

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?

This line could be a parent of a will-full toddler imploring her child to co-operate. In fact, it is the Mock Turtle in Alice's Wonderland plaintively singing an invitation to dance, and acknowledging the role of will. It also contains the secret to managing your child's will: it's a partnership.

Holy Will

Will has had a bad press in our culture in relation to infants and toddlers. It isn't commonly seen as a Holy quality in a child; but rather as a nuisance, an obstacle to be overcome, a defect in the design, or even something to be broken. If you think this last phrase is too extreme; how many times have you heard people say the following of a baby or a toddler?

You have to show him who is boss.

She's just having you on.

Don't let him rule the roost.

It's either you or her.

There is something very lopsided about these statements. Unlike the Mock Turtle's invitation to dance, none of these statements treat the parent-infant relationship as **partnership**, a dance of two equal wills, a dance of two equal human beings. Sure, the adult is older with more experience and is therefore expected to **lead** the dance of two wills, but not to scuttle the dance altogether.



Get real

To be fair, a toddler in a full flight of will is truly an awesome sight, in the same way that the Irish might describe it as a "terrible beauty". The child is taken over by the energy called will, and it can scare the wits out of you if you don't know what is happening for the child. If you **don't** know what is happening for the child you probably won't manage it in a way that is healthy for your child, for you, and ultimately for our society. These early experiences around an energy as fierce as will imprint deeply in the child, affecting his self-view and his view of the world.

Relax, chill out

When the baby arrives onto the planet her most imperative need is to bond with the Mother. The baby has swapped the environment of the womb, which provided all that she needed for that stage of her development, for her Mother who will be her anchor providing all that she needs physically and emotionally while she learns to navigate her way to independence.

The parents who recognise this treat the baby as a partner right from the word go, while at the same time acknowledging they are the senior partners. These parents respect that the baby is in a whole new world and that everything is new and strange. They understand that all of the sensory information the baby is soaking up needs to be processed by the baby's "system", and they take good care not to overload the system and put it into stress.

They know they need to relax first. No-one wants to dance with a partner who is uptight and babies are no exception - though they don't have much choice. If **you** dance with a partner who is uptight, it's mighty easy to get uptight yourself. This is what happens in the parent-infant dance. Because you are the senior partner, the frequencies that your heart and brain emit are matched by the baby. You are the 'tuning fork', and the baby adjusts to your frequency. That's why when you and the baby are both frantically uptight, your Mother-in-law can come in, take the baby and he calms down just like that - damn it. The senior dance party sets the frequency for the dance, so it makes very good sense to learn how to relax at will (there's that word again), and to make peace with yourself. Truly, your baby will love you for it.

Dancing with the Stars

If you were to be invited to appear on Dancing with the Stars, you would hope that the senior dancing partner would treat you as an intelligent human being who will learn to dance well and to partner them elegantly. That way you would have a chance. Well if babies could talk, they would tell you **they hope for exactly the same** when they land here in the Earth Dance. So what might a baby-dancing-with-the-stars 'expect'?

Will you give me your hand?

A senior partner would always tell you what was about to happen before it happened. That way there would be no surprises for you. So with a baby, a competent senior partner comes around

in front of the child so the child knows they are there, and very gently says, *“I am going to pick you up now”*. They wait a couple of seconds so the baby has a chance to process that piece of information, and then the adult picks the baby up. Or you know when you have your hand inside a tiny baby-garment sleeve, and are about to put the baby’s arm into it, almost all adults just do it. They put the child’s arm in and carry on. They are doing things **to** the baby and not **with** the baby. Herein the seeds of alienation are sown rather than seeds of belonging. A true dance star would say to the baby *“Would you give me your hand?”* and then wait for a few seconds before putting the sleeve on. Asking simple questions like this ‘tells’ the baby many things:

- It acknowledges that the baby is a partner.
- It acknowledges that you **invite** partners to dance **with** you.
- It lets the baby know what is going to happen in advance, with time to prepare.
- In time, given this kind of dancing cues, the baby learns to anticipate.

When the baby can anticipate she can participate in the partnership; she can join the dance.

Good choice

Once the baby gets the idea that he or she chooses the timing for dressing, for putting feet into shoes, for opening up for the next mouthful of dinner, she is well on the way to being a dancing star who is using her will to co-operate. She learns to give you her hand when she is ready, to open her mouth when she sees the spoon, to lean forward when she decides to have her nose wiped. She is getting to exercise her will, which like any ‘muscle’ needs to be exercised and grown. From very early on, say 12 to 15 months, your baby can choose from two tee shirts, or the two pair of pants that you hold out when she is dressing. She is learning that she has some say in her world, and you can’t reach independence without this knowing.

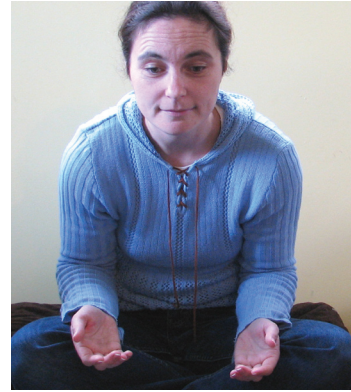
Dancing posture and stance

Just as there is the right stance and posture for the *pase doble* and the tango to be marked highly by the judges, there is a more effective stance and posture in the Dance-of-Two-Equal-Wills. It is much much better to have the effective posture off pat before your infant-turned-toddler reaches the full-on-take-over stage of will where you will need all of your skills to match theirs. Infants and toddlers are marvellous readers of energy and the unconscious. I believe that you can’t fool kids or dogs. Any child with red corpuscles in their blood is going to make a run for it when they meet the energy of the hands-on-hips adult because

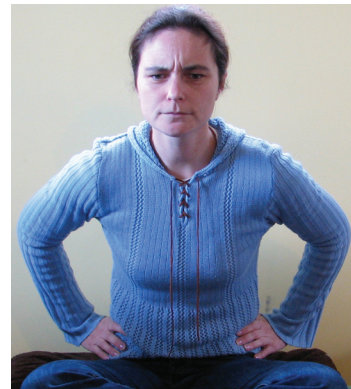
the posture is about confrontation, and it is all shaped up on the adult’s terms. There is nothing in this stance which asks for co-operation and partnership.

