

Asking Permission

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written by Pamela Adelstein | October 25, 2021

When our children were young, my husband and I taught them about the need to ask permission before performing actions that could have consequences. As part of our strategy, we highlighted whenever a poorly thought out choice triggered a positive or negative outcome.

To my bemusement, even into their early adolescence, our kids would ask if they could have a snack or dessert or watch an extra show. I would bring great ceremony to my reply, in the hopes of perpetuating their impression that asking for permission was still necessary.

Our children are now in their late teens and no longer ask permission before doing daily tasks, which is developmentally appropriate. I hope they *do* ask permission from themselves before undertaking actions that impact others and the world around them. It seems that too many adults forget to explore such questions, as their view of the world becomes more myopic and self-centered.

For example, we tried to teach our children that in the battle of humans versus our planet, ultimately Mother Nature wins, and one needs to carefully consider one's actions. Case in point: Our lot is on a downward-sloping flood plain. Years before we moved into our home, some former neighbors leveled their yard, perhaps not considering any downstream effects of their choice. Now our yard is the lowest point in the neighborhood, and we have pulled several all-nighters monitoring our basement sump pumps during rainstorms.

This tale of woe is a mere microcosm of how humans have sought to control our environment to satisfy our desires, without considering future impacts. Climate change has been here for a long time, but now we are at a point of crisis, created by our collective actions. Children worldwide understand this and now are begging us adults to consider our decisions, flipping the "consider the consequences" script on us.

In the 1980s, as a schoolchild, I wrote to then-President Reagan to ask him to end the nuclear arms race. I feared the demolition of our world. "He" replied with a form letter praising the youth of this nation for their political involvement. Rather than feeling empowered to be civically engaged, I felt insignificant and naïve for writing him.

We all know the adage "It is easier to ask for permission than forgiveness." Tragically, I see few requests for either; the only asking I see is our youth begging us adults to consider our decisions.

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