a child. You have such a beautiful character that shines through, regardless of what you are wearing. But I am not sure that the clothes you are wearing now show your true character. Think a while what they say about you. If you are satisfied, wear them, but if in any way you don't feel yourself in them, wear something else instead. Of course, you are more than just your clothes to me, and I am still proud of you even if you don't agree with me about this."

### **How can I win back my pine tree?**

**Q:** What can I do if my pine tree and I don't talk to each other at all?

**A:** Show your love and interest by including yourself in one of your pine tree's activities or interests. If she loves photography, buy yourself a book on it, read it, and then make an informed, interested comment on her next photo. If you have a son who is only interested in computers, you can ask him to show you how to get into a chat room, to blog, or to download music instead of just complaining because he spends all his time in front of the screen!

I know of a woman who realised one day that she and her son no longer had a relationship. They couldn't even talk to each other. Her child was going through a difficult time, but she couldn't support him. She prayed and asked, "Lord, what can I say to him?" She waited for the magical words, but the Lord guided her to do something much more difficult – to join him in jogging on his newspaper delivery route each morning! For months she got up at five o'clock each morning to be ready to set off with her son at six o'clock, backpack in hand. At first there was no talking – partly because she was still too unfit to talk and run at the same time, but also because no-one really knew what to say. But this teenage son "heard" a lot. He heard how much his mother was willing to do to repair the relationship. He heard that he was more important to her than her sleep and her work. After a long time – almost a year (typical pine tree!) – he said the first words, and slowly but surely invited his mother back into his world. She proved that she deserved it. Today they have a better relationship than ever.

We can get back a place in our pine tree's life in the same way. And yes, it won't be easy!

### **What should a strict mother of a "space cadet" do?**

**Q:** I am a very strict mother. I don't just scold; I tend to crush my children when they are wrong. I also let them have it with ugly criticism when I am not satisfied. When I had to take my daughter's swimwear to school last week, I shouted at her that she would probably forget her head at home if it weren't attached to her body. And then I added I would wring her neck if she forgot her swimwear again because I hate it when I have to bring her the things she forgets. How can I learn to act differently?

**A:** Teach yourself to ask sincere questions instead of making the angry statements you are making now. You instead could have asked, "How can we ensure that you don't forget your swimwear at home again?" You are not supposed to bring her things she forgets. Unfortunately she will have to learn that you can't always be a safety net or a Samaritan who comes to her

rescue. If you can't help her in a friendly way, you should not help her at all. How small do you suppose such unfriendly help makes a forgetful child feel? Rather ask, "How will you make it worth my while to bring you the swimwear?" Parents often make the mistake of thinking it is part of their basic responsibilities to catch the balls their children drop. It isn't! If your child causes a crisis because of her bad planning, you may expect her to make up for it.

What will empower her is for both of you think of a plan together that will ensure that she remembers everything she needs in future. Instead of shouting impatiently every morning, "Make sure you don't leave anything here. I am not going to bring it to you!" you could rather ask a question like, "Do you have everything you need for your day?" It is not threatening and it shows you are interested. If your child had indeed forgotten something, it gives her an opportunity to feel good because she remembered it "herself" without you having to rattle off the whole list: "Do you have your bookcase, your food, your test, your letter, your jersey, your swimwear and your snack money?"

### **How do I solve nasty sibling rivalry?**

**Q:** My lollipop daughter is almost nine. Her sixteen year old rose bush brother insults her terribly: "You are too fat. You have an ugly nose. You will never get a boyfriend." How can I help her?

**A:** Unfortunately, her nature causes her to be crushed by such remarks. Her appearance and how she compares with others is very important to her. She hears the negative comments and unfortunately her palm tree optimism will most probably not outweigh the lollipop insecurities when she is attacked in this way. Therefore, first help her by teaching her to only take notice of people who love her and to ignore those who treat her badly. This is the only way in which she will stay standing emotionally. She has to ask herself, "Does this person who says I am fat care for me? If not, I am not going to give him a grip on my mind by taking his comments seriously."

