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***"Is there a 'Jewish' way to parent?"***

***Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer***

Putting aside the gender-bias of the verse, my favorite Jewish parenting instruction comes from the Talmud, Kiddushin 29a, which instructs a father to teach his son Torah, get him a wife, teach him a craft, and, some say, teach him to swim too! It's the final piece of advice that catches our attention. It's one thing to instill values and ideals, to acquire a partner in life and a livelihood. But most important is learning survival skills. When parents are no longer available, we want our children to be self-sufficient and have the inner strength to manage adversity.

Along these lines, we recognize that life is not always fair, that pain and suffering are part of the human lot, that bad things do come to good people. We need to prepare our children by being truthful, by not dodging tough topics or hiding behind euphemisms. We also need to respect our children's intelligence. They are quite capable of distinguishing between myth and reality. To this end, we want to encourage critical thinking. Part of good Jewish parenting is also allowing our children to question authority – an age-old Jewish tradition – and to foster healthy debate. This goes in the face of a more repressive Jewish tradition – "Freg nit! Don't ask!" – which silenced any objections.

Finally, we also want to make a distinction between authoritarian parenting, that admonishes and demands, with authoritative parenting, that is caring and supporting. We choose the latter, and like the sentiment of Baba Batra 21a, "If you strike a child, strike him with a shoelace."