

SECRETS OF PARENTING

Modeling, Molding, Mediating

As you are driving your car, you hear a siren. You are pulled over, and what rushes through your head are the consequences of speeding: I will get a ticket. My insurance rates will go up. I will get points against my license.

Every choice we make in life has consequences.

Children, too, must learn what the consequences of their choices are.

*The **secret of parenting** is to help your children learn while they are young so that when they are older, they will have an inner voice to guide them.*

Parents aren't always around when children have to make decisions about behaviors and activities. How can you make sure that your child listens to a positive inner voice when making difficult choices?

These Guiding Concepts Can Help

Children must develop an inner voice. You will not always be around to guide your children. Let them make small choices like what socks they want to wear or whether to take a bath now or in 5 minutes. Both choices are okay with you. But later the stakes will be higher. What happens if you have always told your children to “do as I say” and they have not learned to choose? When it comes time for fast cars, substance exposure, or early sexual activity, they will tend to follow someone else telling them what to do. Think about it.

Hitting and spanking are short-term fixes. These actions may temporarily stop a problem behavior in a child, but they do not cure it in the long run. The behavior will come back, and more hitting will be needed. As the child grows up, he or she will follow your example. The child may hit you someday because he or she has learned that it's okay to settle differences by hitting someone.

What else can you do? Figure out what is causing the problem behavior. Listen to your child. Look your child in the eye, and talk about what you expect the next time. Then ask yourself some questions: Have I set up my home or

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environment so my child can move freely, explore, and learn? Do I spend too much time saying “No”? Do I spend enough time just being with my child—biking, reading, and listening to music together? This is how relationships are built and how children learn what you want and what you expect. Be clear with rules, and listen to your child’s viewpoint. Often children make very good points. Sometimes all they want is your devoted time. By talking with them about what you expect and listening to their viewpoints, you show your children how to mediate—how to settle differences in a positive way.

Invest 10 minutes to save 20. Try to spend at least 10 minutes with your children right after you get home from work. They have been looking forward to seeing you, and they need your full attention for a few minutes just to make them feel more secure and loved. This will help keep them from getting upset later in the evening when you need to pay attention to other things, like cooking dinner or doing yard work or housework. Giving time and attention when it is needed will help your children develop a model for treating others well.

Prepare your children for activities in advance. Do your children just start whining when you get to

the store? Prepare your children for shopping trips and other activities that test their behavior. Before you leave home, be sure that each child is rested, fed, and comfortable in his or her clothes. Then talk to your children about how you expect them to behave in a store and what you need to do at the store. For example: “Today, I’m buying food and not toys. I need you to stay with me while I shop.”

Often a child who is tired or hungry is more likely to grow restless sitting in a cart or holding your hand. Even if you prepare in advance, one of your children may become restless or start feeling sick. Pay attention to your child’s needs, and take care of those needs, even if it means shopping later. By doing this, you are modeling how to prepare for activities and how to be kind. This will help your children use you as an inner model that they can rely on to guide their behavior in difficult situations.

Repeat yourself. It seems you have to tell your children things over and over again. And it is true. You do. Children forget, they test their limits, and sometimes they are too involved in something else to hear you. So you have to repeat. So do it. When you repeat the important things you want to teach your children, you strengthen each child’s inner voice.

Prepared by

Karen DeBord, Ph.D.

State Extension Specialist, Child Development

Lisa Shannon, Ph.D.

State Extension Specialist, Children, Youth, and Families

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