Second, it is essential to stop your son's behaviour. The ideal is for every house to have a rule against insults, belittling, and cruel teasing. Just call it "hitting is out" – meaning that we are not allowed to deal physical or emotional blows. When it does happen, restitution has to be made. The insulter has to make up for the lack of respect and love by serving the insulted person with respect and love. He can be forced to take over her household chores for a week. (Example: making her bed and taking care of her pets) It may be uncomfortable for both, but it cultivates greater sensitivity for each other. Unfortunately, your son is sixteen and this kind of teasing has gone very far already. However, it is not too late. Choose a good time to explain to him that he is belittling others to feel better about himself. His behaviour is typical of someone with a poor self-image, insecurity about his own appearance, and little respect for himself and others. Does he really want to convey that image? Explain to him that he humiliates himself and therefore has to do a humble task of his sister's choice for her every time he is so mean.

It is possible that this rose bush son of yours gets few positive remarks, eye contact, physical contact, and praise from you because of his aggressive behaviour. His sister, on the other hand, is pleasant and exemplary, and he probably sees the expression of pride, satisfaction, and approval in your eyes when you look at her. Because she is younger, she gets more direct help and nurturing, and she is probably simply easier to hug and cherish. Make an effort to see and reward his good moments, even if it is only with a smile. Ask him directly what makes him feel that his sister is the favourite. His answer may well reveal his needs. "She gets almost as much pocket money as I do, even though I am much older than her," for instance, will reveal that he wants more recognition for his age (being more "grown up"). "You only chat with her," will reveal that he has a greater need to be part of the relaxed family conversations. He needs more proof that you enjoy his company.

### **Why is my son good at home and naughty elsewhere?**

**Q:** My palm rose son doesn't fit this book's description. He is a very good student and not naughty at all. My husband (a pine rose) and I (a lollirose) have been strict with him from an early age and we place a lot of emphasis on academic achievement. When he goes to visit his grandma and grandpa, however, they say that he is quite mischievous. Does this mean that they are not strict enough?

**A:** You and your husband have asserted your rose bush style of parenting from an early age and so pruned away your palm rose's thorns. What remained was the determination, maturity, and self-discipline rose bushes are also known for! He probably realised that he would not be in control at home and has accepted it as such. You are probably both left-brain dominant. Your son has inherited this or acquired it by following your example. Research in this regard differs, but most recent suggestions are that non-motor dominance, such as reasoning patterns and learning styles, are acquired. Dominance of the eye, hand, and foot, on the other hand, is innate. Because of his left-brain dominance, his palm tree characteristics are less prominent. Also remember that palm trees crave approval and attention. If he finds that academic achievement and good behaviour give him that essential recognition, he will keep on conforming to what is expected of him, especially if the rose bush will has been bent by your strong hand. Look out for signs that your palm tree is withering. Rebellion can surface later on. If your son acts very differently away from home, it is a sure sign that he can't be a palm rose at home. You probably don't think very highly of the characteristics of a palm tree and therefore he feels that he is not allowed to be one. Allow space for creativity, fun, fantasy, and whatever it is that his grandparents do right. Mischievousness is not a sin.

### **Should I give my child medication for "ADD"?**

**Q:** My seven-year-old daughter has been labelled "naughty" by her teacher and the teacher has recommended that I have Ritalin prescribed for what she calls "ADD." What are my alternatives?

**A:** Medication is wonderful when one really needs it but a monstrosity when it is used unnecessarily. Parent-centered therapy is always the first step. This therapy can include sensory integration therapy or therapy in visual processing by an occupational therapist or auditory processing therapy by a speech therapist or audiologist. This therapy helps your child to monitor herself so that she can purposefully refocus her attention when she loses concentration. She also learns strategies to process the tangle of stimuli competing for her attention, for example at school, so that she can concentrate and react to the important visual and auditory stimuli. For instance, she can learn to listen to the teacher rather than the children outside the classroom or to concentrate on the written work on the blackboard instead of paying attention all the time to what her classmates are doing. Educational psychologists, paediatric neurologists, and dieticians can also give good parental guidance regarding ways to deal with your child's discipline, routine, learning style, and diet.

If therapy and parental guidance don't help, you can consider medication. It can be natural remedies or something like Ritalin. The secret with any medicine is careful monitoring. The dose and side-effects of Ritalin or any other "concentration medication" must be monitored patiently and with good cooperation of the therapists and teacher until an ideal administration schedule is worked out. It can vary during weekends and holidays, exam times, and normal school times. It may need to be adapted as your child grows older or progresses through the growing phases. However, it can do wonders when you walk this road faithfully and with confidence in a good doctor until your child shows improvement.

