

1 THE NEW AUTHORITY

“Teachers used to have authority!” “Parents used to be parents!” “I respected my father!” “The teachers we had in our childhood were teachers!” Expressions like these, regarding authority as we once knew it, imply that until things return to their former state, there will be no remedy for the problems of education. Indeed, traditional authority has been severely undermined; however, today’s social conditions will not allow a return to its former state. This authority enjoyed the unconditional support of most elements of society. Almost everybody agreed that parents and teachers should be obeyed simply because they were parents and teachers. Public opinion, as well as the educational, religious, media, and legal establishment, endorsed this outlook. This all but unanimous support no longer exists. Many now consider traditional authority as illegitimate and some of its central props, such as corporal punishment, distance, awe, unconditional obedience, and immunity from criticism have become morally unacceptable. Consequently, we cannot and do not wish to restore traditional authority to its former status. Most attempts to do so have negative effects, because without a broad social base the only way this kind of authority can subsist is by the exercise of naked power and the induction of fear.

Liberal society was not content with criticism, and at a certain stage even called into question the very role of authority in education. *Authority* became a negative term, indicating a pernicious form of relation that was viewed as the chief cause of most individual

and social ills. In the 1960s and 1970s, the ideology that sought to eliminate all use of authority in child rearing reached a wide influence. Education based on authority was largely believed to warp natural growth. It was posited that parents and teachers should limit themselves to the provision of warmth, understanding, and encouragement, abstaining from any kind of enforcement. The child was supposed to grow up in complete freedom, unhampered by extraneous demands and impositions. This viewpoint influenced most psychologists, educators, and popular authors, becoming one of the most ambitious visions in the history of educational thinking. Hopes ran high that this was the sure way to raise healthy, spontaneous, and sociable children, and of regenerating society as a whole. Any negative development in the child was attributed to the repression of spontaneous growth. A violent child was viewed as irrefutable proof that his parents were violent; if he had learning difficulties, that he had been oppressed by his teachers; and if he had emotional problems, that his natural tendencies had been suppressed. The remedy for all these ills was the removal of authority's harmful influences. This dream was soon shattered by reality.

Since the early 1980s, many studies¹ have indicated that children who are raised permissively are characterized by higher levels of violence, dropping out, drug use, delinquency, and sexual promiscuity. These children also suffer from lower self-esteem. This final finding came as a surprise, even to the researchers. It might have been expected that children raised with no restrictions would have difficulty with structured settings, but how could one explain the poor self-image in children who, according to the prevailing ideology, were showered with encouragement and praise? We must understand that self-esteem does not develop solely from positive feedback. This is surely important, but the development of self-esteem also is rooted in our experience in overcoming difficulties. In the course of normal development, children are faced with challenging

¹ For a summary, see Steinberg (2001).

situations, such as the transition to school and the need to accept discipline. At first, some of these tasks may seem very difficult to the child. For example, a child entering nursery school may feel that he cannot be far from his parents and the familiar home setting. Despite the difficulty, the great majority of children succeed in this task. Remaining in nursery school becomes for them a developmental achievement. However, children raised in a strictly permissive ideology do not accumulate similar experiences, for the ruling educational principle states that if the child suffers or refuses to make the transition, the obstacle must be removed. These children may suffer from a peculiar kind of deprivation: that of experiences that teach them to endure. Without this their self-image may lack a "backbone."

The undermining of traditional authority and the failure of the permissive dream created a new problem for educators: how to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of authority, so as to provide children with constructive experiences in limits, demands, and the need to cope, in a manner that is acceptable and legitimate in the context of a more democratic society. Our answer to this question is the concept of the *new authority*.

The characteristics of the type of authority that we no longer accept are clear to most of us. On the other hand, we do not have any clear picture of a different, new kind of authority. This is not surprising because our generation is perhaps the first to be squarely faced with this problem. We cannot expect that this new picture of authority will emerge full-blown and ready to use. We will have to develop it gradually, groping for it out of our needs, wishes, and limitations. In this process we will have to define the principles that guide this new authority, the acts that define it, and the ways in which it is communicated.

Most parents and professionals in the area of education will agree that *presence* is a good starting point for the new authority. Increasing presence enables the restoration of parental authority in a positive manner for parent and child alike (Omer, 2000). The child

experiences parental presence when the parent acts in a manner that conveys the message,

“I am your parent and remain your parent! Even when it’s hard for you and it’s hard for me, you can’t fire me, divorce me, get rid of me, or shut me up!”

In this process, the child may come to feel she has a parent in the full sense of the word. The parent, in turn, may conquer the feeling of having forfeited his place. As we see here, the same is true for teachers and pupils.

The notion that authority is acquired by presence is quite uncharacteristic for traditional authority. Actually, the traditional perception of authority was associated with distance. A common opinion reflecting this view is: *“The children don’t obey her because she’s too close to them.”* The belief that closeness conflicts with authority led to social measures aimed at separating the authority figure from her subordinates. This outlook is no longer acceptable. The new authority must be based on presence and proximity, not on distance and awe. However, proximity and presence should not blur the distinction between the role of the parent or teacher and that of the child. The presence of the parent or the teacher should be unique to parents and teachers, and thus differ from the presence of a friend. Authority should become apparent in its responsible role, manifesting concern and supervision, and not in a cheap chummy manner.

In contrast to traditional authority, the sources of validation and support for the new authority are not self-evident. Parents and teachers are no longer automatically backed by virtue of their roles. Hence, to build a new authority, we have to provide it with new sources of support and validation. In our work with parents, we help them develop a support network made up of family, friends, teachers and, sometimes, parents of the children with whom their child associates. The support network generates profound changes in the way the parents act and are perceived. From now on, parental measures no longer reflect the decisions they make as individuals, but actions

with a social echo and functional backup. The need to enlist support also impacts on the nature of parental actions. In our society, one cannot enlist widespread support for aggressive or arbitrary demonstrations of authority; hence, the very act of enlisting support imparts a dimension of control over parental actions. In our program to restore parental authority, the parents make a commitment to their support group that they will abstain from any violent or humiliating behavior toward the child. In this way, the support group guarantees that the new authority will not be arbitrary, as traditional authority sometimes was. The same applies to teachers. Our program to restore the authority of teachers includes recruiting support from their colleagues, parents, and the school administration. As is seen here, teachers who follow the precepts of the new authority also succeed in gaining the support of the great majority of pupils. Support for teachers is of course not unconditional. Teachers are entitled to it when they intensify their presence, when they abstain from humiliating measures, and when they firmly oppose violence and chaos. Under these conditions, teachers can benefit from wide support, which considerably changes their status.

