

Practicing the Golden Rule

HOW LUCKY ST. PATRICK'S DAY fell on a Sunday this year! Parents didn't have to worry about dressing their children in green. (St. Patrick's Day in America historically involves pinching anyone who isn't wearing green. One among many explanations for this tradition: leprechauns can't see green, and pinching turns the skin green, protecting the child from the other-worldly creatures.) Actually, "mandatory" pinching has dropped off, at least at our school. It's odd, isn't it, that our culture has tolerated this aggression on this holiday?

Yet crazy thinking involving inflicting pain on children is just starting to evaporate in the world. When I started teaching preschool, mothers would often respond to a bite from their child by biting her back. In recent years, a boy confided in me that he often had his mouth washed out with soap.

The subject of inflicting pain reminds me of a wonderful children's picture book for people of all ages, *The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkoska. Through the story of a young boy and his grandfather, this award-winning book reveals how the Golden Rule, most commonly known in our society as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," exists in all religions, though it may be phrased in different words. For example, the book points out that Judaism says, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow humans." The grandfather in the story explains the Golden Rule's uniqueness—it is a rule that's the same for children and grown-ups and, in fact, for all people.

Start practicing the Golden Rule, he says, by using your imagination. How might someone feel in a new situation, like starting in a new class? The boy says new kids usually look scared. The grandfather asks, "You can help by always remembering that people like to be treated the same way you do."

The Golden Rule provides a helpful barometer for parents when a situation proves puzzling—"How would I want to be treated in the same situation?" Here are some questions that can help adults to reflect on children's experience.

- Do you like your partner or friend to say "There's nothing to be upset about"?
- When you're feeling unmotivated to do something, does getting lectured help?
- What kinds of interactions encourage you, give you confidence?
- What events leave you feeling "This has been a good day"?

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