Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

January/February 2024

N F A P A

THE POWER OF POSITIVE ATTENTION

How to use it (instead of negative attention) to change behavior

When kids are misbehaving, it is natural for parents and educators to want to correct them, pointing out — sometimes not too calmly — what they are doing wrong. Though this may seem like common sense, it can actually backfire.

Experts have found that giving kids positive rather than negative attention is much more effective in changing behavior. Research shows that praise for behavior you want to encourage gets more results than calling out things you want them to stop doing.

So what do we mean by positive attention? And how is focusing on the positive, instead of the negative, different from "looking the other way" and letting kids off the hook when they misbehave?

What is positive attention?

It's easy to respond harshly when kids are doing something they're not supposed to and not react at all when they're doing what we expect of them. Positive attention requires a lens shift in which we call out kids for good behavior and ignore (at least in the moment) the not-so-good.

The idea is that for children, parental attention is so powerful that whatever behavior we pay attention to will increase, even if we're telling them to stop.

Essentially, rather than chiding them for what they're doing wrong we want to catch kids doing right. It's a simple shift, but one that goes against centuries of parenting norms and takes some practice before it becomes second nature.

How to implement positive attention

So what does this look like in practice? Positive attention can take many forms, including verbal praise, hugs, kisses, high fives or rewards. It may look different for a three-year-old than it does for a teen, but the basic idea is the same.

The key, explains Lindsay Gerber, PsyD, a clinical psychologist, is being as descriptive and specific as possible in your praise so that children know exactly what behavior they should replicate. Experts sometimes call this giving "labeled praise."

Instead of saying "great job!" or "I love how you're doing that," try to spell out exactly what they are doing well. For example, you could say "I love how you are sharing your crayons with your sibling" or "it's awesome that you finished your homework before asking to use your tablet." No matter their age, letting kids know that you appreciate their behavior will make them feel good, and when they know exactly what they are being praised for they will be more likely to do it again in the future.

But what about bad behavior?

This is the part that may be the most challenging. If a child is

(Continued on page 3)

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Families First is published bimonthly.
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This publication is supported by Grant #93.566 under a sub-grant from HHS Administration for Children and Families and Nebraska DHHS.

Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a $10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to ***Corinne@nfapa.org***, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at ***https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JanuaryFebruary2024***
We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. True or False. When you're seeing a behavior that you want to decrease, that's really not the time to interact with the kid.

2. Fill in the Blank. Sometimes all it takes for a teen to change their behavior is a little _____.

3. True or False. These kids are placing value on themselves based on the thoughts they're having.

4. Fill in the Blank. Seeking _____ is a way to relieve the distress or anxiety.

5. True or False. Grief can grow in intensity for kids this age, as they are not old enough to understand death as inescapable and irreversible.

6. Fill in the Blanks. It's important to always tell a child–even with _____ _____ _____–about the loss of a loved one.

7. True or False. I can learn to become the adult you want me to be if you're hovering over me or trying too hard to protect me.

8. Finish the Sentence. Every time we're together, I feel like you're either reminding me about _____, _____, or _____.

9. List Seven Strategies when a child is melting down.

10. Finish the Sentence. All humans operate from three areas of the brain: _____, _____, and _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Families First Newsletter Issue: January / February 2024

(Continued from page 1)

behaving in a way that is unsafe for themselves or others, then of course an adult should intervene. Otherwise, do your best to ignore the behavior then provide positive attention when they stop. Child behavior experts call this "active ignoring." By withdrawing your attention, you are sending the message that acting out is not the way for them to get what they want. You reinforce this message when, as soon as you see them calming themselves down or obeying an instruction, you do give them your attention.

Just because you are ignoring a behavior in the moment doesn't mean that you don't ever address it or that you are pandering to your child; quite the opposite. "When you're seeing a behavior that you want to decrease, that's really not the time to interact with the kid," says Dr. Gerber. "That's a time to take a deep breath, notice it, maybe gently try to redirect them to something else or actively ignore it."

Redirecting them can be anything from asking if they want a snack to pointing out something fun coming up on the family calendar. Later, when things have calmed down, you can circle back around to talk about it.

Positive attention in action

How does the framework of positive attention work in a challenging situation? Let's take a scenario any parent will experience at some point: your child throwing a tantrum in the check out line at the grocery store because they want a candy bar. Giving in and letting them have the candy bar would likely stop the tantrum quickly, but it would also guarantee that the behavior would repeat itself. Negotiating (you can have a brownie when we get home) would likely have the same effect.

Many parents feel judging eyes on them in a public space and feel that they need to make a show out of being firm with their child by telling them to stop, raising their voice, or issuing ultimatums. Chances are this kind of response won't make you or your child feel very good, and also won't prevent the behavior from reoccurring, since you are inadvertently reinforcing the behavior by feeding it attention.

If you are practicing positive attention, however, you would ignore the tantrum until it's over (which is of course easier said than done). As soon as the child is calming down, that's the time to give positive attention and praise. "I'm really proud of you for calming down, for taking a few deep breaths, and for understanding that this is not something we could do right now."

When you're back home and things are less emotional, then you can address the tantrum. Dr. Gerber says to use a lot of validation when talking with your child in this scenario. For example, saying "I saw in the grocery store that it was really hard for you when I told you that you couldn't have the candy. When I say no to something, that means that we can't have it in that moment. So next time something like that happens, what do you think we can do? How do you think that we can better manage?"

In this way, Dr. Gerber says, "you've acknowledged and reflected back their emotional experience and their wants and needs in that moment, and you're also reaffirming your expectations and your boundaries and priorities as a parent." She says that an interaction like this also helps teach kids to problem solve by modeling, and increases their agency and ownership over their behavior.