The authority figure of the past did not feel responsible for escalatory processes. When the interaction with the child became raucous or violent, it was assumed that the child was to blame. The parent or teacher felt obliged to respond to force with force. The relationship between adult and child was asymmetric, only the authority figure had the right to apply physical force. Today, we condemn all use of physical force, *especially* when applied by parents or teachers. The asymmetry still exists, but in the opposite direction! The person in authority is expected to abstain from any violent reaction, even when the child is flagrantly violent. In our view, the asymmetry is even more pronounced: The representative of the new authority should not only eschew any use of physical force, but also should act unilaterally so as to reduce escalation. He must firmly resist the child's negative behavior, without being drawn into a vicious cycle of shouts and threats. Developing the ability to display resolve without escalation is surprising and gratifying. When teachers realize that they

no longer need to strike back on the spot, and are trained to react in a decided but controlled manner, they benefit from emotional relief and from a reinforcement of their authority. Our research has shown that the acquisition of skills in avoiding escalation reduces friction and sharp reactions by parents and by teachers, while also bolstering their authority (Omer et al., 2006; Weinblatt and Omer, 2008).

Traditionally, the source of authority was the formal status of the authority figure. The father of the family was allowed to do as he pleased in his home, with no need to justify his actions to others. Questioning the way he chose to discipline his children was seen as an affront to his authority. Any attempt by family members to talk outside about what went on inside the house was viewed as a crass betrayal. In contrast, we now view transparency in the use of authority as absolutely vital. Transparency, however, can be more than only a limitation, becoming a major source of legitimate power for the representatives of the new authority. This is so because the demands of transparency can also be seen as valid for the violent acts of children and adolescents. In our program, the parents' and teachers' support group receives updates on the child's violent behavior. This group now constitutes a kind of "public opinion" with a double effect regarding both the adult's and the child's violence: It reinforces the adult's commitment while also creating group pressure on the child to refrain from violence. Lifting the veil of secrecy is not easy for parents, who fear that exposure could be harmful to the child or the family. In order to overcome this apprehension, we emphasize to parents that concealing the child's violence is tantamount to its perpetuation. Parents who opt to keep the child's violence a secret are, in effect, partners to it. The same applies, of course, to violent acts by the parents themselves: Concealing them perpetuates them. This principle guides our work with families and schools. Thus, we encourage the school to make public all violent events (and the remedial action taken), without mentioning the names of the children involved. The school also must adopt a policy of transparency concerning abuse of teacher authority. As is seen here, our policy

of restoring the parent–teacher alliance allows teachers to adopt this policy without a sense of unilateral threat.

The commitment to self-examination highlights another essential difference between the old and the new authority. The authority figure of the past was always “right.” Everyone knew, of course, that this was not the case, but nobody dared to speak up. This situation was immortalized in the fable of the emperor’s new clothes. Today, however, any attempt by an authority figure to maintain a countenance of infallibility will be ludicrous from the very start. Not only the child, but the entire public will cry out that the emperor has no clothes. Hence, the new authority entails a willingness to acknowledge errors and to take remedial action. The authority figure no longer represents purported perfection, but is clearly flesh and blood, requiring time for thought, help in making decisions, and the opportunity to correct mistakes. The parents’ willingness to admit and correct errors improves the family climate, broadens the relationship with the child, and reinforces their authority as people of principle.² Today’s teachers also must acknowledge that they are not immune to error. In any case, the critical atmosphere that characterizes a more democratic society ensures that their mistakes will be exposed. Teachers who understand this can transform their vulnerability into an asset, by setting a personal example in the form of admitting to mistakes and being willing to correct them. This stance can become one of the characteristics of the new authority that contribute most to its leadership.

Perhaps the most profound difference between the old and the new authority lies in the relationship between authority and compliance. Traditionally, there was a perfect overlap between authority and obedience: The level of authority equaled the level of obedience. This equation is problematic in a more democratic society because, so conceived, authority is incompatible with the development of autonomy. However, authority can be understood in a way that leaves room for autonomy. The fact that an individual has been

² See Alon and Omer (2006, pp. 148–152).

granted authority does not necessarily mean that the people subject to it are obedient. What defines the authority is not the degree of obedience, but the fact that some relevant sectors of society have authorized this person to discharge her duties and to act in accordance with the dictates of the role. This person's authority is thus defined not in terms of the degree of obedience, but in terms of the "authorization" she receives, that is, the legitimization, support, and resources granted for fulfilling the task. An individual who succeeds in making use of these means and, if necessary, demanding additional ones, has authority. None of the above makes any reference to obedience; but clearly, a person with extensive authority, who has proven her ability to use her power well, will bring about changes in the reactions of people for whom she has responsibility. Thus, the authority of parents and teachers will be reinforced when they are given the tools, legitimacy, and support of the environment. This insight eliminates the problematic equation between authority and obedience. Parents and teachers can be authoritative, regardless of the extent to which a child obeys. Far from being merely a verbal ploy, this position drastically changes the authority figure's attitude to the child and to the scope of her authority. Parents and teachers now know that they have no control over the child; they only can control themselves and the resources at their disposal. Their authority manifests itself when they conscientiously use the means at their disposal, so as to best fulfill their responsibility.

At first glance, most of the distinctions that we have noted between the two kinds of authority seem to reflect a series of limitations suffered by new authority: It relinquishes the privileges of distance, infallibility, and physical force; accepts responsibility for preventing escalation; is exposed to criticism; and surrenders the illusion of control. Nevertheless, these seeming limitations can become sources of strength. They relieve those in authority from their loneliness, freeing them from the compulsion to triumph, and to retaliate when provoked. Although the traditional authority figure felt compelled again and again to protect his honor, the new one is free to decline any invitation to an imagined duel. Furthermore, instead of fearing

the ubiquitous eye of criticism, the new authority figure openly turns to his support network, turning transparency into an asset, and using public opinion to legitimize his steps. In this way he gains a freedom of movement that was all but inconceivable for the authority of yore.

THE EXPERIENCE OF AUTHORITY IN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The experience of the new authority entails changes not only in the external behavior, but also in the inner discourse, the emotions, and even the physical sensations of parents and teachers. The authority figure begins to *radiate authority*, because she now senses it in herself. We became aware of these processes from reports by parents and teachers, who were surprised by their new feelings:

A mother who staged a sit-in³ with her violent 10-year-old son told us, even before there was any discernible change in his behavior: *“I don’t believe it! I sat in the lion’s den for a whole hour, and didn’t budge! I feel that I exist!”*

The mother of hyperactive twin boys told us: *“In the past, when I got home from work and saw them jumping in front of the television, I would quietly sneak into my room to get some rest. I would flatten myself against the wall, barely saying hello so they wouldn’t notice me. Nowadays I walk straight across the room, go over to them, ask what they’re watching and tell them that I’m going to rest for half an hour and will prepare their meal right after it!”*

The report of a teacher, after the teachers in the school made a joint decision about dealing with lateness and committed themselves to helping each other: *“I felt that I was speaking not only with my own voice, but with that of all the teachers! I felt like a chorus!”*

The report of a mother, a woman of heavy build: *“The sit-in made me feel that I carry weight! My son tried to push me away and I didn’t*

³ The technique of the sit-in is described in Chapter 3.

budge! That was the first time in my life I wasn't sorry that I didn't go on a diet!"

