

# Raising Bachurim

## What Parents Need to Know

There are unfortunately many struggling boys either not in yeshiva or in yeshiva wishing they were not. What can we as parents (and community members) do to help them?

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**TEENAGERS HAVE BEEN** spiritually affected by the COVID pandemic more than any other age group. They are too old to just go with the flow easily like younger children do. Most teens have not yet gained the skills required to use their time productively *and* they have more time on their hands than they can handle.

Here are some principles to keep in mind.

Your children will naturally want to be like you.

Who are you?

We don't have control; we have influence.

Relationship, relationship, relationship.

The right yeshiva.

Love them anyway.

Let me explain.

### **YOUR CHILDREN WILL NATURALLY WANT TO BE LIKE YOU.**

This is the first and most important principle to understand when dealing with a struggling teenager. *Your child wants to do the right thing* and wants to grow up to be like you. This is true in

every culture, religion, and environment. Children naturally want to be like their parents and will generally end up with the same beliefs, ideals, and values. It's what they are accustomed to and grew up with. They learn from us how to act and react, how to think and how to process information. They have watched us and absorbed how to live their lives, sometimes consciously but mostly unconsciously.

Here's another truth: It's also the easiest thing to do. Think about it—it's so much easier to behave, toe the line and do the right thing than to rebel, misbehave and go against your parents and community. It never feels good to be looked down upon, to be an outcast, to be perceived as a reject. Teenagers who unfortunately leave the path of their parents and community are suffering a tremendous amount of anguish, to the point that as painful as it is to leave their parents' home and environment (and it is very painful, ask any teen who has done it), it's more painful to stay. Something happened that made this sweet and sensitive child go



Rabbi Lieblich and students enjoying the outdoors.

against his parents, teachers, and the community that he loved and should have wanted to be part of.

Any and every child who is struggling in Yiddishkeit is in pain. He wants to do the right thing but **can't**. He didn't just wake up one day and leave. There is something going on under the surface and it's our job as parents to get them the help and understanding that they need.

Firstly: Remember, they really want to be like you.

So the next question is...

### **WHO ARE YOU?**

Once we understand that children in healthy environments naturally want to be like their parents, the next question is: Who are their parents?

Are you the person you want

your child to emulate? Do you lose your temper easily? How do you behave with your family? Spouse? Neighbors? Do you look at Yiddishkeit as a burden or an honor?

Two men came to America in the early 1900s with their families. Both fathers refused to work on Shabbos and thus would lose their jobs each week. The difference between them was that the first father would hang up the pink slip each Friday on the wall and, with a smile, show his children his "badge of honor" for keeping Shabbos. The second father would also come home with a pink slip but instead would complain bitterly about how hard it was to be a Jew. One raised a healthy and *frum* family while the children from the second family became completely assimilated into the American melting pot.

In your free time, do you take out a *sefer* to learn, do you talk about your love and excitement for Torah? Or are you more animated about a sports team winning a game? As much as you may *tell* your children that Torah is the most important thing in the world, they will learn from your *conduct* whether Torah is truly your priority. What excites you? When are you the most alive? Watching the presidential debates or listening to a *shiur Gemara*? What does your Shabbos meal look like? Is it a beautiful relaxed environment suffused with the *kedushah* of Shabbos? Or is it a dinner table to discuss politics (or worse) with your guests?

I remember going to a shul that had a children's program and the only ones *davening* were the children. But for how long? Would

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they still *daven* when they grew up, considering what they saw their fathers doing (and not doing)?

In summary: Be the person you want them to be or don't get upset if they end up like you.

**WE DON'T HAVE CONTROL;  
WE HAVE INFLUENCE.**

Naturally, parents always want more for their child. Parents want their child to be better than them,

and your child, tell him that you want more for him and encourage him to be better. But you can't force or expect it. Realize what a challenge it is for a boy to be in yeshiva, learn a full day, and wear the dress code of a *bachur*. If his parents themselves don't act that way or value that lifestyle, what is the *bachur* supposed to do when it gets hard for him? Who will be his role model? Where will he get his

I see too many times parents fighting with their children, trying to control them. What they don't realize is that without a healthy relationship they are giving up the most long-lasting and powerful thing: influence.

When we fight for control, we lose our influence, and the only way to influence is through love. Think about all the people in your life who had influence over you; they were

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but they can't demand it and they can't force it. We can demand from and force small children, but as he gets older if your child becomes aware that his parents live their life differently from that which is expected of him, the child will wonder why your lifestyle is not good enough for him as well. I constantly see parents demanding and attempting to force their children to be better than their parents, but it doesn't work.

If you want your child to be on a higher level of Yiddishkeit then make the sacrifice yourself. If you aren't willing to do that, then at least be honest with yourself

encouragement and strength from?

When our children are young, we have a lot of control. We can control who they are friends with, what they see, hear and do. But by the time they are 11 or 12, our children realize that they actually have a mind of their own and that parents can't control them. At that point parents must appreciate that we don't really have much control over our children; the only thing we really have is *influence*. And influence is so much more powerful than control! It's when everything we taught them sinks in and they start internalizing it. This is when they start really learning from you.

no doubt people you loved. Which brings us to the next principle...

**RELATIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP,  
RELATIONSHIP.**

When I first entered the world of education 15 years ago, I had an unforgettable meeting with a parent. The father was sitting in my office and complaining that his son doesn't wake up on time for Chassidus on Shabbos morning. He tried everything, he said. He would bribe, threaten, scream and fight but the boy just slept in. I asked him, "What is more important to you, the relationship you have with your son or that he should



Rabbi and Mrs. Moshe and Chani Lieblich with their children (L-R): Sruly, Yaakov, Miriam, Yehudis, and Dovi.

wake up on Shabbos morning to learn Chassidus?" I was stunned and dismayed when he answered that he would rather his son wake up and learn Chassidus, even if it destroyed their relationship. He tried to rationalize that if his son would learn Chassidus, he would eventually come to appreciate him and the relationship would get better. There was nothing that I could say that would convince him otherwise.

If a child sees his father has a love for Chassidus, and goes to a *shiur* in Chassidus, he is likely to grow up and do the same. I don't know anyone who became *frum* or *chassidish* because the school or

parents forced him. It just doesn't happen by force. It does happen by example and through love.

When a person says the whole *Tehillim* every Shabbos Mevorchim, and has a healthy relationship with their kids, the kids will ultimately do the same one day.

This is not about the highly touted "open communication and the ability to discuss anything." I'm talking about getting along and liking each other. You don't need to have deep conversations, and your child doesn't need to feel like he can "talk to you about anything." I'm talking about enjoying each other's company. The only way you can influence your child is if you

enjoy a positive relationship with each other. If you want your child to learn from you, they need to like you.

### THE RIGHT SCHOOL

When you have a good relationship with your child, when you know who you are and what your values are, then it's really important to send your child to the right yeshiva. I hear from principals from almost every yeshiva that there are boys who don't belong there and they don't know why the parents chose this yeshiva. Sending your child to the wrong school hurts both the child and the school.

One of the criteria of a *ben sorer umoreh*, a rebellious son, is that

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both parents need to bring him to Beis Din and say “he isn’t listening to our voice,” the voice of both parents need to be the same or the child is not guilty and doesn’t get punished.

It’s very challenging and confusing for a child when both parents are not on the same page, and a similar confusion and challenge is felt if the home and school are not on the same page.

When looking for a yeshiva for your son, make sure that you share the same values, make sure that your home environment matches the yeshiva environment. It’s not going to be fruitful to have a *bachur* sit in yeshiva and hear one thing all day and then go home and watch the people he respects, loves and learns everything from do just the opposite or, what’s even worse, make fun of it.

If you are sending your child to a school with higher standards than you have at home, you have two options. You can tell your child honestly that you are not going to change and ask him if he wants to have this higher standard for himself, the one taught in this school. If he does, tell him you will support him wholeheartedly, and then do so! Your other option is to sit down with him and say, “This school has a higher standard than we do. But if you want this school, we are going to try to live up to it too.”

Try not to confuse and challenge your child with mixed messages.

There is another scenario... when parents have the high standards of the school but the child doesn’t have those high standards.

You can have a child who for all practical purposes isn’t *frum*, *R”l*. He is *mechalel Shabbos* and uninterested in all the things *frum* children are interested in. Instead of parents sending him to a school that caters to kids like him, his parents (who are unwilling or unable to recognize the painful truth about their son) force him into a mainstream yeshiva, against the will of the *hanhalah* and against the will of the child himself. Of course, the child just continues his downward spiral, whereas if he were in a school and environment that caters to boys in his position, he would, *b’ezeras Hashem*, grow and heal and soon be back on the *derech* (as we see time and again the *hatzlachah* these “special” schools have).

### LOVE THEM ANYWAY

If nothing works, love them anyway. Every day in *davening*, we list all the sins we did and we ask Hashem to forgive us and love us anyway. Let’s do the same for our children who are at risk or are already off the *derech*. You will never get them back by being mean or, worse, throwing them out of the house. The other children will understand that you are working with a sensitive child now.

If, sadly, your child is struggling

or going off the *derech*, know that he is in unbearable pain and seek proper guidance.

When you appreciate how much pain he is in, not only will you not be upset at him but you will love him even more.

May Hashem bless us all with true *Yiddishe*, *chassidishe nachas* and may we be able to proudly say, “These are the children I have raised.” ❧

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For more information on getting the correct guidance in order to help your child with the proper Torah *hadrachah*, the author suggests you contact either Harav Avrohom Heller at 718.756.4632 or Avi Fishoff via his website [twistedparenting.org](http://twistedparenting.org), or call him at 718.902.6666.

Please visit [nsheichabadnewsletter.com](http://nsheichabadnewsletter.com) to see “Raising a Tomim,” a discussion moderated by Rabbi Levi Kaplan of Cheder Chabad Monsey, where four distinguished panelists explore some of the challenges facing today’s *bachurim*, and debate the best way to approach these issues. The video was originally streamed on [anash.org](http://anash.org), and the panelists are Rabbi Shlomo Sternberg of Chovevei Torah, Rabbi Mendel Gordon of Yeshivas Lubavitch London, and Rabbi Osher Farkash of Yeshivas Lubavitch Argentina.

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