It's important to note that ignoring something like a tantrum won't make it stop immediately. In fact, Dr. Gerber tells parents to be mindful of the "extinction burst" — in other words, it's going to get worse before it gets better. So the intensity of the tantrum may increase before it stops completely, and it also may take a few times of ignoring tantrums or other behaviors before they cease.

What to do if the behavior doesn't stop

If you continue to see behaviors you are trying to extinguish, then Dr. Gerber says it may be time to team up with a mental health provider to create an individualized plan of action for you and your child. Something like a behavior chart can be very effective, especially if the reward is positive attention. If the end goal is too challenging for the child to start out, you can break it down into smaller, more manageable goals that can help pave the way to achieving the desired ultimate outcome.

Sometimes all it takes for a teen to change their behavior is a little appreciation. Teenagers are self-absorbed by nature, but that doesn't mean your teen doesn't care how you feel. If it's important to you to eat dinner as a family, sans phones, say so. "It really meant a lot to me when we all ate together the other night. It was so nice having no phones or distractions, it made me feel like we were able to really hear each other."

Creating a stronger bond

Transitioning to a model of positive attention takes patience and practice on the part of the parent. Sometimes you might backtrack and lose your cool, and that's okay. We're only human. If that happens, turn it into a teachable moment by apologizing, expressing your own frustrations, and talking about what you can do differently next time. Dr. Gerber says that the mental health provider you're working with can be support for you, too. "We're also providing support to parents, because whenever we're thinking of changing a child's behavior, a parent really plays a very big role," she says.

Another thing that can be helpful in the long run is carving out even just 10 minutes a day of check-in time. During this time, a parent can give their child undivided attention doing an activity they enjoy, whether it's playing a card game, doing a puzzle, building with LEGOs or making some art. "We want to build that into their schedule on a daily basis, and to make

sure that we are giving them attention in a positive way," says Dr. Gerber. "Because if they're not getting that attention, they're going to seek it another way.

In the end, beyond addressing behavior, utilizing positive attention can create a stronger bond with your child. "And what we know about children's mental health in general," adds Dr. Gerber, "is that having a positive relationship with any adult — whether it's a parent, a grandparent, a caregiver, or someone in the community — is just an overall protective factor against other mental health disorders or symptoms.

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18 THINGS YOUR TEEN ISN'T TELLING YOU

Chances are, your teen has FAR more to say than they're letting on...

Not long ago, my three kids and a bunch of their friends were hanging out at our home chilling out, watching movies, playing video games, and of course, eating me out of house and home.

I typically give them plenty of space (okay, I admit I do spy on them every once in a while to make sure they're not up to any mischief), but this particular evening I mosied on down to the basement and struck up a conversation with them.

I was truly amazed at how open most of the kids were with me. They were telling me things I was pretty darn sure they weren't telling their parents. Things they weren't too proud of, mistakes they made, and even how they felt about the way their parents parent them.

At one point, I asked one of the kids, "Have you ever talked to your parents about how you feel?" "Oh, heck no," he said. "My parents tell me what to do… I can't tell them what do to. That's not how it works in my house."

It's a harsh reality, but our teens really DO have a lot to say, provided we just give them a chance.

Curious now that I realized these kids really could shed light on what's lurking behind the mind of a teen, I asked them, "Tell me some things you wish your parents knew." Here are just a few things they shared with me: 18 things your teen isn't telling you.

#1 I Need Space and Privacy

Don't take it personally when I come home from school and hide out in my room for a couple of hours. The pressure of life wears me out. I need time to just be by myself and play video games, scroll through my phone or just hang out. Don't worry… I still love you.

#2 I'm Going to Mess Up… Maybe Even Royally

I'm not perfect. I'm going to make mistakes and disappoint you. I don't mean to. But I'm learning and figuring things out on my own. Just stick with me when I do. I'm not a bad kid and you're not a bad parent. It's just that growing up isn't easy.

#3 I Love When We Just Hang Out

Every time we're together, I feel like you're either reminding me about something, telling me what to do, or lecturing me. Can't we just hang out? I love when we go out for breakfast or lunch, watch a movie together or cook together in the kitchen. Stop trying SO hard to raise me right (you're actually doing okay). Just have a little fun with me.

#4 Please Listen to Me, Even if You Disagree

If you want me to act like an adult, you have to treat me like one. Don't shut me down when I try to voice my opinion, even if you disagree. How else am I supposed to learn how to stand my ground or handle conflict calmly and respectfully if you don't teach me?

#5 I Know You Worry, But Your Long Lectures Don't Help

I know you don't want to hear this, but I've heard most of your lectures before. You're not teaching me anything new and it just frustrates me.

#6 I Need You

I pretend I don't, but I do. I need to know you trust me, value me and love me. And, I really do want to spend time with you. I'm just picky about when. So, the next time I'm in the mood to talk, I'd really love it if we could just talk a while.

#7 When You Freak Out it Makes Me Think Twice Before Telling You Anything Else

I want to come to you. I want to tell you things – the good

and the bad. But not if you're going to freak out every time I tell you something you disagree with or that worries you. I'd come to you so much more if you (at least) tried to stay calm and just listen.

#8 Your Rules and Boundaries Don't Bother Me as Long as They're Fair

I know you want to protect, guide and teach me. But when I mess up and the consequences are over-the-top it makes me resent you and I want to rebel.

#9 I Love All the Little Things You Do for Me

I may not always say thank you. Sometimes, it might seem like I don't even notice. But I do. When you make my favorite dinner, do my laundry, run an errand for me or help me with my homework, it makes me feel loved.

#10 I Still Look for You in the Bleachers

I know I'm older now, but no matter how old I get, I'll always look for you in the bleachers, auditorium or stands. Just knowing that you always show up makes me realize that you'll always be there for me cheering me on no matter what.

