



## OF GOLF, PARENTING, AND TERRORISM

By Susan Vogt

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I used to be an avid golfer – that was B.C. (Before Children). Sure, Jim and I still played occasionally after children but soon decided to cultivate sports that took less time and money. But I can still hear my father saying, “Keep your eye on the ball” and “Don’t forget to follow through!”

Those phrases also apply to successful parenting. Keeping one’s eye on the ball is about staying focused on the end result, not the momentary struggle. Parents have to keep their eyes on the prize – to foster responsibility that will hold our children over the long haul, not just be friends for the moment.

Equally important, however, is “Follow Through!” In parenting this is akin to “Actions have consequences”. If the family rule is that dinner dishes have to be done before going out with friends, then I have to have the guts to enforce it when the doorbell rings.

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about these natural and logical consequences. It’s not a new concept. Parenting educators have been using it for more than a generation to help parents see ways other than corporal punishment to discipline their children. Of necessity, teachers have had to learn how to teach a lesson without hitting. What’s new is that I, like all of us, have been trying to understand this whole “9-11” thing and I wonder if some of the insights we’ve gained about how to discipline without hitting can be applied to the terrorists. The mixed message of “It’s wrong to hit someone to solve a problem, but it’s OK for me to hit you” is not that far from, “It’s wrong for the terrorists to kill innocent people. To teach them that we are going to have to kill some more innocent people.”

I don’t want to be misinterpreted as soft on the terrorists. What they did was horrible and inexcusable. There must be a consequence that will make a difference. At issue is what *kind* of consequence will be most effective. I myself have spanked a child in a rage of anger at his defiance or cruelty. I felt relieved and avenged for the moment. It stopped the negative behavior – for the moment. But what I eventually noticed was that it pushed the objectionable behavior underground and it would pop up later. If we were going to be able to live together peacefully in the same home over the long haul, I’d have to figure out better consequences. Sure it was easier to spank, but I’d have to get smarter and more creative about discipline and not just jump to the quickest solution because I was bigger.

Effective alternatives to corporal punishment include time-outs/isolation, forcibly (but nonviolently) restraining a child, and taking away and awarding privileges. All of these require discernment and follow-through by the parent.

As I tried to apply these principles to terrorists it also raised some thorny questions in my mind. For example:

*Time-out/Isolation:* The U.S. did this when we waited to respond and gained the cooperation of countries neighboring Afghanistan thus isolating them from the global community. The problem is that it’s not the Afghan people but only the terrorists who need to be isolated from support; and terrorists don’t only live in Afghanistan. Could the U.N. have taken the lead role since terrorism is a crime against humanity not just the United States?

*Forcible restraint:* As with children, our goal should not be to harm the transgressor but to stop the negative behavior and deter future violations. Traditionally civil societies have done this through the courts and putting people in jail. The problem with terrorists, of course, is

finding them in order to restrain them. The challenge here seems to be one of intelligence and giving incentives to those who could lead us to the terrorists. Would a police action approach be sufficient?

*Rewarding compliance:* I wonder if we could do more to show our solidarity with Muslim people by winning their hearts also. Dropping humanitarian aid was a magnificent start. I wonder if we could achieve our goal of finding and stopping the terrorists by escalating our care for Afghans as a suffering people and being the kind of society they could respect – one that values human life and wholesome living? They are our best allies to finding the perpetrators.

*Taking away privileges:* The U.S. did this when they pressured financial institutions to freeze money going to the terrorists. Their freedom to move about has also been restricted.

*Corporal punishment as a last resort:* Most parenting educators would say that it's better not to have the option of falling back on corporal punishment since this short circuits the motivation and creativity needed to use the other methods first. In international disputes there may be times, however, when it's equivalent – war – may be the only way to protect the victims. Never the less, I think the principle of “last resort”, as described in the Just War Theory, still holds merit. Is bombing the only way we have to root out the terrorists? We want justice not vengeance. We want Middle Eastern countries that can govern themselves fairly and responsibly. We don't want to create new enemies with new reasons to hate us. We must keep our eye on the ball, the goal.

*NOTE: This article was written in 2001, shortly after the 9-11 terrorist attacks and before the war against Iraq.*