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Tired of Arguing with Your Kids

Dolores Curran
Sorin Books (September 1999)
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Fourteen-year-old Mark gets B's. He thinks C's should do, yet he is capable of A's. His parents are frustrated.

What to do? Curran, a prolific parenting writer and popular workshop presenter, suggests that parents negotiate instead of nag and that they stick to their standards and stated consequences. When a book about stopping parent-child arguments supplies specific suggestions, sets desirable, practical goals and is truly inspiring, it is a noteworthy parenting book.

Curran speaks to parents so lucidly that it often seems as if she is looking over the reader's shoulder to address his or her particular situation. For instance, she explains that a child making a snide remark about a parent in front of others ("You should hear Mom when she gets mad!") is a refined form of supermarket manipulation, the whining younger children do in shopping carts. Her advice is to ignore it on the scene and later reverse the situation, letting the child know he can be expected to be embarrassed in front on his friends soon. Curran promises that if parents follow through, it won't happen more than twice.

Curran writes with a voice that is sympathetic, but not cloying; authoritative, but never dictatorial. Her wit is fresh, funny and always
apt for the purpose of instruction. She gives balm to harassed parents by using informal, colloquial phrases for certain ploys or reactions, for example, "rising to the bait," becoming annoyed by a child's teasing, whining or nagging. The book gives readers tips, lists of effective parent responses and the flip side—phrases that kids hate to hear ("Wait until your father gets home."), workshop anecdotes and even ways to say "I love you."

If the book has a drawback, it is that it deserves more artful treatment. There are no photographs or sketches, and white space is sparse. Children's complaints and responses might be emphasized in chart form, and sketches might capture emotional responses, adding humor.

For parents who want to end the seemingly endless arguments with their children, Curran's small book is a huge help. Those who use it will find it a harbinger of peace and calm in the household.
(August 16, 1999)

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