#11 The Older I Get, the More Freedom I Need

I can't learn to become the adult you want me to be if you're hovering over me or trying too hard to protect me. I know it's not easy for you, but I need to be able to make some of my own decisions AND mistakes when it comes to my life.

#12 Sometimes, I Say Things I Regret

I'll be in a bad mood and I won't know why. I'll be rude to you sometimes and I know you don't deserve it. I don't always know why I say or do the things that I do. It confuses me as much as it confuses you. I'm sorry.

#13 I'm Going Through a Ton of Changes Right Now… Try Not to Be Too Hard on Me

I've grown two inches in the last several months, my feet are getting bigger, my voice is changing and there's hair now where there wasn't. I'm trying to figure this all out and adjust to it all. If you could go a little easy on me, that would be great because growing up is really hard.

#14 I Know I Act All Tough, But I'm Really Sensitive

It hurts me when you yell at me. And, it really bothers me when you give me the silent treatment, tell me I'm lazy or that I'm selfish. Just talk to me gently and work with me (not against me), and I'll learn. When you don't, it makes me want to build a wall around myself and shut you out.

#15 I Want to Do Things My Way Sometimes

I know it bugs you when I don't wear a coat. I know you hate it when my room is a mess. But I'm getting older and it really bugs me when you tell me what to do all the time. I'll clean my room, just give me a chance to do it on my terms. Not yours.

#16 Fitting In Matters to Me

I know I told you I don't care and sometimes, I don't. But most of the time, I don't want to be different.

When you're a teenager, fitting in feels good and safe. So when I tell you I want that expensive name-brand hoodie or cool athletic shoes all the kids are wearing, it's not that I'm entitled. I just want to feel part of the crowd and not so alone.

#17 Nagging Doesn't Work

I don't know how to tell you this, but I tune you out when you nag me. It makes me feel incapable when I'm not. It makes me feel like you don't trust me when you can. Leave a note on my dresser, send me a text, or tell me once (okay, maybe twice since I'll probably forget). I WILL get it done. Just don't nag, pleeeeassse.

#18 No, You're Not Cool… But I Love You Just the Way You Are

You're not the coolest parent on the block, but that's okay. I don't need you to be. I don't always say it. I don't always show it. But I really do love you. I have a lot of growing up to do physically and emotionally. If you can just keep loving me every step of the way, I promise I'll come around. Just give me a little time to grow up.

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HOW TO HELP KIDS WORRIED ABOUT 'BAD THOUGHTS'

Children sometimes feel guilty about disturbing thoughts and can't stop confessing

Writer: Caroline Miller

Clinical Expert: Jerry Bubrick, PhD

A mom writes to ask how to help her 10-year-old daughter, who is worrying a lot about "bad thoughts."

Sometimes these thoughts are bad because they are mean: A family friend is "fat" or "wrinkly." Sometimes they are sexual: She imagines a classmate naked. Or violent: She thinks she wants to kill her mother. They have one thing in common: she feels a need to confess all these thoughts to her mom, who wonders what's going on.

It's a scenario we hear a lot: A child is suddenly desperate to confess disturbing thoughts. A 9-year-old noticed his teacher's

cleavage, and feels guilty about it. As his dad writes: "The more he tries to control the thoughts, the more they come." He worries out loud that there might be something wrong with him, and asks for reassurance that he's okay. Over and over.

Kids can get very upset about these thoughts, though of course not all of them feel compelled to share them with their parents. But when they do, the constant confession and requests for reassurance can be stressful for parents, too.

Why do kids worry about "bad thoughts" and feel the need to confess them? And what can you do as a parent to help them?

What does this thought say about me?

Jerry Bubrick, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, reminds us that we all have random thoughts that we think, as these kids do, are bad. We may think, Wow, that was unkind, or weird, or inappropriate! And then we dismiss them. We don't express them, or act on them, and we quickly forget about them.

In contrast, Dr. Bubrick says, kids can get upset when these ordinarily fleeting thoughts get "stuck" and they are unable to dismiss them and move on. Instead of recognizing bad thoughts as meaningless, the kids hold themselves responsible for them.

"These kids are placing value on themselves based on the thoughts they're having," Dr. Bubrick explains. So they think, There must be something wrong with me in having that thought. Or, I must be a horrible person if I'm having that thought."

Dr. Bubrick calls it "over-responsibility of thought"—kids literally holding themselves responsible for their thoughts, instead of letting them go. "And that's why kids feel compelled to confess. They're asking parents for reassurance, for a parent to say, 'Yeah, that's okay. Don't worry about it,' " he adds. "That calms that fear: Okay, I'm not a bad person."

Why do some thoughts get stuck?

Thoughts are often driven by emotional states, Dr. Bubrick notes. For example, "when I'm happy I'm more likely to have happy thoughts, and when I'm scared I'm more likely to have scary thoughts. When I'm hungry I'm more likely to have thoughts about food." When we get frustrated or angry, we can all relate to imagining bad things happening to the person who's standing in our way.

But most of us don't become alarmed or self-critical based on our thoughts alone—what matters are the actions we take. Becoming fixated on "stuck" thoughts can be a symptom of anxiety, whether it's just an anxious personality or a full-blown anxiety disorder.

What kids consider "bad" depends on the culture and what they've been taught. In religious families, for instance, kids worry about "bad thoughts" they think might offend God. Sexual thoughts are not infrequently disturbing to boys, especially before puberty makes talk of sexuality common among their teenage peers. Worries about wanting to murder people are surprisingly common in young children. Rachel Busman, PsyD, a clinical psychologist, treated one 10-year-old girl who felt she needed to sit on her hands because she had thoughts about strangling someone.

Kids who feel compelled to confess and ask for reassurance are usually less than 12, Dr. Bubrick notes. "Older kids tend not to tell parents what they're thinking, I would imagine, because the thoughts are darker or scarier. They're more sexualized, or they're more violent."