### **May my lollirose be his siblings' boss?**

**Q:** My lollirose fancies himself as a third parent in the house. He repeats all my instructions to his brother and sister and would have liked to discipline them if he could! When they don't obey, he intervenes and insists that we punish them severely. Sometimes it is convenient to have help, because I can count on him to see that all my instructions are followed through, but his siblings get furious when he "plays mom and dad." How should I handle it?

**A:** Read the Bible stories of Ezra and Nehemiah and repeat the relevant parts to him in simple words. They were both lollirose whom the Lord used to teach his Law to the people and to supervise them. Explain to him that the Lord also has this kind of job in mind for him. He will also show people what the right thing is to do and watch over them until they have done it. This will also mean that people will get angry with him when they don't want to do things his way. Then explain that a king may not crown himself. One may only be the leader when he has been elected or appointed. He was not appointed by his brother and sister. They didn't elect him as leader. Sometimes you will appoint him, for example to see to it that everyone brushes their teeth when you can't be in the bathroom at that stage. However, the way in which he handles his appointment will determine whether or not he will keep his "position." A very strict king such as Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 10) causes his subjects to rebel. Read this story to your son and explain the wisdom of compassionate leadership to him. Therefore, he is allowed to direct his siblings in a friendly way when you or they have asked him to do so. He may also talk to you about their disobedience, but he is not allowed to reprimand them.

Give him lots of responsibilities in other areas. For example, the pets won't mind having him as their boss.

### **How should I treat a non-greeter?**

**Q:** My seven-year-old lollipine refuses to greet people. He is very shy. It is an embarrassment to me. Should I allow him to rather not greet people at all?

**A:** No, your son may not have the option of not greeting people. He will only be uncomfortable for a few seconds. However, greeting someone is one of the most important social interactions. Explain to your son that there are two things that are important when we respect other people: we must look them in the eye and we must say their name clearly. A firm handshake between men also says a lot. When we greet people, we tell them something about ourselves. If we make eye contact and say our names clearly, it conveys a message that we respect ourselves. However, if we look down and mutter, we create the impression that we don't think much of ourselves. It is not necessary to kiss; he can just hold out a straight arm and greet in a friendly way. Also don't expect him to ask people how they are or tell long stories about himself yet.

### **Why is my lollirose so irrational and touchy?**

**Q:** My lollirose wanted to take down a picture from the wall, but she couldn't reach without standing on her bed – something she refused to do because her bed had already been perfectly made. Later, I sent her sister to secretly take it down. She left the bed perfect, but my lollirose made a terrible fuss because her sister had been on her bed, even though one couldn't even see it. I can't understand what the problem is because now she has the picture and her bed is still neatly made.

**A:** Lollipop roses want to crow on their own dunghill. They are more territorial than a crocodile in mating season! The unauthorised invasion of her space (that is how she experiences it when someone climbs on her bed!) was the first mistake. The second mistake was that you didn't give her time to solve her own problem in her own time. Lollirose feel humiliated when someone "saves" them without their asking. I suggest you apologise for these two "transgressions,"

because they have definitely encroached on her rights to a private space and to make decisions about her property. Try stepping back next time so that she can sort out her own problem. You are allowed to offer help, but she may refuse this in a friendly way! Her self-image depends on her finding solutions, rectifying her own mistakes, and executing plans successfully.

### **Why don't I fit the lollipop mould?**

**Q:** My score clearly indicates that I am a lollipop, but I am much more optimistic and not much of an introvert. I was head boy in Grade 12 and also occupied various leadership positions after that, but you said that lollipops are unlikely leaders. How can one explain this?

**A:** Lollipops can either be people-oriented or task-oriented, while pine trees can like people so much that they can in fact come out of their shells. You are probably a combination of these two – a people-oriented lollipop and a more outgoing pine tree. These characteristics make you very likeable. Your exemplary behaviour caused you to become head boy. However, you will never really feel at home in a public leadership role with huge responsibilities. You will prefer being second in command or being the leader of a smaller group of people.

### **How do I teach my daughter to keep her room tidy?**

**Q:** How can I help my eight-year-old daughter (a combination of all the tree types!) to be neater? I have tried many systems in her room, such as making attractive containers for her hair bands that are always missing. Her closet is always a mess within three days after tidying it. When I asked her if she felt ashamed, she answered with an astonished voice, "No, not at all."

