

UNITED WISDOM

When adults disagree about raising a child

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

R-12-N04 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

When adults disagree about raising a child

Epigraph

> *We must learn what we should teach.*

Charlotte Mason, Parents and Children, chapter X, Parents in Council, Part I; a line in the author's created dialogue, translated by us in Russian. Not evidence of an actual research group.

What this article is about

In a fictional family, eleven-year-old Timur is getting ready to visit a friend in the evening. His mother asks him to finish an assignment first; his father says he can go and return to it later. The boy is already putting on his jacket when the adults start arguing. Within minutes, the conversation concerns who is too strict, who never supports the other, and whose parents raised children better. Timur stands in the hallway. He is asked to confirm that he has understood the right arrangement, although there are two arrangements in front of him and both still apply. His answer now risks becoming a vote for one adult against the other.

Different views of upbringing do not disappear because both adults love a child. They can care equally and assess workload, freedom, bedtime or help with schoolwork differently. This article asks how adults can take responsibility for those differences while keeping conditions understandable for a child and avoiding appointing the child as judge of their dispute. We will distinguish a shared principle, a specific rule, an observation and a habit inherited from one's own family. This is an optional way to think about one disagreement, rather than a validated conflict-resolution programme. Where threats or violence are present, safety has its own priority; elegant agreement is not a condition of anyone's right to protection.

I. There is already a decision in the hallway

While the adults debate who is right in general, the child has to choose what to do now. Timur can stay, leave or ask permission again. None of these options frees him from the risk of breaking the other instruction. The first adult question may therefore concern ending this uncertainty, rather than proving which method is better. They can say that the permissions diverged and that the adults themselves will clarify today's arrangement. This does not promise immediate agreement in their views. It acknowledges that incompatible demands arose from two adult answers to the same specific question, rather than from a child's objections or insufficient obedience.

A temporary decision has a cost too. If Timur stays home, who will explain the cancelled visit to his friend? If he goes, who will agree a return time and a realistic opportunity to finish the work? An option cannot be called neutral simply because it suits the more senior adult. In our scene, his parents might choose a short walk after one completed task, provided that condition is feasible. They might choose something else. What matters is identifying which question has been settled for today and which remains open between the adults. The child should not have to guess whether permission is valid or tests his loyalty.

Sometimes a condition cannot be postponed: safe transport, a known address, necessary assistance or compliance with a specific limit may be needed. An adult can then make a responsible decision within the options available without pretending the other already agrees. Urgency, however, does not authorise turning every preference into a danger. The known circumstance and the limit of one's knowledge should be named honestly. An outing an adult dislikes does not become demonstrably unsafe simply because of that feeling. Conversely, a child's interest does not cancel an established risk. A question about today's action needs a reason suited to today's conditions and the child's age.

II. The same word may stand for different tasks

The parents talk about independence but mean different actions. His mother wants Timur to learn to account for an assignment's deadline. His father wants him to plan how to spend the evening himself and see the consequences of his choice. Those aims may be compatible, but the people arguing are currently defending different methods. Replacing the conversation with a question about who respects the child more puts them into a moral contest. It is more useful to clarify which skill is needed now and what assistance an adult is ready to provide. Planning independently does not mean having no support available, and support need not become management of every step.

Talk of discipline also needs translating into behaviour. Does it mean a predictable arrangement, an ability to complete work, respect for other people or unconditional

compliance with an older person's request? These aims have different grounds and limits. A child may remember a rule and still need help organising time. A child may obey out of fear without understanding its purpose. These are possible distinctions, rather than diagnoses of our fictional child. It is useful for adults first to identify the action they want to make understandable, rather than contest a word that each considers self-explanatory.

A dispute about upbringing often includes personal history. One adult remembers a strict household as a place of reliable order, another as a continual examination. Their memories matter, but they do not automatically establish this child's needs. You can explain why a condition matters to you personally and separately examine whether it fits the present situation. This conversation does not require revealing your entire family biography or declaring your own parents bad. It is enough to notice the transition from a familiar past to today's decision. Timur has his own age, abilities and circumstances; he is not obliged to repeat someone else's earlier story.