How can we help kids handle 'bad thoughts'?

The goal is simple: to help kids recognize that their thoughts are just thoughts.

"Just because you have a thought—whether it's a good or a bad thought—doesn't make it true," Dr. Bubrick explains. "A bad thought doesn't make you a bad person—It just means you're having that thought. "

That's the message clinicians use when they treat kids with anxiety disorders using cognitive behavioral therapy. Kids are taught to identify their obsessive thoughts as separate from themselves—as a "bully in the brain," as Dr. Bubrick puts it. "When thoughts get stuck in our mind, they kind of bully us into thinking they're more important than they are," adds Dr. Busman.

"Seeking reassurance is a way to relieve the distress or anxiety," she says. "And it works, for the moment." But the only way to stop the cycle of getting stuck on intrusive thoughts and asking for reassurance is to learn to tolerate the distress without confessing, and see that the anxiety will fade.

If bad thoughts really become a problem for a child—if they continue, if they cause great anguish or interfere with the child's functioning, it may be a sign of an underlying anxiety disorder that deserves professional help.

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TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT DEATH, TRAGEDY, AND LOSS

by Phoenix Santiago

Oh, precious friend. If you're reading this article, chances are you're in a tough spot.

Whether grandpa just received a terminal diagnosis and is only given weeks to live or mommy was in a life-ending car accident, the thought of breaking the news to a child is enough to make anyone panic.

As a parenting educator, my number one goal is to equip parents with the tools they need to handle all of life's parenting struggles. I even offer a FREE ONLINE CLASS to get parents started. As questions about grief have begun to circulate in our

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  Lindsey Ondrak, Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children
- **February 17, 2024**
  The Big 3: Lying, Stealing & Raging
  Barb Clark, Families Rising (Formerly NACAC)
- **March 23, 2024**
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Positive Parenting Solutions community, I realized I needed some help answering these challenging questions.

With research and feedback from our Positive Parenting Solutions members (ranging from grief counselors to those who've personally experienced loss), I've compiled information to help relay and explain death and tragedy–as much as it ever can be explained–to our kids.

Concepts of Death by Age

Before we can even begin one of the hardest conversations of our lives, we need to know what kids are capable of understanding. Naturally, most of their comprehension regarding death and loss depends on their age and experience–and we need to explain things accordingly.

Preschool (Ages 2-5)

The finality of death is hard for anyone to accept. But for very young children, who have no understanding of mortality, they are simply unaware that death exists.

A 3-year-old, for example, might be unable to grasp that her deceased grandfather is "gone forever" as she's been told. She may even ask when he'll be returning.

Young children are also ego-centric by nature and may think they have caused or can control death or loss. This is concerning because they might feel guilty or responsible for what happened.

If an older sibling dies, a younger 4-year-old brother might think it was the mean look he gave him or the harsh words he said under his breath that caused his death.

Whether or not we introduce religion to young children, the concept of heaven, the soul, and an after-life can also be confusing. Most young children are very literal (particularly those diagnosed with autism), and abstract concepts–especially the idea of a person being in heaven and buried in the ground at the same time–don't come easily to them.

Early Childhood (Ages 5-7)

Slightly older children still grapple with the finality of death. Like younger kids, they may also think they can influence or cause death with thoughts or actions. They may even believe they can avoid their own mortality.

Children this age might connect unrelated incidents to explain loss. If a 6-year-old watched The Nightmare Before Christmas the day her friend died, she may think–without being told otherwise–that the movie caused her friend's death.

Middle Childhood Years (Ages 7-10)

Grief can grow in intensity for kids this age as they're old enough to understand death as inescapable and irreversible. This means they may become fearful of their own death or the death of additional loved ones.

At the same time, though, children in this age group are becoming more capable of looking beyond themselves. They may worry about how their family members and loved ones are coping.

They also want to understand and make sense of death, and will likely ask more detailed, difficult questions.

Pre-Adolescents (Ages 10-12)

Pre-adolescents have learned enough about the human body and basic biology to grasp how a body physically dies; whether it's from old age, injury, or disease. Coincidingly, though, their fear of death further increases.

Luckily, this age group can better understand that death and loss isn't their fault, but may still need reminding and/or professional guidance. This is especially dependent on the situation and how the death or loss occurred.

Teenagers

Teenagers, in their final stretch towards adulthood, generally acknowledge death in its entirety. They are also ready to explore the philosophical meaning of life.

Also, with their growing freedom and privacy, teenagers may process their grief more independently than younger children.

Explaining the Unexplainable

Since every child's ability to process death is different, how can we explain what we barely comprehend ourselves? Where can we possibly start?

No matter your child's age, it's important to begin by finding a safe and secure environment. While the explanation should come soon after a loved one's passing–so that children don't hear it from other, less personable sources (and so that they understand why you're acting differently, or sad)–it can at least wait until they're home from school and away from the public eye.

Next, it's important to hold the child or offer some form of physical affection while delivering this news. If it's our 4-year-old daughter, we can pull her up on our lap and hug her. If it's our reclusive teenager, we can put a hand on his shoulder. This, beyond the comfort of a quiet and familiar physical environment, will help our kids feel safe and sheltered while hearing difficult information.

If the death or loss isn't sudden, we can ask our child what she may already know. Maybe she was aware that auntie was sick and suffering, or maybe she wasn't. (Learn when to tell kids about a terminal diagnosis–and why.)

Then, we can explain what our kids need to know.

While it might be hard to suppress our own strong emotions, it's best to be calm, stay as reassuring as possible, and use simple, matter-of-fact explanations.

If we say "Auntie went to sleep forever," our young daughter will be confused. Children know that after sleeping, we wake up. Plus, if we explain death in this way, our daughter may develop an unfortunate and irrational fear of sleep.

Instead, we can be more direct and say, "Auntie's body got very sick and it stopped working. She can't breathe, eat, walk, or feel anything anymore."