**A:** You have a lollipop component who likes order, *no*, who *needs* order! Your daughter is right-brain dominant, which means that she isn't affected by untidy surroundings. In fact, she doesn't even see all the stuff lying around. She is happy as long as she can find her clothes when she wants to put them on and when she has a place to put them away when she takes them off. Looking for things doesn't bother her. The closet works well enough for her, whether it is untidy or neatly packed! You have to distinguish between being different and being unacceptable. She may not be allowed to damage anything. That is unacceptable. For instance, you are allowed to draw the line when she destroys books or when washed clothes land up among shoes. However, if she puts everything away, you have to be satisfied, even if she does it differently than you would have. She may not be allowed to waste your money. That is unacceptable. For example, if she loses her hair bands because she refuses to put them in one place, she has to buy new ones. However, if she miraculously finds two hair bands among the chaos every morning, you have to make peace with her "being different."

Your lollipop and palm tree components make you someone who is easily affected by others' opinions. Therefore you also expect her to keep her room tidy so that people don't think badly of her. That is not how she is wired. Isn't it more important that she does things out of her own convictions and self-respect rather than from a sense of shame you project onto her?

When she is older and more socially attuned she will be affected when her friends roll their eyes at her untidy room or when she can't find the pants that make her look her prettiest. The natural school of life is just around the corner. Be patient and don't sacrifice your valuable relationship for the sake of a much less valuable tidy room!

### **How do I calm down my drama queen?**

**Q:** My child is happy-go-lucky, playful, and funny, but sometimes she is just too intense and emotional. How can I help her to be less dramatic and hysterical?

**A:** You can take a good listening pose when she gets loud and dramatic and say something like, "Wait a bit. I really want to listen to you. Will you please calm down so I can hear what you are saying?" She thinks she can't convey her message without all the drama. Assure her that you can hear and understand her. It will also help to make her sit down and talk when she carries on too much. Say, "Come and sit here by me; then you can tell me nicely and clearly." If you also sit and even touch her, she won't need to perform to keep your attention.

### **How many choices are too many choices?**

**Q:** My three-year-old rosebush makes a point of being self-assertive. For example, she will take the ear of corn on her plate and throw it back in the serving dish, look me in the eye, and take another one, which looks exactly the same. Then she smiles victoriously at me. Should I appreciate her need for control or should I "prune" it?

**A:** Tell her that you can see she likes choosing for herself, but also explain to her what table manners you expect from her. If she asks nicely beforehand whether she may choose one herself, you will allow it, but when there is already food on her plate she may not exchange it. You can give her enough choices in other areas. Beware of giving her too many choices too soon. This can easily teach her that she is always entitled to her own choice.

### **How can I meet the lollipop's standard of fairness?**

**Q:** My lollipop child demands absolute fairness in the house. She begrudges her brother any reward he really deserves if she can't share in it. How can I help her to deal with it better?

**A:** She needs to learn to make peace with apparent inequality because life treats everyone differently. Ungratefulness is the underlying problem. Make an effort to point out all the privileges she has and talk to her about gratitude: It is noticing what you have, rather than what you don't have. Reward her each time she succeeds in this. Beware of enforcing equality in an unfair way. For instance, when one child asks for a soda, you don't have to offer everyone else one too. When it is one's birthday, the other must be satisfied with less attention without you having to compensate for this. When she complains about a sibling's privileges you can assure her that you love them all equally, but that everyone needs different things at different times.

### **How involved should I be in my child's homework?**

**Q:** My child complains a lot when he has to do his homework. How can I make him understand that he simply has to do it? Surely I can't sing his praises the whole time and reward him for doing it every day. I feel he has to take responsibility for this himself.

**A:** You are right. He is making you his motivator. You have to supply all the energy. Surely that is very tiring! You have to explain that your job is only to help him when he needs you. You are glad to help when necessary, but you expect the work environment to be calm and positive. As soon as you have ensured that he knows what to do, he has to start working alone. He may call you when he has a problem. He will not perform his self-pitying concert when there is no audience. When he calls in your help, you have to give the minimum help and leave immediately. At first the quality of his work may suffer a bit (a difficult thing for you to allow), but if you don't do this he won't achieve a sense of responsibility or self-sufficiency.