The father of a 13-year-old boy, who felt that his son was ignoring him, told us that the boy managed to evade the sit-in by slipping out through the window: *"I couldn't just let him run away like that! So I lay down on his bed and fell asleep. I don't remember when I've slept so well lately! When he came back he was stunned to see me there!"* This brings to mind the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. We can imagine the boy's astonishment: *"Who's been sleeping in my bed???"*

EXPERIENCING FAILURE IN TRYING TO RESTORE TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

In the absence of the widespread support that they had in the past, many parents and teachers who try to reclaim their authority feel as though they have no choice but to assume an aggressive stance. They think in terms such as *strong-weak* or *winner-loser*, or expressions such as: *"If I don't punish him, he'll think that he won!"* *"This child only understands force!"* *"It's either him or me!"* These statements express the belief that the relationship between the authority figure and the child is a *zero-sum game*.

The sense of urgency that overtakes the teacher or the parent who is struggling to restore lost authority reflects the fear that only one small step lies between triumph and disaster. This feeling underlies the wish to *"show him once and for all!"* as well as the anguish that *"if I don't show him, that's the end of me!"* Every confrontation now becomes a matter of life and death, in which the slightest hesitation may signal total collapse. Feeling compelled to deter or subdue, the teacher or parent tenses his back, jaw, and body muscles to their breaking point. He injects his voice with pent-up rage so as to convey the enormity of the punishment about to descend on the insolent child, unless he gives in with no further ado. He does this, however, with a queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach, knowing full well

that the conditions for this type of authority no longer exist. One of my childhood experiences will illustrate the profound difference in this kind of confrontation in the past and in the present:

Mr. Hernani taught us Latin, a compulsory subject during my childhood in Brazil. He was an educated and genteel man who was admired by his students because of the seriousness with which he taught and his extensive knowledge, which he put to good use in his lessons. He was one of those teachers whose demeanor conveys authority effortlessly. I was a good and obedient student, although I couldn't always resist the temptation to burst out with a statement that I thought was witty. That day, Mr. Hernani was writing the inflections of a Latin verb on the blackboard and stopped in order to reprimand me for chattering. As he was wont to do, he did this without turning away from the blackboard, as though he had eyes in the back of his head. A few minutes later he noticed that I had started chattering again. He stopped writing on the blackboard and turned to me with a look on his face that could be construed as either angry or amused: "*This is the second time that I'm reprimanding you, Mr. Kuperman⁴! In which language do you want me to speak to you?*" His mischievous tone misled me into taking a similar stance, and I replied: "*German!*" I saw that my reply surprised him, and I wanted to explain to him that I understand a little German (my parents spoke Yiddish to each other), but he interrupted me, and quickly made it clear that that was not the reason for his surprise. What followed was perhaps the most embarrassing moment I had ever known in all my years as a pupil. Mr. Hernani stopped the lesson and told me off heatedly for several minutes. I remember very little of what he said, but his facial expression, his posture, his movements, his tone of voice, and even the sprays of spittle from his mouth are etched in my memory. The class was completely silent, a setting that deeply intensified the impact of his outburst. At the end of his harangue, Mr. Hernani took out his handkerchief, which he used to wipe the remnants of chalk off his hands at the end of class.

⁴ My original surname.

He slowly spread the handkerchief over his palm and began to strike it forcefully, with every blow releasing large clouds of chalk dust, an allusion to the extent to which his anger was still not spent. In the minutes after he left the classroom, the pupils were very restrained and I had no way of knowing what they were thinking. I yearned for support, but instead, a girl whom I particularly liked and admired, came up to me and said that this time I had gone too far. This is the only outburst that I remember by Mr. Hernani during the two years that he taught my class. The incident left an impression not just on me, but on all the pupils. Our admiration and respect for Mr. Hernani grew: Now we knew that beneath his genteel manner there lived a tiger, and it didn't pay to step on his tail. I doubt that Mr. Hernani told his colleagues about the incident, and I don't know whether my classmates told their parents about it. If they had done so, Mr. Hernani would have unquestionably been supported and I would have been roundly condemned.

Angry outbursts and indignant tirades by teachers are as common today as they were in the past. However, the difference in norms and social expectations imbues these incidents with a completely different context, which totally alters the experience of the participants. Today's teacher will certainly not have the benefit of widespread support for this type of behavior. The other teachers will dissociate themselves from it, to say nothing of the parents. In certain cases the teacher may even be called to order for his outburst. Also the students' reactions almost certainly will be different from that of my classmates: The child who was reprimanded will not lack for supporters or admirers, some of whom will be willing to risk imitating his behavior. Today's teacher will thus feel he stands alone, not only against the insubordinate child, but also against the probable criticism of parents, colleagues, and superiors. Whereas in the past the teacher could be certain that school authorities and the community would back him when necessary, today's teacher stands virtually naked opposite the rebellious pupil. With no support, the teacher feels his position entirely depends on the threat that he manages to

convey. The confrontation becomes a duel that will determine his fate in the class. Woe to him if he blinks first! This situation leaves him no choice but to invest all his strength in the attempt to intimidate. He knows, however, that all it takes is a slight push to expose his weakness.

It is more than likely that Mr. Hernani did not find it necessary to share his "treatment" of an impertinent pupil with others. His classroom was his undisputed territory, and what he did there was no one else's business. This was even truer in the family. Sayings such as "*Don't wash your dirty linen in public!*" expressed the prevailing attitude toward anyone who dared to reveal family secrets in public. Nowadays, a parent or teacher who tries to establish her authority by aggressively confronting the child will try, like her predecessors, to make sure that the incident does not leak out, but her feelings will be entirely different. Her predecessors didn't feel it necessary to report such episodes, because the classroom, or the home, was their undisputed territory, whereas today's authority figure tries to keep them secret because she fears the harsh criticism that will further undermine her already shaky foothold. Thus, secrecy went from being an undeniable right, to an existential imperative that is accompanied by the constant fear of exposure.

Traditional authority was based on *honor*. In the incident with Mr. Hernani, his honor was at stake. Any affront would require an immediate response, so as to restore the damaged perfection to its former state. Had Mr. Hernani chosen not to respond, he would have forfeited his honor. As long as no appropriate remedial action was taken to remove the slight, the authority figure would feel that he was in "negative balance." There were two ways of restoring the balance: (a) the offender would express ample regret and capitulation, or (b) the authority figure would degrade the offender. Humiliation, a central element of many disciplinary measures, manifested the almost mathematical need to wipe out the slight. The authority figure had to make sure that the status of the offender was sufficiently diminished, making it clear that his own exalted position had been reestablished. Expressions such as: "*I'll wipe that smile off his face!*"

"He'll eat his words!" or *"He'll pay with interest!"* illustrate this need. To the regret of today's teachers and parents, restoring the account to a positive balance is becoming more difficult. After my confrontation with Mr. Hernani, it would never have crossed my mind to challenge him again. Mr. Hernani did indeed *"wipe the smile off my face."* This is not the case nowadays. Insubordinate children very often make a show of their indifference or renew their provocation. The smile refuses to be erased, despite the adult's outraged responses. The threats and punishments may be doubled, in a desperate attempt by the authority figure to achieve the hoped-for remedy. However, the more he persists, the greater the danger that he will draw critical responses from the surroundings, thus forcing him into a much more shameful retreat. The aggressive solution is thus doubly harmful: It escalates the situation and it undermines even further the shaky support for the authority person. Such experiences lead many teachers and parents to ignore provocations or to capitulate in advance. In this way, the traditional perception of honor, one of the bulwarks of traditional authority, becomes a source of demoralization for today's frustrated parent or teacher.

