

Parenting 101

We give birth to these wondrous creatures and then it hits us that we are now responsible for this little life. I remember when this hit me...I had just given birth to my daughter, six hours of labour and my brain snapped into fear...I literally just delivered the placenta and turned to the nurse and asked if I had pushed out the manual on how to raise her! I think the nurse thought the stress of giving birth was too much for me, but I was serious. This moment will hit all new parents at different times but it is guaranteed to happen. So in a panic, I had to calm myself down and relied on my education and training. That was laughable, as education and training may prepare you for the real world but only LIFE EXPERIENCE will get you through it!! My daughter is a great teacher of what I should not do with my next child! I always look at her as my trial run...in a good way. So here is what I have learned in my trail run.

Many parents ask me when to start disciplining children. As parents, train yourself immediately. Here's what I mean by that, get in the habit of using positive phrases rather than negative phrases. This is not an easy process as we are use to using negative phrases in our everyday lives. Yet, using positive phrases induces positive behaviours and negative phrases rewards negative behaviours. So instead of saying "No, you can't go to the park today" which would follow with your child having a melt down, use "Today we are busy. You can go to the park tomorrow." With this phrase the child was not told "NO" and therefore the behaviour is more positive. Or "No you can't wear the short sleeve top it is dirty" which then leads to a power struggle. Choose another way of saying this "Would you like to wear the red top or the blue top?" This allows the child a choice of two items and therefore they feel that they are still part of the decision making process. These latter phrases are more positive and can quickly de-escalate a sticky situation. You can also use this technique in your everyday life; it works for co-workers and spouses too!!

Another discipline technique is the "1, 2, 3" method. This is where the child is prepared and made aware that if you start counting to "3" a pre-decided privilege will be taken away. Why do I say pre-decided? Well, when a parent is mad and flies off at the mouth about what you are going to take away, you better be careful of what you select as you may end up punishing yourself too. I can't tell you how many times my daughter pushed the limit and started counting to 3 with TV privilege taken away for a week or a Birthday party that she can't go to if I reach the preverbal "3". I reached "3" a few times with her and ended up having to listen to her whine the entire week about being bored and there is nothing to do (I soon discovered that if I offered a list of chores to replace her new found boredom she would stop and happily go off an play with her toys) or have to change my plans because now she wasn't going to the party any more so now I needed to be home or find a babysitter. So take my well proven advise and have the privileges pre-determined. Have a few so you can switch them out when necessary. Also make sure it is a privilege that your child will surely miss so they learn the reason for the discipline or as I like to call it "lesson".

Time Out is another method that has proven results of modifying your child's negative behaviour. In this method the child needs to sit on a mat, in a chair, or special "spot" in the house. The selected space needs to be in the main living area of the home and not their room so you can observe them and make sure they remain in the designated spot. The rule of thumb for this is the child is to remain in that spot for minute for every year he/she is. That means that if you have a five year old who needs to go into time out then they will be there for five minutes. When the child is placed in time out they are told that they are to remain there for however many minutes in this example for five minutes. You set a timer for five minutes and tell the child that they may leave time out when the timer goes off only after they talk to you. If the child leaves the time out before the designated time is finished the timer is reset for five more minutes and time out starts again. The child may be mad and yell or scream you need to ignore the behaviours. When the time out is completed, have your child apologize to you for their behaviour. Once this is done the incident is over and should not be revisited throughout the remainder of the day. I have used this technique when a child has hit, bite, kicked and seemed out of control. It is good for giving them time to calm their body.

Natural and Logical consequences are another good way to modify a child's negative behaviour. A Natural consequence is when you do not interfere in the natural process of the child's thinking. So for example the child does not want to wear a hat in the winter time and the natural consequence is he/she is cold. This solidifies that sometimes mom or dad is right! You would not use this if safety was an issue such as the temperature has dipped so low that frostbite could occur in seconds. Logical consequences are great teaching tools. In this case the child wants to ride his bike but refuses to wear a helmet the logical consequence is his bike is taken away until he wears his helmet. The Consequence has to relate to the action of the child. So you can't take away a TV show if the child refuses to wear their coat. The logical consequence is the child does not go to wherever they were going until the coat is worn.

These are some great behaviour modifying techniques that I have used and are proven. In conclusion, here are some final tips:

1. Understand that every child is different and that one or more of these methods may not work for them at any given moment.
2. Recognize the situation you are in and be flexible enough to modify the technique you are going to use.
3. Be prepared and prepare your child for the privileges they could loose if their behaviour continues.
4. Stick to your preverbal "guns". If you tell your child he/she will loose a privilege for a specific amount of time then that is what will happen. Don't back down. Your child will recognize if they push you they will get their privileges back sooner and this will not help you the next time.

Parenting is a life altering career, the hugs, kisses, smiles, and laughter may not fill your bank account but are priceless none the less.