III. Shared rules do not require identical adults

Predictability does not require adults to become copies of each other. One likes reading together, another offers an independent attempt. One is willing to spend a long time explaining a task, another demonstrates it more effectively. These differences can remain if the child understands which condition applies and who is available to help. A shared arrangement matters where contradictory answers create a practical difficulty: return times, acceptable ways of addressing people, or a requirement to report changed plans. This list is not universal. Each family needs to distinguish a necessary agreement from a wish to make another person's character, temperament and manner of involvement entirely resemble one's own.

On its page about discipline, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adults, family members and people caring for a child discuss basic rules. This is professional guidance on understandable conditions, rather than a separate experiment establishing the effectiveness of our evening conversation. The same page emphasises age-appropriate limits and nonviolent treatment. We use this limited context without turning every listed technique into a compulsory programme or presenting an American resource as local law. For Timur, our editorial conclusion is more modest: finding out the applicable condition should not mean guessing which adult won today.

An outwardly united front can sometimes conceal a different arrangement. One adult disagrees with humiliation but remains silent to preserve the other's authority. Consistency then becomes support for harmful treatment. An earlier agreement does not cancel the possibility of stopping an unacceptable form of interaction. A prohibition on insulting the child can be separated from further discussion of the assignment. A child should not hear that their dignity cannot be protected until older people have settled their relationship in private. Equally,

an ordinary difference in preferences should not automatically be called violence. Precision matters: what happened, what needs to stop now, and what remains a question of agreement?

Other adults may participate too: a relative who meets a child after school, or someone helping with an activity. Their actual availability matters more than an elegant allocation of duties. Free time or additional work cannot be promised on their behalf. If Timur's grandmother can collect him only at a particular hour, that is a separate condition, rather than an argument against his independence. Participating does not require identical views of every aspect of upbringing. But a person should know what they have actually agreed to and whom to contact if plans change. Otherwise, the shared arrangement exists only in a conversation between two parents, while the child and people who did not help create it have to fulfil incompatible expectations.

IV. A child's voice matters without making them an arbitrator

Timur knows how much work remains, when his friend will be home and what he planned himself. That information matters to the decision. He can be invited to explain it, with room to clarify or decline a personal question. But asking about facts differs from asking him to determine which parent is right. When a child is asked to confirm that his mother is being unreasonable or his father permits everything, his experience becomes material for an adult alliance. A useful child contribution concerns his life and conditions for acting. Responsibility for the adult disagreement stays with the adults; it does not transfer to whichever explanation a child gives most persuasively.

Listening does not mean promising any outcome. Timur may propose visiting his friend first, while the adults retain a requirement to complete an urgent assignment. It is then important to explain the actual reason rather than portray a free choice that was closed in advance. Where several acceptable options exist, a specific area of choice can be offered. Where none is available now, that can be acknowledged directly. An honest boundary is more respectful than a decorative invitation in which a child is heard only until the first inconvenient answer. Age-related dependence does not make his information unnecessary, and the significance of that information does not make him the sole organiser of every condition.

There is no need to demand identical accounts for both adults as a test of sincerity. A child may remember different details, express a thought differently or fear a reaction. One discrepancy does not establish deception. A significant factual uncertainty can be clarified without putting the child's character on trial. Nor should Timur be asked to carry messages between his parents: find out whether the other agrees, persuade them or explain an already adopted decision. In our scene, adults can arrange their own channel. If direct conversation is unsafe, selecting appropriate support and communication remains an adult task, rather than a new assignment for the child.

V. The adults' conversation needs a manageable subject

After the hallway, the parents can discuss the arrangement for one evening rather than the whole of upbringing at once. What deadline is known? Which part of the help is available? At what time is an outing still possible? Specificity does not devalue deeper differences. It helps show whether they need one answer today or several separate decisions. A dispute about an entire philosophy can easily expand into an assessment of the marriage and families of the past. Sometimes those subjects matter, but they cannot quietly be placed on the question of a child's jacket. Timur is not obliged to wait for final adult agreement on the meaning of freedom before learning today's arrangement.