Today's experience of distance also is completely different from that of the past. Distance was once intended to reflect the unfathomable gap between the authority figure and the child. Whereas the authority figure was perceived as a complete person, the child was merely considered raw material. The child could only gradually attain the status of an independent being by accepting and internalizing the adult's authority. Instances of familiarity between the person in authority and the child were unusual expressions of grace. The rare disclosures of intimacy on the part of the father or the teacher were viewed as festive occasions to be treasured by the child, who then revered the authority figure even more. In contrast, today's authority figure tries to maintain distance not as someone whose lofty position is self-evident, but as one who is compelled to remain detached, so as avoid any closer interaction that may unmask her reduced value. Distance thus becomes an expression of authority under siege.

For example, teachers often shut themselves in the staff room during break time, for fear of encountering rowdy pupils in the halls and schoolyard. Teachers who shut themselves off feel that their position in the school is unclear and not secure, and that the staff room is their only refuge, where they can feel somewhat protected from the onslaught of pupils. Similarly, parents who experience disrespect may try to salvage their feelings with a display of distant anger. Distancing by the offended parent is liable to turn into alienation, an especially common phenomenon among fathers who feel insulted. Distance thus is no longer a manifestation of authority, but rather one of resentment over the fact that authority no longer exists. Far from expressing his exalted status, the authority figure who opts for distance finds himself outside the camp, in voluntary exile, as it were, with no place, no voice, and no status.

EXPERIENCING THE NEW AUTHORITY

Control and Self-Control

In promoting the new authority, we no longer focus on the reactions of the child, but rather on the actions of the adult. The objective of traditional authority was absolute and instantaneous obedience. Conditional, hesitant, or partial compliance were the signs of a failing authority. Today, in contrast, automatic obedience has come to signify a failed education.

The understanding that one's authority does not depend on controlling the child evolves gradually. A crucial moment in this development is the acceptance that control over the child is not only undesirable, but virtually impossible. The child is not like clay in the potter's hands, but an independent being who acts according to her own needs and predispositions. Thus, the same disciplinary measures may arouse different or even opposite thoughts, feelings, and responses in different children. Even a child who behaves submissively is not really under control: Her thoughts and feelings escape the adult's shaping will, and, given new circumstances, she may stop complying altogether. This may bring the authority figure to the

conclusion that he can only control himself. This is a disappointing but liberating insight. It is disappointing because it dismantles our aspiration to shape the child's experience. It is liberating because when we understand that we cannot control the child, we become free of the obligation to do so. We can now focus on our actions, without viewing noncompliance as proof of our failure. This is not merely a philosophical but a highly practical change. Thus, parents and teachers who increase their presence and supervision no longer require compliance to experience their authority as such. The message they convey to the child will now be: *"I can't make you do as I say, but I'll keep a close eye on you, and resist your negative behavior!"* This attitude changes also the child's experience. She comes to feel that the adult emanates a new kind of power and weight, while also leaving space for her own autonomy.

Acceptance of the limits of control is reflected, for example, in the substantial difference between punishment and resistance. Punishment is an attempt at control. This is particularly obvious in the psychological concept of *negative (or positive) reinforcement*. Reinforcement, both positive and negative, is actually viewed as a means of control. Thus, if the expected behavior does not materialize, this is proof of failure (i.e., the appropriate behavior was not reinforced). The child understands very well that rewards and punishments represent the will of the authority figure to control her. Sometimes she reacts paradoxically, so as to avoid this control. Thus, rewards sometimes lead to a worsening of the problem behavior, and punishments, to counterpunishments. The situation differs when a parent or teacher *resists* undesirable behavior by the child, without pretending to control her. The authority figure resists because it is his duty, but he is aware that he cannot force the child to do his bidding. The difference between resistance and punishment is not just semantic. The attention of the authority figure displaying resistance is focused on conveying a clear and determined stance, whereas meting out punishment focuses solely on results. There also is a marked difference between punishment and resistance in regard to the time

factor: Punishment has to take place right after the incident in order to be maximally effective, whereas acts of resistance may be made stronger when they are delayed because delay allows the authority figure time to prepare and enlist support. Each approach conveys a completely different message to the child. Punishment conveys the other-directed message: *"If you act violently, you'll pay!"* Resistance conveys the self-anchored message: *"It is my duty to resist your violence!"*

Children are well able to distinguish between punishment and resistance. Thus, children who are victimized by a sibling react with disappointment when their parents stage a sit-in as an expression of resistance, instead of punishing the culprit. They say: *"You sat in his room, but he wasn't punished!"* This also is a common reaction among parents: *"We can sit there until doomsday. What does he care? He's not being punished!"* Parents and teachers repeatedly complain: *"We have no sanctions!"* These statements reflect the belief that there can be no authority without punishment. However, parents, who inform a child who stays out late that they will supervise him closely and oppose his frequenting bad company, are not using punishment, but manifesting resistance. By their resistance they often succeed in reducing the danger, while also reinforcing their authority. In place of the old refrain *"We have no sanctions!"* the authority figure now has recourse to a variety of ways of resisting negative behavior, without feeling compelled to punish so as to maintain his authority.

The adult's emerging acknowledgment that he has no control over the child is gradually reflected in the child. Relinquishing negative behavior no longer signifies capitulation, thus allowing the child to experiment with new options. Cooperation has become a choice. The new authority thus promotes autonomy, even when the child complies. Indeed, when the parent or teacher mentions the positive change in the child's behavior, she often answers: *"I did it because I wanted to!"* To our mind this statement is a true reflection of the child's experience.

Vigilant Care

Research shows that supervision (or monitoring) is the form of parental presence that is most effective in reducing risky behavior by children and youth (Fletcher, Steinberg, and Williams-Wheeler, 2004; Pettit et al., 2001). The fact that the parent takes action to find out where and with whom the child is spending time reinforces the child's ability to withstand temptation. Supervision also offers protection from bad company or from violence by other children. Many parents are not aware of the profound significance of these findings. They think that supervision only can be effective if they have additional ways (sanctions) to make the child behave in the desired manner. Consequently, they often give up on it because, in any case they, lack the means of control necessary, in their minds, to stop the risky behavior. This viewpoint is erroneous: Research has proven that the benefits of the parents' supervisory activity do not depend on additional means of control. The determination to know and pay close attention to what is happening imparts presence and substance to the parents, even in the absence of any further sanctions. For this reason we choose to term the relevant parental activity *vigilant care* rather than "supervision" or "monitoring." The new term makes it clear that vigilance counts when it conveys caring rather than merely an inspective stance. Additionally, supervision also can be attained by anonymous or mechanical means, whereas vigilant caring completely relies on parental presence.