Although it might seem too harsh, these facts, when presented sensitively and directly, are reasonable and acceptable explanations to children of all ages.

Be Open to Questions, but Don't Pry

Once we've told our children what they need to know, we

can transition to asking what they'd like to know. Even the youngest children will probably ask questions we can't answer. It's always ok to say, "I don't know."

Children may want to hear the same information repeatedly in order to accept what has happened. Or, they may not have any questions at all. It's also possible their questions will come later–in a few days, months, or even years. And if kids don't ask for details, details don't need to be given. They'll ask questions when they're ready to hear them.

Part of asking our kids what they want to know can also be asking them who they want to know; that is, which of their friends or acquaintances they'd like to share the news with. We should encourage them to confide in anyone they'd like.

Kids With Special Needs

When children have cognitive differences, it's best to explain loss at their cognitive-age.

It's important to always tell a child–even with severe intellectual differences–about the loss of a loved one. Despite their processing differences, children with special needs still have a close emotional bond with those around them and have the right and the need to learn of a loved one's death.

For children with autism, the same methods of explanation at various ages apply.

Suicide and Violent Deaths

When death comes tragically through suicide or murder, it's important to explain what happened as matter-of-factly as possible with honest–yet minimalist–description.

The scripts below come from the Common Ground Grief Center and can provide a place to start for these difficult conversations.

(WHEN EXPLAINING SUICIDE)

"It is difficult to understand why someone would want to end his or her life on purpose. But what we know is that just like people can get sick in their bodies, such as pain in their stomach, people can also get sick in their brain. This can cause them to feel very sad and lonely for a long time.

When people feel like this, they sometimes think about hurting themselves or even killing themselves. That is what your mom did. This is called suicide. Do you have any questions?"

(WHEN EXPLAINING HOMICIDE)

"There are people in this world who might make a decision to hurt someone else on purpose. Someone killed your dad and he is no longer alive. It can be difficult to understand why someone would want to cause others harm like this. This is called homicide. Do you have any questions?"

Addressing Spirituality and Religion

Times of crisis are always an appropriate time to acknowledge and explore faith and philosophy with children.

As mentioned before, however, when abstract, metaphysical concepts are used to explain death, children may struggle to understand.

For young children, using solely religious explanations may be ineffective because they need much more concrete, specific explanations about the physical realities of death. – Elyse C. Salek, MEd, and Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP — HealthyChildren.org

If we tell our son that his dad is "now in a better place," he may wonder why life on Earth is so terrible. If we mention that "God wanted Grandma to join him in heaven," young kids will ponder why God thinks it's more important that Grandma is with Him and not with family. And if we mention that Grandma will always be watching over them, it might make them feel uncomfortable when they've done something bad or embarrassing.

While these explanations may give adults comfort, they need to be used carefully with children. Otherwise, they can further concern and confuse them.

As children grow older and ask deeper, more detailed questions, we can gradually introduce the more complex aspects of our belief systems.

Final Thoughts

I know that right now, it may be hard for anything to sound helpful or to make sense. I know you and your child are hurting.

Taking the first step towards anything is often the hardest. You just need to focus on putting one foot forward–step-by-step, minute-by-minute–and helping your child do the same.

Don't ever hesitate to seek additional outside resources and advice from grief counselors and specialists. And, please, remember that there are many helpful strategies you can use to relay the heartbreaking news to your children and move forward through grief, tragedy, and loss.

Our goal at Positive Parenting Solutions is to support parents on their parenting journey through all of its ups and downs. We have an incredible community of parents who've learned how to parent well through all of life's struggles.

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https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/talking-to-kids-death-tragedy-loss?fbclid=IwAR1K3MnNu1wyyZzKPoILR2TZHvQk2RU2p5EttcHcBkltx9-ExLP7q0hp_uM

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8 WAYS TO DE-ESCALATE MELTDOWNS WITH YOUR CHILD

Meltdown Escalation Cycle

Often a child's outburst or tantrum can seem unpredictable. However, experts say there is a predictable pattern to this escalation, referred to as the acting-out cycle. To help parents choose effective interventions, it is useful to understand these seven stages:

Calm - In this phase, your child is responsive and cooperative.

Trigger - A stimulus sets off a pattern of behavior.

Agitation - Your child displays signs of anxiety or may withdraw from the situation.

Acceleration - The escalation of uncooperative, aggressive,

or provocative behaviors.

Peak - This is the climax of the incident. Your child's behavior will feel out of control.

De-escalation - The reduction in the frequency or intensity of unpleasant behaviors.

Recovery - Your child transitions back to a calm, responsive state.

Reasons For Meltdowns & Escalation

Underneath every challenging behavior we see is a root cause stemming from a thought process and an emotion.

When we as parents learn to remain curious about the unmet need, we can better come to understand misbehavior as a form of communication, heading off meltdowns and deflecting escalation just by noticing and meeting these unmet needs.

The Need For Attention

When a child misbehaves, an adult often notices and responds quickly, giving children a sense of control by commanding the attention of everyone around them. An antidote for attention may be a Genuine Encounter Moment (GEM).

A GEM is five to fifteen minutes of focused attention on your child - an opportunity for heart-to-heart, not head-to-head, communication. Not every moment will be a GEM, but if you offer several a day, your relationship will improve, and undesirable behaviors will decline.

For younger children, a GEM may come in the form of child-led play. Get eye level or below, join them in their world, and allow them to be the leader of the moment.

Because teens may come less often for a GEM than a toddler - when they do come for these types of little moments, pause what you are doing, make eye contact, and actively listen.

