

February 2009 Newsletter

10 Steps to Effective Parenting

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It is important to discipline in a way that teaches responsibility by motivating our children internally, to build their self-esteem and help them feel loved. If our children are disciplined in this way, they will not need to turn to gangs, drugs, or sex to feel powerful or to belong.

(1) Give your child FOCUSED attention

Your child's self-esteem is greatly influenced by the quality of time you spend with him not the amount of time that you spend. With our busy lives, we are often thinking about the next thing that we have to do, instead of putting 100% focused attention on what our child is saying to us. We often pretend to listen or ignore our child's attempts to communicate with us. Negative attention to a child is better than being ignored. By giving our child FOCUSED TIME throughout the day, he will be less likely to misbehave. This means get into his world and on his level. It is also important to recognize that feelings are neither right nor wrong. Feelings just are. So when your child says to you, "Mommy, you never spend time with me", (even though you just played with her) she is expressing what she feels. It is best at these times to validate her feelings by saying, "Yeah, I bet it feels like we don't get enough time together."

(2) Use Action , Not Words

Statistics report we give our children thousands of compliance requests a day! No wonder our children learn to tune us out. Instead of nagging or yelling, ask yourself, "What action can I take?" For example, if you have repeatedly asked your child about unrolling his socks when he takes them off, then only wash the socks that are unrolled. Actions speak louder than words.

(3) Give Children Appropriate Ways to Feel Powerful

Children need to feel powerful. By giving them appropriate ways to feel powerful, you will diminish the number of power struggles in your family. Some ways to help children feel powerful and valuable are to ask their advice, give them choices, let them help you balance your check book, cook part or all of a meal, or help you shop. A two-year-old can wash plastic dishes, wash vegetables or put napkins on a table. Often we do the job for them because we can

do it with less hassle, but the result is that they don't feel valuable.

(4) Use Natural Consequences

Ask yourself what would happen if I didn't interfere in this situation? For example, if your child forgets her lunch, don't bring it to her, allowing her to find a solution, and learning the importance of being responsible for herself. If we interfere when we don't need to, we rob children of the chance to learn from the consequences of their actions. By allowing consequences to do the talking, we avoid disturbing our relationships by nagging or reminding too much.

(5) Read your child's behavior as communication for you.

Children who misbehave are frequently trying to communicate a need that is not being met. Perhaps your child is feeling tired, bored, lonely or unloved. Children whose needs are being met are less likely to misbehave. Ask, "what is my child's behavior trying to communicate?"

(6) Walk away from power struggle with your child.

If your child is testing you through a temper tantrum, or being angry or speaking disrespectfully to you, it is best if you leave the room and tell the child that you will be in the next room if he wants to "try again". Say this in a calm, detached tone of voice.

Ask yourself, did I use fear or love to motivate my child?

(7) Separate the Behavior From the Child

Refrain from telling a child he is bad. That tears at his self-esteem. Help your child recognize that you love him, but it is his behavior you are unwilling to tolerate. In order for a child to develop healthy self-esteem, he must know he is loved unconditionally no matter what he does. Do not attempt to motivate your child by withdrawing your love from him. When in doubt, ask yourself, did my discipline build my child's self-esteem?

(8) Be Kind and Firm at the Same Time

Suppose you have told your 5-year old child that if she isn't dressed by the time the timer goes off, you will pick her up and take her to the car. She has been told she can either get dressed in the car or at school. If she is not dressed by the time the timer goes off, make sure that you lovingly but firmly pick her up as soon as the timer goes off without any more nagging. If in doubt, ask yourself, did I use fear or love to motivate my child?

(9) Parent with the End in Mind

Most of us parent in ways to get the situation under control as soon as possible. We are looking for the quick solution to resolve a situation. This often results in children who feel overpowered or not disciplined. It is more effective to know why you are disciplining your child. Meaning, if we learn to parent in a way that keeps in mind how we want our child to be as an adult, we will be more thoughtful in the way we parent and be less likely to fly off the handle.

(10) Be Consistent, Follow Through, and Do What You Say

If you have an agreement with your child, keep it. For example, you may have an agreement to not buy candy at the grocery store. Do not give in to her pleas, tears, demands, or pouting. Just the same, if you tell your child you will do something then make sure you do it. Your child will learn to respect you more if you mean what you say and are consistent. He will also learn to trust your word.

*The most effective way to learn and apply the tools mentioned in this article is to register now for Dr. Laurie Emery's PARENTING BY DESIGN COURSE. Go to <http://www.familiesbydesign.net/workshops.html#pbd>.