Parental awareness of the need to intensify their vigilant care comes as a result of episodes that reveal a new and threatening aspect of the child's life. For example, parents discover that their child has been concealing dangerous behavior from them. The proportions of the lie often produce astonishment. The authority figure oscillates between total helplessness and extreme measures, intended to etch in the child's mind that such things must never be repeated. For example:

The father of a 10-year-old girl caught her lying about using the change from money he had given her to pay for private lessons. The

shocked father vowed that if she lied to him again, he would never speak to her again.

The teacher of a 16-year-old boy found out that he had been forging his mother's signature in his assignment book for months. When the teacher telephoned to talk to the parents, the boy recognized her voice and identified himself as his father. The teacher later talked to the parents, who took the boy to a psychiatrist. In an attempt to deter the child from further lies, the psychiatrist and the parents agreed to keep him in the hospital ward for a month.

The hope that a harsh threat, the display of insult and shock, or even intensive psychotherapy for the child will solve the problem is, in most cases, illusory. Instead, the person in authority must learn to increase the level of vigilant care. She must learn to require the child to account for all departures from the house and to explain how he spent his time; she must watch over the child's activities and, if necessary, contact those whom the child spends time with. She must be prepared to withstand the child's protests and fierce resistance without escalating or giving in. The ability to do so generates profound changes in the experience of both parent and child.

Vigilant caring requires the authority figure to alter his outlook toward the limits of his role and of the child's privacy. When a child develops appropriately, his right to privacy gradually increases. As the child is better able to function independently, adult involvement is reduced, and the child's personal space extended. The increased vigilance that is required in the wake of the child's dangerous activities temporarily suspends this natural sequence of development. Parents who had become accustomed to limited involvement may now have to enter areas of privacy that were already taken for granted. It is no wonder that many parents shy away from such measures, even when the child is in danger. Actions such as entering a teenager's room to search for drugs, contacting the parents of her friends to develop a common policy, or paying a surprise visit to a place where the child is exposed to danger, all constitute violations of hallowed principles. Such extraordinary steps require advance preparation.

Parents who act together or with the aid of supporters manage better than those who try to go it alone. The lone parent is more apprehensive and more susceptible to the risk for escalation than the parent with backup. Support also helps them to overcome the sense that their watchfulness shows that they are bad parents. Instead, they begin to understand that it is precisely their vigilant caring that makes them parents in the full sense of the word.

A 15-year-old girl vigorously protested her mother's demand for the telephone numbers of her friends. The mother's request came after she learned that on two occasions her daughter had not been where she was supposed to be, and had not returned home at the promised time. The daughter responded to the mother's demand with the classic complaint: *"None of the other mothers do this!"* The mother, who was prepared for this reaction, answered matter-of-factly: *"I spoke to the mothers of two of your friends, and they told me that they too have begun to ask for phone numbers!"*

The authority of teachers also is enhanced by their readiness to exercise vigilant care. Like parents, teachers also may have to overstep their customary bounds when alarming events in the school so require. Teachers frequently see the bounds of the classroom as the acknowledged limits of their involvement. Actions in the schoolyard or at the school entrance sometimes are considered as beyond the scope of their authority, and even more so, actions outside of the school's immediate vicinity. Often the schoolyard or some other particular areas (e.g., the lavatories) are tacitly defined as "children's territory." If teachers do approach these areas, they do so with an uneasy feeling. The school bus often is viewed as out of bounds for teachers. In many cases, school transportation is administered by the municipality, so busses also are beyond the formal responsibility of the school. Teachers' feelings regarding the limits of their activities are reflected in the pupils' feelings. For example, teacher intervention in a fight between students in the schoolyard may provoke particularly angry reactions, as opposed to similar intervention in the classroom. In so reacting, the students indicate to

the teacher that his intervention constitutes an incursion into forbidden territory. Transforming the school into a safe place entails altering these attitudes. Research on violence in schools indicates that most violent incidents take place in areas from which teachers regularly are absent. Accordingly, programs that involve increased teacher presence in these areas were found to be the most effective for preventing violence (Limber, 2006; Olweus, 1993). Like parents, teachers find it difficult to appear in “forbidden” places without support and advance preparation. Getting teachers to patrol effectively takes more than orders from above. They must understand that their presence in these places is not merely “one more demand” made of them, but an effective means of restoring their authority and status. With the help of appropriate preparation and backup, teachers gradually dare to extend their presence to areas outside of the classroom. They soon discover that many people are happy about such action, including parents and nearly all of the pupils, who welcome it as help against the bullies’ tyranny.

Support

In contrast with traditional authority, the new authority figure no longer feels like a solitary person in charge, issuing commands to inferiors from on high, but rather is a member of a team, deriving strength and legitimacy from the network. The authority figure of the past thinks: *“If I need outside help, it means that I’m weak!”* The new authority figure says: *“My strength doesn’t come only from me, but from the network that supports me and which I represent!”*

Fourteen-year-old Fabian “talked back” to his math teacher in front of the class. The teacher, who until then had had her doubts about the concept of the new authority, felt that this time she would risk defeat in a direct showdown with Fabian. She therefore decided to look into the option, which had existed since the beginning of the term, of availing herself of the help of a “teachers’ response team.”⁵

⁵ See Chapter 4.

This team offered its support to any teacher who encountered offensive or hostile behavior by students or parents. After consultation, the team decided to enlist the help of the gym teacher (because Fabian was an outstanding athlete). The gym teacher sat beside the math teacher when she telephoned Fabian's parents. She spoke with the mother and told her about the incident, adding that the gym teacher was sitting beside her, and suggested that the three of them collaborate to find a solution to the problem. The mother asked why the gym teacher was involved. The math teacher replied: "*We have a rule in school: Any offense to a teacher is the business of the whole staff!*" The three agreed to meet the following day at the school in order to decide on a joint response. Fabian was summoned a few minutes after the meeting began. The gym teacher spoke first, saying that the purpose of the meeting was to think together about measures of reparation that would enable Fabian to avoid suspension and would assuage the insult to the math teacher. Fabian, who was surprised by the coalition of two teachers and his mother, agreed to apologize and cooperate in the process of reparation, which consisted of his donating three hours of fitness training to a group of younger special education children. It was decided that the math teacher would report the result of the meeting to the class, but that the report would respect Fabian's pride. The following day, the math teacher told the class about the meeting and the agreement with Fabian. She later told a meeting of teachers that she had never felt so much support or been so calm when dealing with an unruly pupil.

This case also illustrates the connection between support and escalation: Support diminishes threat, thereby moderating the reaction of the authority figure. Parents who are assisted by supporters feel similar relief: They no longer have to back up their decision with a threatening stance, but can calmly rely on the support of their backup network. Their voices reverberate, even when they speak softly. Conversely, the lone authority figure easily is driven into a corner, feeling forced to raise his voice and go to extremes in order to extricate himself. Thus, the solitary authority figure is almost

doomed to become aggressive. This understanding sheds light on the damage done by the widespread view that authority is solely a function of charisma. In this view of authority *“you either have it or you don’t!”* The teacher who simply doesn’t have it is a hopeless case. Actually, even those who believe they possess this so-called charisma suffer, because they are doomed to an unending battle, lest their charisma fade. The understanding that authority is by and large related to support releases the teacher from this trap. The authority figure is no longer a lonely leader, but a representative of a network that backs him up. This network is also a safety net that allows the teacher to get back on his feet after taking a fall, which would spell doom for the “charismatic” leader.

