

Freedom:

In a relationship you have three basic responsibilities – to encourage your partner’s freedom, to accept influence from your partner, and to show affectionate love. Today I will discuss the first of these – your need to promote freedom.

The promotion of freedom within a relationship is an unusual and often neglected responsibility. We tend to forget about not only our need to feel free but also our obligation to promote the freedom of those close to us. The attainment of freedom is such an essential human need and right. Each one of us strives for this – in both domestic and social life.

Most struggles of family and intimate life are struggles related to freedom. All power struggles and attempts to control another person are about freedom. Here are some examples from everyday life that are, at their core, struggles about freedom, no matter how trivial they may seem:

- Your partner prevents you from doing something.
- Your teenage daughter wants to stay out later than she should.
- Your 3-year-old child wants to walk down the street without holding your hand.
- Your aging father refuses to go to the hospital.
- You encourage your spouse to be the kind of person they want to be.
- Your husband intimidates you into being a certain way.
- You ground your child for bad behaviour.
- Your teenager uses foul language in the house.
- Your husband wants to go away for a weekend with the lads.
- You long to take a break from being a stay-at-home mother.
- Your partner interrupts you whenever you speak.
- You feel you trapped.
- You place expectations and obligations on those close to you.

All of these kinds of issues are struggles to find a balance between freedom and emotional captivity - between emancipation and control. We all struggle for freedom and resist confinement. We accept influence but hate being controlled. We hate to feel emotionally imprisoned or trapped. We want to be free to be ourselves and, despite our sense of responsibility, resist the effect of having to inhibit ourselves too much.

Freedom is such a basic human need because it allows us to breathe fully into ourselves and to inhibit our potential. It is difficult to feel it fully because life is so full of obligations, confinements, limitations, commitments, and rules. It is easy to feel trapped and unfree. In fact when relationship and family life deteriorates, issues of freedom rise to the surface in intense and dramatic ways. Teenagers fight for freedom in the face of what they imagine to be rigid imprisonment. Spouses long for freedom from relationships that leave them feeling trapped. Battles between control and freedom form the character of everyday family life.

In family life there are coups, revolutions, and fights for independence. There are dictators and leaders, mutinies and take-overs. There are family civil wars,

imprisonments, emergency rules, punishments, and autocracies. In lots of ways, family life mirrors larger socio-political life.

A six-year-old who freely decides that she should be allowed to eat a bag of crisps before dinner can turn into a full-scale battle over freedom. Even a six year old will innocently claim her right to be free to eat what she wants. So, right in the kitchen before dinner parents will get involved in an inquest about human rights and responsibilities.

It would be interesting if families drew up their own Constitution with laid out principles and beliefs regarding responsibilities, obligations, freedoms, rights, and democracy. What might your family constitution look like? What freedoms, rights, and responsibilities would each person in your family be entitled to? As a 'citizen' of the family, what would be the basic responsibilities of each family member?

The ideal family is one that has clear hierarchical lines and boundaries within which democratic principles and ideals are gradually promoted as children learn to assume the essential responsibilities of living in a family. The establishment of democratic principles within the context of parental rights and responsibilities is certainly not easy but, I believe, well worth the struggle.

Freedom attained is proportional to responsibilities carried. Teaching children that small freedoms are gained through assuming basic responsibilities is surely the art of good parenting.
