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Kids Are Just Kids—Not Little Adults

Many parents and teachers carry around in their heads a trouble-producing notion about young children. This idea is a kind of false assumption or wish that causes discipline attempts that don't work, along with stormy scenes that make everyone feel bad. This erroneous concept is known as the "Little Adult Assumption."



The Little Adult Assumption is the belief that kids have hearts of gold and that they are basically reasonable and unselfish. They're just smaller versions of grownups, in other words. And because they are little adults, this notion goes, whenever the youngsters are misbehaving or not cooperating, the problem must be that they don't have enough information at their disposal to be able to do the right thing.

Imagine for example, that your eight-year-old son is torturing his little sister for the fifteenth time since they got home from school. What should you do? If your boy is a little adult, you simply sit him down and explain to him the three golden reasons why he shouldn't tease his sister. First of all, teasing hurts her. Second, it makes you mad at him. Third—and most important—how would he feel if someone treated him like that?

Your son looks at you, his face brightening with insight, and he says, "Gee, I never looked at it like that before!" Then he stops bothering his sister for the rest of his life. That would certainly be nice, but any veteran parent or teacher knows that scenes like that don't happen. Kids are not little adults.

Kids Are Born Unreasonable and Selfish

The crucial point here is this: Grownups who believe—or want to believe—the Little Adult Assumption are going to rely heavily on words and reasons in dealing with young kids and trying to change their behavior. And words and reasons, by themselves, are going to be miserable failures much of the time.

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Talking and explaining certainly have their place in raising children. But kids are just kids—and not little adults. They are not born reasonable and unselfish, they are born unreasonable and selfish. Consequently, it is the parent's job—and the teacher's job—to help kids become the opposite. In accomplishing this goal, adults need to be gentle, consistent, decisive and calm.

QUICK TIP: NONCOMPLIANCE

Noncompliance and lack of cooperation in children are not always due to lack of information. Kids are not little adults or simply small computers, so raising youngsters involves training as well as explaining.



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ParentMagic Inc
800 Roosevelt Rd
Glen Ellyn IL 60137
www.123magic.com