The transition from lone authority to collective authority changes the teaching experience in a basic way. The teacher faced with the challenge of discipline will ask herself: *“What kind of help can I get from my fellow teachers?”* or *“How can I get the parents to support me?”* Her situation is radically different from that of the teacher who asks herself: *“How can I show that I’m the boss?”* *“How can I make him behave?”* *“How can I teach him a lesson that he’ll never forget?”* Authority that derives its strength from working with a network is free of the “dueling code” that characterizes a traditional, power-oriented authority. The change also is reflected in the emotional and physical state of the teacher, who no longer feels compelled to muster all his resources for daily showdowns. The team format of the new authority may thus play a central role in alleviating teacher burnout (Omer et al., 2006).

Persistence, Delay, and Reparation

In our work with parents, we coined three phrases to help mitigate the sense of urgency that comes over parents when confronted by their child’s harsh behavior: *“You don’t have to win, you just have to persist!”* *“Strike while the iron is cold!”* and *“You’re allowed to make mistakes because they can be corrected!”* These three sayings are indicative of the changes in time perception that characterize the new as opposed to the old authority: (a) instead of striving for a decisive

blow, we aim for a gradual change achieved by persistence; (b) in place of the urge to react immediately, we should allow ourselves time for calming down, reorganizing, and enlisting support; and (c) instead of experiencing time in a linear manner, we hold that mistakes (by us or by the child) can be made good by reparation.

The insight that authority can be based on persistence and not on an immediate show of force seems revolutionary to many parents and teachers. The common view is that the adult's demands must bring about instant compliance. A delay in obeying signifies lack of authority. The trademark of the new authority is entirely different. Authority no longer is characterized by the child's prompt compliance, but by the unwavering persistence of the authority person.

Persistence is not the same as rigid consistency. The authority figure can tarry or change her response, but she must reestablish her presence and her opposition to destructive acts. For the person in authority, every day is a new day to manifest her presence and care; and each day the child discovers anew that his parent is still his parent and his teacher, his teacher.

Persistence achieves its objective, among other things, because of the positive voices in the child's mind. In our view, the child's actions are the outcome of an inner dialogue between the different voices in his mind, some of which wish to improve his behavior. We view this ongoing dialogue as a "parliament of the mind" (Shneidman, 1985). The positive voices may be latent or feeble at a given moment, but we must assume that they exist. When the authority person persists in her steps, there is a good chance that she will encounter the child's positive inner voices. If we imagine the child's mind as a kaleidoscope in which sometimes the negative and sometimes the positive voices have the upper hand, it stands to reason that by persisting, the prospects that the child will cooperate keep improving. These positive responses, in turn, nourish positive interactive cycles, thus improving the relationship between the adult and the child.

The authority figure of yore was characterized by quickness to anger at any sign of disrespect. Endurance and restraint were viewed as incompatible with authority. If a parent or a teacher chose to keep

quiet, waiting for an appropriate moment to reestablish his influence, he was often seen as swallowing his pride, thus compromising his authority. For the new authority, in contrast, endurance and silence can convey determination. In our program, whenever parents succeed in delaying, and thus controlling their angry response to provocation, we say to them: *"If you could withstand that without an outburst, your authority is on a firm footing!"*

Sarah, mother of 14-year-old Silvana, tried to stage a sit-in following continued humiliation by her daughter. Silvana reacted by cursing, throwing objects and finally, physically attacking her mother. Sarah, frightened by the response, stood up and said that she would not continue the sit-in, but would not tolerate her daughter's violence passively. She arrived at her session with the therapist feeling defeated. The therapist asked her how much time the sit-in had lasted until she left the room. Sarah said that she had sat there for fifteen minutes. The therapist pointed out that under those circumstances, staying there for fifteen minutes was an achievement, on which she could build, if she had appropriate support. Sarah wrote down the details of the sit-in and the humiliations that had preceded it and sent the written report to a number of relatives, two friends, and a neighbor. The supporters called Silvana and told her that they had received the report and that they would stand by her mother in her struggle against humiliation. One week later, Silvana again humiliated her mother in the presence of a friend from school. The mother called the neighbor and asked him to listen in on the phone when she went into her daughter's room in order to demonstrate her resistance. The neighbor agreed and Sarah entered the room, with her cell phone in her hand. She told her daughter and her friend that the neighbor was listening in on the phone, and informed the girl who was visiting that, regrettably, she would have to leave, because she was not willing to have a guest in the house when her daughter humiliated her. Silvana cursed and threatened, but Sarah repeated her request that the visitor leave. Silvana slammed out of the house together with her friend. Later, Sarah phoned her daughter's friend

and said that she was sorry about the episode, but made it clear that she could not remain passive while she was being humiliated. The friend agreed and said she thought so too, and that she had said the same to Silvana. At the next meeting with the therapist, Sarah felt that she had handled the difficult episode well. The therapist emphasized the combination of endurance and persistence, as key sources of her growing authority.

The principle of delay (*"Strike while the iron is cold!"*) is the second factor that shapes the way the new authority figure relates to time. One of the basic premises of traditional authority was the speed with which punishment followed a transgression. Promptness of response was considered crucial. The new authority is grounded on completely different assumptions: (a) immediate disciplinary response brings a high risk of escalation; (b) a delayed response allows the authority figure to sort things out and enlist support; and (c) a delayed response conveys the message that the authority person is continuously there and concerned with the child, even in the silent interim. During the episode itself, the authority person can say: *"I refuse to accept this behavior. I will think about what steps to take, and will get back to you later!"* These are not empty words. After sorting things out, the authority figure returns and carries out the planned measures of resistance. The adult refrains from noisy arguments, abstains from hasty punishments and does not try to impose his will. This restraint is not experienced as weakness, but as inner strength, because the authority person knows in his heart that he will deal with the problem later on. Children often tell their parents in amazement: *"What, you still remember that?"* There is a positive undertone to this response, for the child has discovered that the parent has continued relating to him. In this way the experience of authority, for both child and adult, changes from that of a fleeting confrontation to that of a continuing presence.

A 14-year-old girl noticed that her father had the habit of consulting the book, "Parental Presence" (Omer, 2000) after clashes with her.

She told her mother that she was surprised that her father thought about her in his free time.