### **Can a three-year-old palm rose be neat?**

**Q:** My three-year-old palm roses changes her clothes up to three times a day and the clothes are strewn all over her room. How can I teach her neater habits before it is too late?

**A:** She has a need to be colourful, interesting and dynamic. She expresses this need by wearing different outfits. Get a container such as a plastic crate and put a bunch of older clothes in it, as well as a few costume-like items such as hats and belts. She is then only allowed to wear one set of clean, neat clothes per day. However, she may get dressed from the crate as many times as she likes. But everything has to be put back into the crate every night before bath time. A three-year-old needn't keep everything tidy the whole time but may be requested to tidy up once a day.

### **Is my child discerning or disrespectful?**

**Q:** My daughter is quick to take on her friends and even adults about their behaviour. She points out their faults to them undauntedly. Usually she is spot-on. How can I teach her to have more tact and also not to be blind to her own mistakes?

**A:** She gets away with it and in spite of her critical mindset (something that can in fact be very useful as well!) she has a large circle of friends. In the long run, however, people get tired of this. Read to her from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, about judging others and the "plank in your own eye." Make sure she understands that fault-finding and discernment are not the same things. Discernment means you are able to see the wrongs so that you can choose the rights. Fault-finding, however, leads to pride and hurts other people. Make a square poster with four blocks and write "criticism" in the top left block, "compliment" in the top right block, "cruel" in the bottom left block and "kind" in the bottom right block. Explain to her that you observed that she can see through people. You want her to practise it in a way that she won't only see the bad, but also the good. Each time she is critical, compliments someone, says kind things about someone, or says cruel things (give her an example of each) she will get a point in the appropriate block. She should consistently try getting the most points in the blocks on the right-hand side.

You can also expect her to "balance" every critical remark that slips out with a positive remark, for example: "Miss Barclay thinks too much of herself, but she really is very clever." Say "but ...?" every time she criticises someone and then wait for her to say something positive.

You may tell her that she also has her faults. Ask her whether she has identified some of them yet. Then ask how would she feel if someone constantly pointed them out to her? If she thinks it wouldn't bother her, ask her whether you may look for her faults for a whole day just to give her an idea what other people feel like.

Every time you criticise, introduce your criticism with the words, "I am going to say something cruel now, which might sound like I don't love you." Keep the criticism light-hearted, for example: "I see you are not very eager to do your homework today," rather than "You are very lazy today." The idea is not to hurt her, but rather to show her how one can reprimand others with tact.

### **How can we get to school on time?**

**Q:** Mornings revolve around my child. She nags and complains incessantly, and it takes a team effort to get her ready for school in time. How can I teach her time management so that it doesn't become such a titanic battle?

**A:** Tell her that you are not going to rant and rave in the mornings to get her to school on time. You will expect her to perform a short list of tasks in the same order before a certain time each morning. Make a poster of these things. She may frequently ask how much time is left and look at the poster to see what must still be done, but you are not allowed to refer to the time nor the list of your own accord. This kind of structure is very rigid and against her nature, but she will need such artificial measures as adult; otherwise she will always battle to manage her time. If she is late or becomes hysterical there will be a penalty time. That night she will have to go to bed half an hour earlier or get up half an hour earlier the next morning so that she can get ready for school in

time and in a calm manner. If you are afraid that you may really be late for school, you can wake her earlier on the first morning of the new arrangement with the promise that the wake-up call will be made later as soon as she improves.

### **How can a rose bush win in love?**

**Q:** Both my children are rose bushes and like to argue. How can I make both feel like winners when they expect me to actually point out a loser?

**A:** Teach them that the winner is the one who can act the most lovingly. The one who stops fighting first or the one who is more lenient wins. If they can resolve their conflict without calling you in as referee they are both winners. Encourage them to find their own solutions and then tell you about them. Make yourself scarce because when we stand next to them it sometimes adds the unnecessarily dramatic component of forcing us to choose sides.

### **How should I handle underachievement?**

**Q:** My child is very talented, but she doesn't push herself. She begins new activities with enthusiasm but then complains terribly when I want her to persist. She is eight years old now. Is she just too young?