It is useful to distinguish an observation from a proposed explanation. His mother saw that yesterday's work finished late. That is an observation about time. The conclusion that Timur can never plan is much broader than the available incident. His father noticed that the boy calmly explained his plan. This does not yet establish that it is feasible. They can check the deadline, the amount of work and an earlier agreement without turning either a successful or a difficult evening into a complete portrait of the child. Information may change a decision without having to confirm a predetermined method. Adult openness to correction begins when an observation remains separate from a convenient general accusation.

A trial arrangement needs a clear limit. For example, the parents agree to review the next comparable evening once it is over. They do not turn the child into a secret test subject or collect every mistake as evidence in their argument. If a condition concerns Timur, it is explained in an accessible way. There is no need to create a merit chart or promise a reward for the right opinion. What matters is knowing what will be reconsidered and in light of which circumstance. One trial may reveal that a particular schedule is inconvenient. It does not establish who is forever the more competent parent or whose love deserves greater trust.

VI. Mason's parents in council

In Parents and Children, Charlotte Mason portrays a discussion among parents for whom general talk about education is insufficient. They try to understand what they know themselves and what they intend to teach. This is a dialogue created by the author, rather than a record of a research group or evidence of contemporary family counselling. Published in London in 1897, the book retains the Christian foundations of its period's pedagogy. Its physiological assumptions and gender generalisations cannot quietly be declared present-day knowledge. Our limited question is this: is an adult willing to learn when their own habit already seems a sufficient reason for a child's rule?

The participants in the historical discussion need not become models for our parents. Some of their grounds require criticism today, and some examples concern a very different social

setting. Nevertheless, clarifying the meaning of upbringing helps expose an empty slogan. If the mother and father discuss good education, it is worth asking which action they mean and what the child can actually learn. This is an editorial comparison, rather than evidence that Mason and contemporary paediatricians belong to a shared school. A historical book offers a question about adult thinking; a professional page offers particular recommendations. They do different work and have different limits.

Learning as an adult does not mean continually abandoning judgment. Sometimes, after checking, a parent retains a rule and can explain it more precisely. Sometimes, they discover that they demanded something without making suitable conditions available. His mother may learn that part of the assignment was issued later than usual; his father may learn that the promised evening assistance is unavailable. Such circumstances can change a plan without requiring a ceremonial declaration that someone's method is wrong in every respect. Attention to one's knowledge is useful precisely because it permits a limited conclusion. Parental responsibility remains alongside the possibility of acknowledging uncertainty, correcting a particular error and continuing care without an image of absolute infallibility.

VII. A pause should not leave a child in uncertainty

The AAP page Family Arguments describes respectful limits to disagreement and the possibility of stopping a conversation when it turns into shouting, personal attacks or unproductive repetition. It mainly discusses relationships with a school-age child and family communication. We do not derive a guaranteed way to reconcile two adults' views from it. Our application is limited: ending an unsuitable form of interaction can precede further discussion. Meanwhile, Timur needs an understandable answer about what happens to today's decision. His parents can stop arguing and retain a temporary condition without requiring him to calm both of them down or finish their negotiations himself.

A pause differs from the disappearance of a question. If adults promised to return to a condition, they should identify an available time or way to provide a further answer. There is no need to guarantee an evening conversation when nobody knows whether it can happen. They can say that today's decision applies, while reconsideration of the next similar incident remains unagreed. This is less elegant but more precise. Temporary clarity is not complete agreement. It reduces the uncertainty of the instruction in our scene, without promising to remove tension, restore trust or change a settled adult habit. Naming a pause cannot deliver those outcomes.

If continuation is repeatedly postponed, that becomes a separate adult circumstance. One parent should not have to hold all conditions indefinitely while the other retains a right to cancel them without discussion. The decisions that remain unconfirmed and the practical arrangement available can be identified. Giving a child the full list of grievances against the other parent, however, is a different step needing its own justification. It is useful for Timur to

know who is currently responsible for answering his question. He does not need to establish who first broke the promise to talk. Clarity in a child's life can be supported without appointing him as keeper of evidence, ally or witness to adult righteousness.

VIII. Difference does not require humiliation

You can disagree with a rule without attributing a bad motive to someone. His father may consider the deadline too rigid without declaring his mother indifferent to the child's freedom. His mother may doubt the plan without calling his father someone who permits everything for the sake of his own peace. Sometimes a motive becomes the subject of an important conversation, but one convenient remark cannot establish it. For a small decision about upbringing, it is more useful first to address the reason available. A respectful tone does not itself make a proposal good. It preserves the possibility of examining it without an additional demand to defend one's entire human dignity.