The Need For Power

Another possible source of outbursts is the need for power. When children feel out of control, whether from stressors in their lives or from the lack of opportunity to exercise their independence, they tend to cling to control wherever they can. The goal is to empower our children rather than overpower them. Some ways to do this are by offering choices, encouraging them to complete age-appropriate tasks, inviting their help or opinion, focusing on the behavior you desire (as opposed to that you don't), and replacing commanding and demanding with asking questions and providing information.

Additional Needs

Other triggers that precipitate misbehavior include:

Transition times

Feeling hungry or tired

Being off routine

Unexpected changes in the day

Feeling under- or over-stimulated

Needing to wait

Unfamiliar social situations

Challenging schoolwork

Parents and other caregivers can intervene before these situations arise to disrupt the acting-out cycle. Here are some things you can do to meet these needs and regulate your child before they begin to escalate:

Announce transitions - "Let's set a timer for five minutes. When it dings, we are cleaning up the toys."

Ensure age-appropriate meals at age-appropriate times.

Have a consistent nighttime ritual that honors their natural sleep rhythm.

Keep routines consistent and predictable, and discuss changes ahead of time.

Keep from over-scheduling.

Notice your child's cues for either movement or rest throughout the day.

Teach the skills of impulse control and "waiting" through playful games.

Break schoolwork into bite-sized pieces that allow for focus and celebrate small successes.

Emotional Regulation And The Brain

All humans operate from three areas of the brain: the forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain. Knowing these brain states helps us recognize our child's needs and offers a set of tools for regulation.

Forebrain

The forebrain, also known as the prefrontal cortex, is the last region to develop, beginning around age three and continuing into the mid-to-late twenties. This is where learning, both academic and social-emotional, occurs. The prefrontal cortex allows for skills of empathy, compassion, self, social awareness, impulse control, problem-solving, and more.

The most effective tools for this brain are to meet your child where they are and teach tools in a supportive way by asking, What tools am I trying to teach, and how can I best teach them free of punishment, blame, or shame?

Midbrain

The midbrain is our emotional hub, known as the limbic system. This area is responsible for attachment, memory retention, and emotions.

When this brain is dysregulated, children may seem whiny, clingy, demanding, uncooperative, and nervous. An effective mantra for this stage is: name it to tame it, feel it to heal it.

When the amygdala, a component of the limbic system, is activated, it sends an impulse to the lower brainstem, which can lead to those reactive behaviors discussed above. But, just in naming your emotion ("I am mad"), an impulse is also sent to the higher-thinking brain, lighting up the gray matter responsible for executive function. The higher brain can therefore override the lower brain and, in return, help the child tame - aka regulate - their emotions and behaviors.

Hindbrain

The hindbrain, also known as the brainstem, is responsible for survival and jumps into action when it detects a threat.

A threat can be as real as actual trauma or perceived such as having an unmet need. Because it is fully developed at birth, tots and teens can easily resort to brainstem behaviors of fight,

flight, freeze, or fawn when dysregulated.

About 90% of communication with our kids is through our body language, so something as simple as getting down low, at the child's eye level or below, and saying, "You are safe". Often, body language alone is effective in communicating a sense of safety to a child. Having diffused their internal protective responses, children can then move into higher brain functioning, feeling safe and connected.

Tools to De-escalate Meltdowns

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, things do escalate. Meltdowns and tantrums are your child's pressure valve to help them let off steam and de-stress. When met with connection, you can help your child emotionally transition, manage behaviors, and teach higher-level skills while keeping your relationship intact.

Here are some effective tools for helping your child regulate during the peak of escalation:

1. Intervene early

Notice the verbal and nonverbal warning signs that may communicate your child is escalating. These include being tearful, pacing, balled fists, shaking, clenched jaw, fidgeting, grunting, or talking in a faster and/or higher-pitched tone.

2. Center yourself

Mirror neurons communicate to our brain to echo the nervous system of others. If we come into a situation hot and bothered, equipped with our judgments and biases, our children will replicate and escalate on our energy. At the same time, if we pause to breathe and center, our children are more apt to anchor into our calmness.

It is hard to argue with someone who is not responding aggressively back to you. In general, use a respectful and calm tone (as opposed to yelling) and indicate safety with your body language by getting low, making eye contact, having open hands, a neutral/non-reactive facial expression, and a square body.

3. Avoid poking the bear

When children are in their primitive brainstem, they are unable to think logically. Avoid reasoning with them, asking questions, or making demands as it will only further dysregulate and escalate their emotions and behaviors. The time to speak logically and teach the lessons is when they are already regulated and able to access their thinking brain.

Decrease stimulation by turning lights low and minimizing the number of people in the room. The smaller the "audience" the better. If your child will not leave the room, ask other family members to go to a different location to help your child calm their nervous system.

4. Respect personal space

Understanding your child's desire for personal space and/or closeness is helpful when things begin to escalate. Some children desire proximity while other children will feel like a cornered bear as you approach, which will further agitate their aggression and surge the situation. If needed, maintain some space to keep both you and your child safe.

5. Validate feelings

As your child moves out of their reflexive brainstem and into their emotional limbic system, validate their experience and reflect on what you hear.

Reflect: Repeat what you have heard and clarify. TRY THIS: So, you are saying you are upset because you wanted grandma to pick you up from school today. Is this right?

Validate: When validating your child's emotions, use words such as because or and instead of a dismissive but.

TRY THIS: It makes sense that you're upset right now because you really wanted to go to grandma's house, and because it's hard to not get what you want sometimes.
NOT THIS: I see you are mad but we don't act this way.

Support: Let them know they will get through this and you are there for them. TRY THIS: I know this is hard and I will stay with you while it is hard.

