

# On politics and children

**I'M A PROUD PARENT** of two small children, aged nine and six. I also happen to have the privilege of being Finland's foreign minister.

You might think that these two tasks have nothing in common, but think again; in fact, they have several clear parallels.

As a parent I direct daily peace mediation meetings. The two warring parties get into all kinds of disputes, ranging from who gets to push the elevator button first to who gets to play the next computer game.

Misunderstandings and mixed messages are common. Both kids are good at holding their own, but sometimes the situation gets out of hand and a fight breaks out.

First, I try to broker a ceasefire by being nice and diplomatic. If I fail at this, I sometimes resort to threats and inducements. As a last resort I intervene, raise my voice and come up with a punishment.

I admit that a week without television does not ruffle many feathers with nation states. But you get my drift.

**The United Nations** comprise of 192 members. They compete for the world's attention and for influence. And much like children, they all want to be loved.

Some of them are big, others small, and size does not always guarantee power. If you are small, you can get your voice heard by being smart, clever, loud, or all of the above.

States are supposed to play by international rules.

Sometimes they play nice, but there are also times when they misbehave. No matter what happens, those at fault, much like children, always claim that they have done nothing wrong. They

have just been defending their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Sometimes foreign policy and child-rearing can be frustrating. You feel as if you are banging your head against the wall without any progress.

**But, at the end of the day**, you just have to remain patient. Losing your temper is not an option. If that happens, you lose all credibility – whether you're dealing with children or entire nations. Easier said than done, I know.

Perhaps the international political stage is just a massive kindergarten; similar rules certainly apply to dealing with both situations. Come to think of it, perhaps all foreign ministers should be required to have a master's degree in child development. This prerequisite could be the shortest route to international peace. ■

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