Not every disagreement should end in a halfway compromise. If one adult proposes humiliating punishment, shortening its duration is not necessarily a worthy shared option. If there are two acceptable ways to distribute time, a limited trial may make sense. These situations need distinguishing, rather than a single formula of concession. Nor can local rights and obligations be determined from a general article. Questions about health, clear danger or legal arrangements need appropriate assistance that accounts for circumstances and place. We do not prescribe a particular route, verify service availability or propose debating protection of a child until the adults fully agree.

A child's dignity is not a reward for a convenient answer either. Timur may become angry, forget part of his plan or struggle to find careful words. An adult can still limit an action and help clarify the question. An inconvenient reaction does not authorise ridiculing him before the other parent. When older people dispute a method, it is especially easy to use a child's behaviour as evidence. It is worth asking whose task the next comment serves: does it clarify a condition, or win an adult argument? This is not a diagnostic test. It is an optional check on a forthcoming remark, which may show that it is better postponed or phrased differently.

IX. A correction needs to reach the applicable rule

Suppose the parents discover that today's deadline does in fact permit an outing. Merely acknowledging this to each other in the kitchen is insufficient. Timur needs to hear the updated condition and understand that the earlier restriction has changed. Otherwise, adult agreement remains a private relief while the child continues following the old instruction. They can briefly identify the circumstance they clarified and the arrangement that now applies. There is no need to make the boy evaluate his parents' admirable work or confirm that he is no longer upset. The correction concerns their action; the child's emotional response may differ and does not have to match the new clarity immediately.

If one adult made a mistake, the other should not use correction as a permanent mark of superiority. Equally, concealing a significant change for the sake of authority is not compulsory. A particular inaccuracy can be acknowledged without publicly examining someone's entire character. This subject neighbours the separate question of admitting a mistake to a child. Our focus here is different: how a changed decision becomes understandable and workable for everyone involved. An apology may be needed, but it does not replace clarifying the condition that applies. Similarly, a new agreement does not cancel responsibility for a humiliating earlier argument. Different actions address different parts of what happened.

Sometimes there is no shared decision yet. Adults can honestly retain a difference and determine who is responsible for a particular feasible area, provided this does not breach necessary protection and actual obligations. Authority cannot automatically be distributed through a convenient sentence from an article. Family circumstances differ, and not every arrangement can safely be agreed. In an ordinary scene, today's clarity can be separated from a future philosophy of upbringing. If the arrangement continually changes depending on whom the child approaches, that deserves discussion as a practical difficulty. The child should not be given the duty of choosing the right adult to make the system work.

Understanding can be checked without an examination in obedience. Timur explains what he heard about the return time; an adult notices that they did not give an exact hour and clarifies it. An inaccurate account does not necessarily mean resistance: the original instruction may have been ambiguous. This brief correction differs from a demand to repeat everything word for word or confirm unconditional agreement. Its purpose is a shared meaning for the action. If a child understood a condition and disagrees, that is a different question. His objection can be heard separately without cancelling today's arrangement or declaring every reluctance to accept it cheerfully a failure to understand.

X. The jacket and the next evening

In our fictional story, Timur learns when he can leave and which task remains his responsibility. His mother and father do not become identical. They have agreed on one understandable condition and continue discussing independence themselves. This outcome is possible in the scene, but it is not predicted for every family. The boy may still be angry about waiting; the adults may still doubt their chosen option. The modest result is different: incompatible instructions have stopped demanding a moral vote from the child. He can get on with his evening, while older people retain responsibility for the further disagreement and its form.

Before a similar incident, adults can usefully ask what actually needs shared agreement. The difficulty may turn out not to concern different views of freedom, but missing information about a deadline. It may become clear that one person repeatedly promises unavailable assistance. Sometimes the difference goes deeper and requires a separate conversation or support. These situations cannot all be named a simple shortage of communication in advance. One careful conversation does not guarantee a new relationship structure. But it can leave a more precise question: what needs agreeing, what information needs checking, and what responsibility is an adult ready to take without seeking an alliance with the child?