The possibility of rectifying previous mistakes or negative reactions adds a third dimension to the new authority's experience of time. Parents and teachers are afraid that admitting that they were wrong will be interpreted as weakness and will hand the child a decisive advantage. However, clinging to an untenable image of infallibility gets the authority person in trouble. Thus, a teacher who refuses to acknowledge that the data that a pupil obtained from the Internet may be more up to date than the information at her disposal, risks losing her credibility. A teacher acting in the spirit of the new authority will tell the pupil instead: *"You may have found better information than I have. I'll verify it and let you know!"* By delaying her response and being willing to examine the facts, the teacher is freed of the need to make a snap decision. Her willingness to check the data bolsters her responsible standing. It is of course vital that the teacher return to the class with the results of her examination. This is an opportunity for her to tell the class: *"I verified the material in the light of the new information that X brought in, and I found that he was right. Meanwhile, I learned some new things on the subject."* The teacher proved that she is capable of listening to the pupil, checking his claims, correcting her own version, and expanding her and the pupils' knowledge. Alternatively, the teacher could ask the pupil to bring the data that he has gathered to class, thereby teaching the pupils to assume responsibility for the information that they quote. The teacher's authority as a source of knowledge is not undermined, because the structure of knowledge is different today from that of the past. Nowadays, an authority in a field of knowledge must be prepared to check and update himself, thus acknowledging the inexhaustible sources of information available not only to him, but to everyone. In his willingness to make room for the information that the pupil brought in, the teacher set a personal example and displayed leadership. The time that the class devoted to verifying the information was not wasted. It enabled the class to delve more deeply

into the subject, and the teacher to establish her competence in the ever-changing landscape of knowledge.

The willingness to admit to mistakes and to act to rectify them that characterizes the new authority also applies to the adult's negative reactions. In our work with parents, we showed that parents who are willing to act in this way reinforce the legitimacy of their authority in their own eyes and in those of the child. Their admission and their acts of reparation may salvage the parent-child relationship from the residue of past confrontations. Parents discover that the courage to do so creates a new ethos in the life of the family. Reparation now becomes a major value, relevant both for the parents and the child, strengthening the parents' leadership:

Mario and Tina, parents of 10-year-old Jeff, sought help because of their son's violent behavior at home and at school. The mother used the point system and would award Jeff five points for each day without violence. She promised him a PlayStation when he reached 100 points. The number of points was displayed on a chart in Jeff's room. However, in the wake of a particularly harsh episode in which Jeff beat up a child in his class, the mother announced that the system had gone bankrupt and she took down the chart. Jeff, who had accumulated more than half the required points, reacted furiously, accusing his mother of deceiving him. The parents came to the therapist a week after the incident. Tina felt she had been unjust. The discussion focused on the need to initiate a joint process of reparation. Two simultaneous steps were planned and implemented. First, the parents approached Jeff together and Tina told him: *"We have decided to correct the mistake that I made in your case. I was wrong when I took down your point chart. I'm hanging it back on the wall, and will give back all the points you accumulated!"* Second, the parents told Jeff that he had to apologize to the boy he beat up, and make reparation toward his class, because his outburst harmed not only the boy, but also the entire class. They suggested that they act together as a family in order to help Jeff carry out this task without wounding his pride. The parents added that they would take part in

Jeff's act of reparation because, as his parents, they also were responsible for his deeds. The teacher summoned the boy who was beaten up to a room, where Jeff and his parents were waiting. The parents and Jeff handed him a letter of apology signed by Jeff. They also brought a cake, which Jeff had helped bake, as an act of reparation toward the entire class, in order to make amends for his violent outburst. At the end of the day, the teacher informed the class that Jeff and his parents had apologized together to the boy who was attacked, and that Jeff had baked a cake together with his parents as a gesture of reparation for the whole class. Jeff and the teacher cut the cake into small slices and each child came up to get his. In the evening, the father congratulated Jeff on his behavior, adding proudly, *"In our family, we act according to the principle: 'One for all and all for one!' We are there for you, we take responsibility together with you, and help you to rectify your mistakes. I'm sure that if I am ever in trouble, you'll be there for me!"*

It is difficult to imagine that these steps wouldn't strike a positive chord in Jeff's mind. Returning the point chart to its place was a step toward restoring his wounded pride. The parents set a personal example, demonstrating that admitting to a mistake, expressing regret, and rectifying it do not diminish the stature of the rectifier; quite the contrary. In the process of reparation, time is no longer experienced as linear; what happens later does influence what happened earlier. The admission of error, the expression of regret, and the symbolic reparation are measures that change the significance of past events. These steps reopen the problematic episode, adding a dimension that will impact on the way it is remembered and on the character of future relationships. The courage to make reparation is one of the characteristics of the new authority, which is no longer all-knowing, but is liable to err and ready to correct past mistakes. In so doing, the new authority figure earns the right to steer the child in the same direction. As is seen throughout this book, the requirement to make reparation is one of the preferred responses of the new authority to the child's negative behavior. The authority figure uses all the means

at his disposal, such as asserting his presence, enlisting the help of supporters, and appealing to the positive voices of the child in order to motivate him to do so. Contrary to traditional punishment, the process of reparation places the authority figure and the child on the same side, and not on opposite sides of the divide.

We have seen that attempts to reinstate the authority of the past by a swift retribution are doomed to failure. Parents and teachers who seek to do so become tragic figures, who try nostalgically to reestablish a position of power that has no place in a more democratic society. In contrast, the new authority relies on cumulative progressive acts in order to build up its status. In the past, every confrontation with the child ended with an unequivocal outcome: the child obeyed, was punished, or “won.” In the present view, the immediate result denotes only the beginning of the process. Time is the central arena for the unfolding of the new authority. The authority person accrues depth and weight by virtue of her willingness to persist, to delay, to perform, and to demand reparation. Her authority is founded not on an instant threatening gesture, but on the pillar of time, on which it rests.

Honor and Pride

We have seen that honor is one of the basic values of the authority of the past. The need to defend honor or to restore wounded pride is one of the chief motives of punitive action. In their book *The Culture of Honor*, researchers Nisbett and Cohen (1996) noted that in communities where honor is a supreme value, bloodshed is far more prevalent. The concept of honor binds the honor-bound person to the obligation to retaliate. In this view, any attempt to opt for a response other than the required retaliation is an expression of personal and moral inferiority. Similar feelings drive many parents and teachers to take severe punitive action, which they consider unavoidable.

The values that form the basis of the new authority permit a gradual liberation from the sense of wounded pride and the obligation

to retaliate that were binding for the traditional authority figure. In the present view, endurance and self-control are achievements, not weaknesses. The new authority figure learns to feel pride at his self-restraint, his ability to maintain his mental balance in the face of provocation, and in the quiet knowledge that he can react later on, in a legitimate and convincing manner. However, for people in authority who feel that their standing has been badly undermined, this emotional change may be quite difficult. It is hard to see, for example, how we can instill the pride of self-control in teachers whose worth in society, and perhaps also in their own eyes, is at an all-time low, or in parents who have become accustomed to daily humiliation.

The approach of nonviolent resistance may provide an answer to these quandaries. Nonviolent resistance developed among social groups that labored under continued oppression and extreme feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. Gandhi, the leading proponent of the approach, stressed that the change from total helplessness to proud determination may take place almost overnight, after the first experience of resistant solidarity. In *Nonviolent Resistance: A New Approach to Violent and Self-Destructive Children* (Omer, 2004), I tried to adapt these ideas to the family and school setting. Our experience with many parents and teachers confirms Gandhi's observations: Surrender and despair quickly give way to a sense of pride and mission, once parents and teachers are freed from the pendulum of surrender and retaliation and move on to nonviolent resistance.

