

## THE TATTLETALE

I have several young children, B'H, with the oldest being a wonderful ten year old daughter. As an oldest sister she does tend to be somewhat bossy, but she is a sweet, even-tempered child.

The problem is that the sibling immediately beneath her, a rambunctious and geshmacke nine year old boy, is a hand-full, and always engaged in some mischief or another. All too often, I am distracted by the other children or work and she will come running up to me 'Moishy is coloring on the wall, tying up the baby, cutting everyone's hair etc.' (all true!)

She is, in effect, becoming my little 'tattletale.' My question is; I really need her help to be on top of things and she is not really sharing negative stories and the like, merely making me aware of 'happenings' in the home. Should I be hesitant about accepting her information?

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*Hashem* gave parents the *mitzvah* of parenting, *ve shinantom l'vanecho*. Just as we observe any of the other *Taryag mitzvos*, we should be *mechanech* our children in this *mitzvah* the best way we know how, even more so than any other *mitzvah*, as it is paramount in the education of our future *doros* and the future of *Klal Yisroel*.

When you are *mechanech* your second child, the one that needs a tremendous amount of input on your part to straighten out his rambunctious behavior, it cannot and should not be on the back of your oldest daughter. This ten year old, like any other child, should help, where possible, with the orderly running of the home. But it should never, ever be at the expense of her personal *chinuch* by causing the erosion of her own *middos*. You are using her to tattletale, or to use the vernacular, snitch, on her brother who needs to be constantly watched. We certainly understand that you are unable to do it alone.

A child, or for that matter, any one of us, who repeats any action again and again, causes the action to become habit-forming, *hergel naaseh teva*, or, at the very least, *naaseh lo k'heter*, a kosher and permissible act. In this case, for you the parent, it is a desirable action as there is certainly a *toeless*, a great accomplishment in helping Mommy to stop the mischief of her brother. Yet, by helping Mommy, she is constantly tattletaling and the *toeless* is not constantly uppermost in her mind. This is therefore unacceptable *chinuch*.

I have previously recounted in this Roundtable, a story of a Jewish soldier in Israel who had the option to have a desk job or to be assigned to the front lines. Since another soldier would be sent to the front lines in his stead, if he took the desk job, he therefore asked a *shaila* about using his *protectzia*. In the answer, a completely different problem arose. The soldier was advised to take the desk job because if he were to go to the front lines, he would probably have to take a human life, even though it is the life of the enemy; it will however affect him to the point where the value of human life is somewhat diminished'.

The ten-year old, who is constantly 'snitching' on her brother, who must obviously be

monitored, will be affected in her future life regarding the importance of guarding oneself from *loshon hora*, even when there is no *toeless* , obvious benefit, involved.

Furthermore, there is no way that you will be able to prevent sibling rivalry between your daughter and her brother if there is this constant tattletaling. He will definitely try to protect himself which will cause him to fight with his sister. Your other children, who observe their constant bickering, will also learn that it is okay to fight among themselves and to tattletale. This, in turn, will erode the cohesiveness of your entire family and eventually lessen the love that we strive to achieve among brothers and sisters.

I am not minimizing your problem with the second child. But, you must find a way to be *mechanech* him without the “help” of your other children. You can look to a parenting group for advice or from a professional on ways to deal with your second child. Please leave your ten year old daughter out of this equation. She should not play “Mommy”. May *Hashem* give you the *sechel* and physical strength to raise your second child without the help of his siblings.