6. Invite awareness

Sometimes, we can help a child shift their focus from what has happened into the present moment, and they begin to integrate their brain. Here are a few ways to do this:

Ask them what they hear, see, feel, smell, or taste. One fun application is to use their fingers to track what they can observe with their senses (5 things you can hear, 4 things you can see, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing

NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

Live Virtual Support Group ***NEW DAY***

- Second Monday at 6:30pm (MT)
- RSVP required: Contact Jolie, (308) 672-3658 or Tammy, (402) 989-2197

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines

- Fourth Monday of the month — for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- RSVP required — Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273 or Jessica at mailto:jessicia@nfapa.org

Meetup Adoptive Mom Support Group in Lincoln

- Second Friday of the month, for adoptive moms.
- 7:00-9:00 pm
- RSVP required, Felicia, (402) 476-2273

you can taste).

Use breathwork. When we are stressed, angry, or tense, our breathing patterns become shallow and rapid. Start by matching your child's breathing then gradually slow it down. Your child will likely mimic you, even if subconsciously at first. Help a younger child notice their belly move up and down, or, with an older child, use finger, box, or bumblebee breathing.

Allow them to choose an activity that soothes their nervous system such as playing with a sensory toy, doing a puzzle, moving their body, or laying with a weighted blanket.

7. Share reflections

This is a time, once your child feels seen, heard, validated, and receptive, to explore what they could do differently next time, and prompt making amends if needed. Positively reinforce your child's courageous work of noticing and managing their big expressions.

8. Return to routine

Avoid harping on the moment, but rather use it as a learning opportunity to build brainpower and connection. When your child is ready, encourage moving back into the routine of their day.

Connection is just as contagious as fear. The goal is not for your child to be void of emotional outbursts but to support and help them through the process. These steps can be completed in a Calming Corner or wherever your child is at the moment.

Generation Mindful's Time-In ToolKit guides parents in all eight steps to help the adults and children of a household notice, regulate, and de-escalate. When we practice co-regulation with our children, they develop skills to calm their nervous systems in the face of triggers, they learn that it is safe to feel, and they begin to ask for what they want and need.

At the end of the day, remember that your child's journey is their own. Our role as parents is to be the guide by their side, gently nurturing and loving them through all emotional states and behaviors because, after all, who they are is always love.

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https://genmindful.com/blogs/mindful-moments/8-ways-to-de-escalate-meltdowns-with-your-child?fbclid=IwAR13nWI-zquVJ40lPzgD3kolbXuH-gkX9dMbZxiACpmDFyIuAZ815PNcWoA

WHEN PARENTS DISAGREE ON DISCIPLINE: 9 STEPS TO HARMONIOUS PARENTING

Published by Amy McCready

You vowed to be together for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, but now you're in a parenting standoff and can't seem to agree on A.N.Y.T.H.I.N.G.

You're tired of yelling at your kids. Your partner is tired of their disrespect. You try to implement positive parenting strategies. Your partner insists on sending them to time out. You dread mealtime. Your partner dreads bath time.

The tension is palpable, and your kids notice. They know you're the strict one and your partner is more lenient. They know who will cave under pressure and whose fuse will blow first.

If there is one thing you can ALL agree on, it's this: Something has to change.

The standoff can't continue.

Your kids are too important. Your marriage is too important. Your family is way too important to let discipline differences wear everyone down.

So what should you do about it?

First, take a deep breath. A REALLY deep breath.

There is hope for you and your family, my friend. Lots of hope.

I'm here to suggest 9 tangible steps you and your partner can take TODAY to set a new foundation in your home – a foundation you can both feel comfortable standing on as you continue your parenting journey.

Step 1: Find (Any) Common Ground

Assuming a partner needs to get on YOUR parenting page immediately puts you in a power struggle. It's not "my way or yours"–it's about coming together with a philosophy and strategies you both feel good about.

Start by identifying the aspects of parenting and discipline where you DO agree. You'll be more successful identifying similarities than focusing energy on the areas where you disagree.

Look for the positives. Identify the parenting strategies your partner uses that you appreciate.

Are they encouraging?

Do they use a respectful tone?

Do they play with the kids?

Are they consistent?

Do they have reasonable expectations of your kids?

Are they loving?

Foster Parents: Driver's License for Foster Youth

Please answer a brief survey regarding obstacles foster youth have in attaining a driver's license. It should only take a couple of minutes but a great way to share your views.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NEfosteryouthdriverslicense

Foster Parents: Let Your Voice Be Heard

No longer a Nebraska Foster Parent? Folks leave for all sorts of reasons. We'd like to hear more about your experience--and why you left-- so we can improve the foster parenting experience for those who follow.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Foster-Parent-Exit-Survey

Eve if all you can say with confidence is "I appreciate how much you love our children," that is a positive foundation to build upon.

After all, your partner DOES love your kids. And even though his/her parenting style may differ from yours, their discipline approach comes from a place of LOVE.

This is not a time for blaming or rehashing – this is a fresh start for everyone involved, so build on your commonalities.

Step 2: Explore the Underlying Reasons Why You Disagree on Discipline

The greatest influence on our discipline methods is undoubtedly our own parents. Whether you agree with your parents' discipline style or not, the choices you make today as a parent are due, in part, to how you were raised.

Without new knowledge and outside influences, parents are often predisposed to repeat the same patterns of behavior as their parents. This is why you'll hear moms all over the world catch themselves in a moment of shock and mutter, "Oh no! I sound just like my mom!"

For those with negative childhood discipline experiences, these parents often vow to not repeat the same discouraging behaviors with their own children.

Or conversely, (and more frequently) those who agree with the discipline techniques used by their own parents will repeat the same strategies and use the same language they internalized as a child.

This scenario plays out when you hear a parent say, "My parents did _____ and I turned out ok!"

This justification for parenting choices is a slippery slope, because you are taking your experience as a single person and applying it to an entire group of people.

For example, you might hear someone say, "I never wore a seatbelt growing up, and I turned out fine." Chances are, if this were the case, the same person probably wasn't in a messy car accident, either.