Will you, wont you, will you?

I invite you to put these pages down for a couple of minutes and try this out for yourself.



Try this posture. As you do it notice how it feels in your body.



Now try this posture and notice how it feels for you.

Now try the first posture and then change to the second, then change back again and see if you can notice differences in your body with each posture.

Now imagine that someone wanted you to give them something and they were doing the hands-out gesture. How would you feel about co-operating? How would you exercise your will?

Now imagine the same person wants you to hand it over and they are using the hands-on-hips gesture. How would you feel about co-operating? How would you exercise your will?

The hands out gesture offers something very different. It invites the child to be a partner. It

allows them the courtesy of deciding whether to dance or not. At the world renowned Pikler Institute in Budapest, Hungary, the staff always ask in this way if they want anything from a child. The staff are forbidden to take anything from a child's hand, they must ask with this gesture. Because the Pikler Institute is a residential nursery, and because the staff make sure the environment is child-friendly, there are no scissors or knives lying around - but even if there were, I am 100% sure the staff there would still ask. This asking with respect - as one does in a dance - leads to very different reflex behaviour. These children do not make a run for it because they do not expect to be chased, growled, spanked or worse. It doesn't ever happen there. And it doesn't need to happen when the senior dance partner sets up the steps, the gestures, and the posture for the Partner-Dance-of-Wills.

Dance union negotiation

Negotiation skills begin very early if we are smart enough to see them unfold. Watch this very complex negotiation unfolding, and like a good negotiator see what each dancer wants: what requests have they 'placed on the table'? More importantly, notice how each dancer deals with the requests of the other?

The toddler has a block he is interested in and he has been carrying it around

The senior partner sees the block and wants it back in the box which has been put away.

The senior partner is busy holding a younger child having just fed him, so the adult holds out her hand in the gesture of invitation. The toddler sees the gesture and interprets it correctly, though it is clear he is not **willing** to give the block back. Yet. He walks up to the adult but moves away again. He is not ready to give up his needs. After considerable inner turmoil, the child picks up a plastic lid and puts it in the adult's hand. The adult, without a word, places the lid beside her and continues to hold her hand in the gesture of invitation. The child focuses on the hand, delays some more, and eventually puts the block, not in her hand, but at her feet. The adult does not make a big fuss that the negotiations have been concluded successfully, that both parties have danced elegantly. Neither does she say cutting things like:

Well you took your time with that one didn't you? Next time in my hand. You knew very well I wanted it in my hand.

The senior dance partner has her block back, that is what she wanted. The toddler saved face by putting it back but in a location of his choosing.

This adult knows that negotiation skills start early, and she allows children the opportunities to build up their skills. The great thing about learning to dance the Dance-of-Negotiation with adults, is that adults are more patient than toddler playmates can be, (at least adults ought to be), so the child has time to work through the conflicting demands and turmoil of emotions they experience. In this particular incident the adult very softly and gently brushed the child's cheek with her hand. That alone was the gesture to acknowledge that the relationship was still very much intact after the negotiation.



Enter will

So what about tantrums, those virtuoso displays of will by toddlers? This is where the Holy comes into it: Holy as in sacred; sacred as in worthy of awe and respect. Every child comes onto this planet with many 'programmes' which will unfold as they grow and develop. The two main 'programmes' in the beginning, which run simultaneously, are that the child stay bonded with the Mother, as it is she who modulates the environment for the child until they are able to do it for themselves. The second is to explore the world at all cost. The child is made to learn. They are pure learning-beings, and they need to build up a body of knowledge of the world that they entered after they were born. Once they are upright and their hands free they are off. You will have noted how single minded they are, passionate scientists and exploring anything and everything. Enter will.

Will power

Will is a gift in the child, a piece of learner-design brilliance. Will is the power that the child has take them over when they meet an obstacle to their sacred task of mapping in a body of knowledge about the world. People think that toddlers can turn it on and off, they can't. It's an energy response to an obstacle in their path as passionate learners. It is designed so that they have the energy to overcome obstacles and get

on with discovering what they had in their 'single-mindedness'. When you understand that you don't take it personally. You stop seeing it as a power play against yourself and you find ways to work around it. Dancing partners find something equally as fascinating for the toddler to switch their single minded attention to (and they also watch that the child doesn't become overtired-overstimulated-overhungry). That way **you** don't unwittingly become the obstacle. If you take the time to learn the Partnership Dance that we have been discussing **you** will not **be** the obstacle. Put yourself in the baby's shoes, it must be hell for

them when the senior dance partner becomes the obstacle. That's 'baby-catch-22'.

How lucky is that Babe?

Lucky is the infant who lands with adults who are committed to the idea that all human beings are equal and that the only way to relate is not with force, but in partnership. Once you have that idea firmly in your heart, and have your intention to create partnership sorted, simply start practising the steps - one at a time. Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?



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