**A:** Our children are under enormous pressure to perform these days. If we don't pressure them the school does. Everything is a competition. Every talent has to be rewarded with trophies or certificates; otherwise our children feel that they have underachieved. At this young age your child is still exploring her interests. Allow her to enjoy her activities. Ignore external pressure when she has clearly chosen the wrong activity and wants to stop doing it. If you drag her there for six months you will both burn out. If her pulling out could hurt the team, let her finish the term or sporting season. Don't make a penal camp out of activities that are supposed to be enjoyable or fulfilling. Teach her perseverance in other areas; otherwise you may just smother the little passion and interest she has left.

### **Why can't my child handle choices?**

**Q:** My child can't make decisions and this discourages him. He bursts into tears in shops because he can't choose a favourite from all the shoes, toys, or storybooks. What causes this indecision and anxiety?

**A:** Your child interprets choices as tests. He thinks there is a right and wrong answer to everything. He doesn't realise that any storybook can be the "right" one. Prepare him when he has to make a choice from a wide variety: "You are going to like more than one. It doesn't matter which one you choose. You will have many more chances to buy another one, and each time you will be able to choose a different one. We are only going to take five minutes to choose. If you can't choose before the time is up, I will help you by bringing you two or three from which to choose."

### **Should I force my child into team sports?**

**Q:** My lollipop son enjoys his tennis lessons, but sometimes he backs out of participation in team sports. He is not very competitive. Should we encourage him to participate in team sports?

**A:** Lollipops are known to be self-driven and would rather compete with themselves than others. It is difficult for them to cooperate in a group when they fear that the other children in the team could let them down (rose bush). They are also very scared that they will let the team down (lollipop). Rather allow him to do what he enjoys doing. Some children are not built for team

sports. He may have more self-confidence in a few years and surprise you by joining the rugby team, but don't force it.

### **How do I handle a smothering sibling?**

**Q:** My son doesn't really have personal space. He is very loving and enjoys physical contact. However, sometimes he invades his sisters' personal space. They hate it. How can I teach him to respect them without suppressing his spontaneous nature?

**A:** Tell him about the different trees and that all show their love in different ways. Point out ways in which his sisters like to receive love. Maybe they don't want a hug but rather a picture he drew them or a glass of cold drink. Teach him to also ask permission before he goes into their rooms or sits next to them. Reassure him that you will always welcome his hugs. Also teach his sisters that he is trying to show love in his own way and that you expect them to respond tactfully. For example, they can say: "Dave, just move up a little. I get anxious when you lie on top of me. I don't want a hug now, but I do love you too." As long as nobody punishes or hurts him when he is clumsy in his demonstration of love, he will keep on being demonstrative. He just needs patient "training."

### **Why does my lollipop sprout thorns?**

**Q:** My lollipop son gets furious when we reprimand him. When he is caught or cornered, he changes completely from a sweet child into a scary one. How should we correct and punish him?

**A:** This reaction is typical of a self-conscious lollipop. He hates making mistakes, and therefore he is very sensitive when they come to light. Ensure that he is disciplined very calmly and privately. Ask, "Do you know why I am not happy with your behaviour?" Then wait for his response. Also allow him to say what he can do to set things right and how he should act in future. He will probably know very well what he did wrong and what he should have done instead. Lollipops have an overactive conscience. He will be less defensive when you are not the one spelling out his mistakes.

### **Can charm go too far?**

**Q:** My three-year-old lollipop palm daughter is so cute and lovable that she gets away with murder. However, we are frequently involved in power struggles. She tries to win by being lovable and cute. When I give her limited choices, as recommended for rose bushes, she will add her own third option. Sometimes it is so adorable that we want to give in. How can I teach her that flattery is not always the answer?

**A:** Your daughter is only three years old. If you allow her to start wielding the sceptre now, you will have absolutely no authority by the time she reaches her teens. Ask yourself what her motive is each time. Does she want to postpone obedience, does she want to pass the buck, does she want to do things her own way, or does she merely want to see how serious you are? Tell her what you see and what you expect: "You are trying to persuade me to postpone your bath time. That is disobedience because I decide when you have to take your bath. Obedience means that you have to listen immediately. Do what I told you to do."

### **How do I handle a stubborn martyr?**

**Q:** My lollirose daughter hates putting on shoes when her feet are dirty. She would rather walk barefoot from the park over thorns and stones than put on her shoes. Moreover, she does this

with a sulky face and walks a few steps behind us. Why doesn't she want to be part of us? Can't she just dust off her feet, put on her shoes, and walk with us? How can I help break this habit?