The sources of pride of the authority figure who adopts these values are wholly different from those of the authority figure of yore. Although, traditionally, the sense of honor of parents and teachers was fed mainly by the child's obedient and respectful behavior, the pride of the new authority person rests on his own actions. It rises when he endures and persists. His standing in his own eyes drops when he is drawn into an escalating cycle by the child's provocation. Thus, the very actions that were taken to defend traditional honor, are a blow to the sense of pride of the new authority figure.

Release from the Cycle of Coercion

The experiential aspects described in this chapter have a common denominator: the release of the new authority person from her sense of compulsion and self-restriction in regard to space, time, the obligation to retaliate, and the need to control the child. Gerald Patterson (1982) described the relationship between parents and children in families with high levels of violence as characterized by a reciprocal coercion: The parent feels obliged to impose her authority on the child, and the child feels forced to impose his will on the parent. Both fear that reducing their own coercive moves will lead to their self-effacement. The parent feels she has no degrees of freedom. She must retaliate immediately and with suitable severity, or lose her authority altogether. Not so the new authority figure. In place of the binding fear that if she does not react immediately and with maximal severity her authority will disintegrate, a new expanse opens up in her awareness of time, place, and the possibilities of action.

Dan, a boy of 11, used to punish his parents (James and Sheila) by intentionally destroying their property. In the past he spitefully damaged the air conditioner (because they refused to turn it on and off according to his will), Sheila's car (because she refused to drive him to soccer practice), and his older sister's possessions (because she didn't get off the computer when he ordered). Dan's parents responded to these incidents with furious outbursts and severe punishments (*"You won't leave the house for a month!"*) that they were unable to carry out. They felt that they had no choice but to react as they did. They justified the severe punishments by the feelings of shock that Dan's behavior provoked in them, and by the need to react in a way that would show him once and for all that he was not allowed to behave in this way. The punishments, however, were not effective. Dan only entrenched himself further in his hostile and destructive stance. When Dan deleted the poems his mother had written from her computer, the parents decided to seek help. They felt that their lives had become impossible and their relationship with Dan had hit bottom. They understood that a major effort

was required to resolve the crisis that threatened the whole family. Following their first session with the therapist, the parents recorded Dan's destructive acts, assembled a group of twelve supporters, and distributed their documentation. The following day, they informed Dan in the presence of four supporters that they had decided to cut his allowance in half, as a partial compensation for the damage he had done. Additionally, they told him that they would oppose his going out to visit friends until he reached an agreement with them on how to stop his destructive behavior. They informed him that if he went out despite the prohibition, they would go to his friends' houses to look for him. Dan went wild, but to the parents' surprise, not to the extremes that they had expected. During the first ten days of the program, there was always a supporter in the house. The presence of the supporter helped Dan's parents to watch over him and prevent physical violence on his part. Within two days, Dan went to a friend's house without permission. His parents called all of his friends to find out whether he was at their houses. They asked the friends, and the friends' parents, to notify Dan that they had called looking for him. James and one of the neighbors drove to the friend's house where Dan was. They spoke to the friend's mother and told her that he was there without permission, and that they had come to take him home. When Dan saw them he cursed and ran away. James and the supporter stayed at the house and initiated a conversation with Dan's friend and his mother, telling them about Dan's behavior. They said that they would halt their prohibition to Dan's going out, if he were willing to make a symbolic gesture of reparation for the damage he had caused. James asked Dan's friend if he would be willing to convey their offer. He asked him whether he thought the offer was fair. Dan returned home later that night and his father slept in his room with him.

A few days later the parents took Dan, his grandfather, and his uncle, with whom Dan was very close, to spend a long weekend by the sea. The four of them took Dan on a long hike and sat down with him on the shore. The parents said to Dan: *"We will be like*

at a peace conference. We'll talk and wait until we find a solution!" Dan said that he wasn't interested in talking or in a solution. The parents didn't answer him. The grandfather and the uncle stayed with Dan for a few hours, most of the time in silence. The first night the parents and Dan went to sleep without exchanging a word. The scenario repeated itself the next day: They hiked for a few hours, sat looking at the sea, and the two supporters tried to talk to him heart to heart. On the third day, the uncle was replaced by Tom, a family friend who used to take Dan fishing. He took Dan on a nighttime hike and at the end, asked Dan if he wanted him to mediate, so that his parents would accept a reasonable offer of reparation on his part. Tom promised Dan that he would protect his pride, but said that without a commitment to refrain from terror in the future, it would be difficult to find a solution. Dan agreed, but demanded a halt to the ban on visiting friends and the restoration of his allowance. The friend said that the hour was late and they would have to put off the discussion until the next day. The next day, Dan's grandfather stayed with him and the friend spoke with his parents. At the end of the discussion he returned to Dan and told him that they had still not reached a solution because it wasn't clear how Dan would make up for the personal insult that he had caused his parents. He told Dan he was prepared to help him develop an acceptable reparation step: He proposed to teach Dan how to wash his parents' car thoroughly, and Dan would wash it once a week for a month. He offered to try and temper the reduction in Dan's allowance, but made it clear that in this case, repayment by installments would last until Dan's Bar Mitzvah. That night Dan burst out crying, but said he *"could not give in to his parents' demands."* The family returned home without having reached a solution. At the therapy session following the long weekend, there was a marked difference between James and Sheila. James thought that a basic change had taken place, because he and Sheila felt free to act, but Sheila, although acknowledging the change in their stance and their standing, thought that Dan had not been sufficiently punished and that his self-entrenchment proved it. The affront to Sheila was still fresh and painful, and she had

difficulty making the transition from the cycle of coercion to the ideas embodied in the new authority.

During the next two weeks, the situation at home gradually stabilized. The ban on visiting friends was lifted, but James and Sheila still deducted half of Dan's allowance. Their behavior toward Dan became friendlier, and Dan was especially cautious, as though he was walking on eggshells. Tom continued to visit once a week and take Dan on an outing. He volunteered to serve as a buffer when things threatened to get out of hand: *"Call me, I'll talk to you or we'll go out together!"* At the end of the second week, Dan washed his parents' car on his own initiative. He did the same the following week. Dan's parents told him that the deduction from his allowance had been lowered to 15%, so that he could resume going out with his friends without embarrassment. At this point the therapy sessions with the parents ceased, but the therapist was on call if needed. After eighteen months, the parents sent the therapist a letter with an invitation to Dan's Bar Mitzvah. They said that the atmosphere at home was much improved. During the entire period, there had been no incidents of vandalism or physical violence. The letter also stated that they had recently taken Dan to a restaurant and told him that they felt the episode was over. Dan did not reply, but they saw that he was moved. They said their view of themselves as parents had changed. They no longer strived for might, but cultivated instead a patient strength. They concluded the letter with the sentence: *"We could never have imagined that silent persistence could carry so much weight!"*