On the United Wisdom map, this subject neighbours parental expectations, children's interests, substantive disagreement and an adult's admission of error. These directions help distinguish tasks, rather than confirm that every neighbouring material is ready. Here, a particular dependence is central: the child lives within rules they do not themselves coordinate. The quality of an adult dispute is therefore assessed not only by the strength of its arguments, but by the condition it leaves in the child's life. You can retain your opinion, hear an objection and answer for the clarity of an action at the same time. This does not require appointing a child as evidence of your love or victory.

What this means in practice

If the situation is safe and you want to try, choose one manageable adult disagreement that creates contradictory instructions for a child. First write down what the child needs to know now: an action, a time, available help or the adult responsible. Separately identify what the older people have not yet agreed. Do not involve the child in judging who raises them better, or require confirmation of someone else's motive. If information from the child is needed, ask about a particular circumstance and leave room for correction. If choice is closed, do not portray a free vote. If danger is immediate, this exercise is not a condition of starting protective action.

In the adults' conversation, distinguish one observation, one aim and one proposed condition. Check the grounds for each and whose workload the chosen option creates. You can agree

only today's arrangement and leave the further question open, with an honest way to return to it. There is no need to create a perfect family code or achieve final unity of views. Where humiliation, threats or an absence of freedom to answer are present, a joint trial may be unsuitable. You do not need to demonstrate a method's worth by continuing an unsafe conversation. Support is chosen for the real situation; the article establishes neither local availability, a legal procedure nor a guarantee of safety.

After a correction, check whether the new arrangement reached the child and whether its feasible part is understandable. Do not measure success by compulsory gratitude, a hug, forgiveness or a rapid improvement in mood. Sometimes removing two incompatible instructions is enough. Sometimes it becomes apparent that adults need a different way to make decisions. Sometimes nothing changes, and this needs honest acknowledgement. The exercise is optional and does not establish any upbringing method's effectiveness. Its limited aim is to leave the child a voice about their own life and return responsibility for adult disagreement to the people who can actually discuss and change the conditions.

Key quotation

> *...we must go to school...*

Charlotte Mason, Parents and Children, chapter XI, Parents in Council, Part II; a fragment spoken by Mrs Meredith, translated by us in Russian. It concerns studying the grounds of everyday upbringing; historical medical positions are not adopted as contemporary recommendations.

Connections between traditions

Source	Question for comparison	Difference and limit
Mason's parents in council	What does an adult know about what they intend to teach?	A fictional nineteenth-century pedagogical dialogue with Christian foundations; not contemporary research
AAP on discipline	Which basic rules are genuinely understandable to a child?	Professional guidance; not evidence of the effect of our optional exercise
AAP on family arguments	When should the form of conversation stop and be reconsidered?	Family communication guidance, primarily for school age; no requirement of reconciliation or single local route
Editorial proposal	Who answers for incompatible adult instructions?	A contemporary ethical distinction of roles; sources are not declared one tradition or a guaranteed technique

Primary sources

1. Charlotte M. Mason — Parents and Children. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897; Project Gutenberg72445. Selected context of chapters X–XII: adults' knowledge and the meaning of education in author-created dialogues. Historical physiological, gender and religious positions are not adopted as present-day facts.

2. American Academy of Pediatrics — What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child?. HealthyChildren.org; updated5November2018. Page content read: age-sensitive conditions, nonviolent treatment and basic rules with participating adults. Linked studies were not independently verified; the entire list of techniques is not offered as a compulsory programme.

3. American Academy of Pediatrics — Family Arguments. Updated16December2025; declared source: Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages5to12, copyright2004. Complete main text read: respectful limits of conversation, a child's voice, family alliances and adult example. Professional material, rather than a separate efficacy trial.

Tags

upbringing, parents, adults, child, disagreement, rules, independence, responsibility, child's voice, age, safety, respect, uncertainty, family conversation, discipline, observation, expectations, boundaries, nonviolence, agreement, pause, correction, assistance, right to respond, voluntary practice, Mason, AAP, parents in council, United Wisdom, R24, R12N03, R12N05

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, connections between traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.