**A:** Your daughter's sulky face is probably the result of your attempts to try and persuade her to put on her shoes. She wants to do her own thing (rose bush), but she is very aware of the fact that you are unhappy with her decision (lollipop). Therefore she walks where she doesn't have to look you in the eye. She knows she is being stubborn, but she can't help it. She should be allowed to follow her own mind because there will be opportunities for her to learn, like when she steps in a piece of glass or has to walk on the hot tarred road. If you let her be, without telling her what to do, she will be able to put on her shoes as soon as her feet hurt, without "losing," but if you have tried to persuade her, she will only be more determined to win by not putting on her shoes. Rather say something like, "You are welcome to walk barefoot for as long as you feel comfortable."

### **Is there a short-cut when I need to punish?**

**Q:** I have five children – each with his own temperament. If I have to consider which punishment would be fair, logical, and suitable according to their natures each time, I will sit and page through your book the whole day long. It would be too difficult for me. Isn't there a creative shortcut?

**A:** There are two possible ways to address the problem. The first solution is what I call a "sorry bag." It is used for less serious transgressions for which the logical punishment is not obvious but for which you feel there has to be a punishment. If your children are old enough, they can help you compile a list of about twenty different punishments. You write or draw each of these punishments on a piece of paper. Throw all the pieces of paper in a durable, laminated gift bag. The transgressor will be called each time with the word "Sorry!" He or she must then draw a punishment from the bag and do it without arguing. A few suggestions are:

- Make the bed of the person who was adversely affected by your behaviour every day for a week.
- Throw a predetermined amount of your pocket money into the "sorry bag" and after a few times Mom or Dad can buy themselves a treat.
- Take over someone's worst chore for two days.
- Clear the whole family's dirty dishes from the table.
- Clean the car.
- Get up earlier to prepare everyone's breakfast.
- Hand your favourite toy over to Mom so that she can put it away for a week.
- Miss out on the next episode of your favourite television programme.
- Lose cell phone privileges.
- Go to bed half an hour earlier.
- Take the last turn bathing, depending on the children's dislikes.

(Note that the punishments should preferably not only be extra chores, but rather the loss of privileges or special chores where the rest of the family is served. The message that work is punishment is not helpful. Work that serves the rest of the family because they were adversely affected by your behaviour is restitution rather than punishment; therefore it is a good idea.)

Your second option would be to make a wall chart where behaviour is categorised and depicted by a phrase or picture. Next to the behaviour you write or draw the punishment that will always follow this behaviour. The ideal would be to decide on the punishments as a family. Broad categories can include the following:

- Stealing

Punishment:

- Give back double what you took from your own possessions or pocket money. If you don't have money, you have to work until you can pay back twice the stolen item.

- Bad talk (swearing, shouting, insulting, teasing, calling names)  
Punishment:
  - Have to cool down in your room.
  - May not join in the conversation at the next family dinner because you have to practise controlling your tongue.
  - Must apologise and be the insulted person's "slave" for the rest of the day and take over all his chores.
- Lying  
Punishment:
  - A spanking (depending on age, nature of situation and temperament).
  - Must go and tell the truth and so rectify the matter.
- Hurting others (physically or emotionally)  
Punishment:
  - Apologise and make up for it by serving the "victim".
  - Lose social privileges such as watching television or playing a game with the rest of the family because this brings across the point that someone who hurts others are not welcome.
- Disobedience (refusal)  
Punishment:
  - A spanking (depending on age and temperament).
  - The loss of a privilege or right that the child takes for granted, so that he can learn that his disobedience removes him from his family and he doesn't have the same rights and privileges any more. One who can't obey the rules of the house can't enjoy its privileges.
- Damaging property  
Punishment:
  - The same as for stealing.
- Nasty attitude (ungratefulness, moodiness, selfishness)  
Punishment:
  - Go to his room or somewhere else to adjust his attitude. Is only allowed back in the company of others when the mood has passed.
  - Apologise for the attitude to everyone who was affected by it and pull yourself together.
- Irresponsibility (doesn't do chores, loses possessions, forgets duties)  
Punishment:
  - Some of your pocket money is taken away because financial loss in the adult work is the natural consequence of irresponsibility.
  - Lose the privileges of being an older child and move a few steps back as it were, for example: having to go to bed earlier again.