This person's one experience can't be used to justify banning seatbelts because, inevitably, someone is going to get into a car accident and need a seatbelt to save their life.

In parenting circles, you'll often hear someone say, "I was spanked all the time, but I turned out ok." But the truth is, we can't let a single person's experience justify spanking ALL children who come from a plethora of different backgrounds and who have different predispositions. Or, when multiple scientific studies tell us spanking has a negative effect on children.

And sure, this negative effect might be something as simple as a quick-temper or mild anxiety, but it could also create emotional trauma that is much deeper than you ever intended.

If you find yourself using the "I turned out fine" argument to justify your position, I'd encourage you to really dig deep and evaluate where these feelings are coming from.

To find common ground with your parenting partner, it's critical you each do a little soul-searching and discover WHY you disagree.

What parts of your childhood influence your perception of appropriate parenting techniques?

Additionally, what parts of your childhood influence how you feel about your partner's parenting techniques?

With a little self-reflection from you and your partner, you'll be well on your way to uncovering the roots of your deeply held parenting beliefs.

Step 3: Start Small

Begin with the non-negotiables for your family.

The non-negotiables are typically the health and safety rules (wearing bike helmets, driving before dark, etc.) and other areas your family values like education (homework before playtime) and respect (name calling will not be tolerated).

Agree on the limits and expectations for the non-negotiables and clearly communicate those to everyone. If the rule is "no cellphones in a bedroom," be sure you both follow through each and every time on that non-negotiable. Your kids will immediately observe you are a unified front.

Step 4: Think Long-Term

Remember that parenting is a marathon, not a sprint – and that requires us to think long-term.

Visualize your kids when they show up for their first day of work. Imagine who they'll be when they have children of their own.

What attributes do you hope your children will possess when they become adults?

Compassion? Work ethic? Thoughtfulness? Respect? Motivation? Resilience?

If you and your partner can agree on 3-4 words you hope will describe your children as adults, you'll be able to view parenting with a far-sighted lens.

Then, when tackling the day-to-day discipline dilemmas, ask yourselves the question:

"What do we want our child to LEARN from this experience or discipline opportunity?"

It's not about winning. It's not about proving "you're the boss and they WILL OBEY!"

It's about teaching your child to make the best possible choices in the future–and learning from mistakes along the way–so they can grow into well-adjusted adults.

When you and your partner have a long-term goal of raising responsible, compassionate, respectful children, you have a framework to make short-term decisions.

For example:

If you want your child to be responsible, should you drive his forgotten homework up to school for the third time this week, or not?

If you want your child to be compassionate, how should you respond when she admits to cheating on a test?

If you want your child to be respectful, how can you model that for him on a daily basis?

If you and your partner can agree on some long-term parenting goals for your family, the short-term decisions will

be easier to make.

Step 5: Select a Signal

It's okay if you disagree on some discipline issues–the key is not to argue about them in front of your children.

Establish a non-verbal signal between you and your partner that indicates "we clearly don't agree on this one, let's discuss it away from the kids."

Since **95% of issues don't need to be solved on the spo**t, this gives both parents a chance to take a breather and decide on a course of action later.

Step 6: Avoid Good Cop, Bad Cop

In the same way you shouldn't disagree on discipline in front of your children, it's vitally important you don't pigeon-hole one another into good cop, bad cop roles.

Well-meaning parents do this when saying things like, "Just wait until Dad gets home," or "Mom is going to be very upset about this."

What message does a kid hear when Mom says, "Just wait until Dad gets home?" A child hears that Daddy is the bad cop and is the only one capable of handling this situation.

Or if Dad says, "Mom is going to be very upset about this broken vase!" The child assumes Mom cares more about the vase than Dad does.

Statements like these only reinforce a child's feelings of viewing one parent as the "loving one" and one parent as the "strict one".

In reality, if you're trying to present yourselves as a unified front, you should both try to be consistent in your reactions. Each parent should feel equipped and empowered to handle any situation that arrives when the kids are in their care without threatening the other parent's involvement.

In a similar vein, it's important not to undermine your partner's parenting decisions in front of the children. If your children see you have a lack of faith in the parenting decisions your partner made, they will undoubtedly share the same sentiments, and behave accordingly.

Step 7: Ditch the Scorekeeping

"I'm the one who always deals with potty training."

"If she's not helping with bedtime, why would I want to help her get the kids ready for school?"

"He's the last one to ever offer to help with homework…"

Scorekeeping is the silent relationship killer. It breeds resentment and puts you on opposite teams.

If it has become second nature to keep a tally of rights and wrongs, consider how this is affecting your goal of more integrated parenting.

It is time to start fresh and focus, again, on the things you appreciate your partner doing.

Step 8: Commit to Consistent Communication

Set aside some time, one night each week after the kids go to bed, to discuss your progress.

Take note of the issues that have come up most frequently and agree on a correction method to use going forward. Keep in mind that your goal is not to "win the battle" with your partner, but to find the most constructive plan to help your children make good choices–thereby reducing future misbehaviors and training them for adulthood.

Again, this is not a time for blaming or rehashing, but rather a time to come together and map out a plan for your current parenting struggles. Celebrate the little successes you've made and the changes you've seen in your children and each other.

Step 9: Seek Support

If, after some focused effort, you and your spouse continue to disagree on parenting and discipline issues, consider taking a parenting class together or visiting with an objective, third-party resource, like a family therapist.

If you're not sure whether an in-person parenting course or an online class would be better for your family, you can learn more about the pros and cons of each type here.

No matter what route you take, just remember, you and your partner are on the same team!

Final Thoughts

While the task of solving discipline disagreements can seem daunting, these 9 strategies will put you and your spouse on the path to success. With these guidelines, time, and effort, it won't be too long before the big discipline debate is happily in the past.

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WHAT IS INSIDE

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
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3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D
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www.nfapa.org

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