

Effective Parent's Toolkit

Course Name:

Creating a Safe Space

Core Material – Reading (Creating a Safe Space)



Sounds easy, right? Well, it is, but not the way you think. Creating a safe space, doesn't mean keeping burglars and bad-people out, keeping sharp objects and firearms out of reach. Creating a Safe Space means that you build a trust between you and your child, so that no matter what the situation, they feel "safe" coming to you and telling you.

That means, that for that conversation, there is no yelling, there are no judgments, there is no eye-rolling, or face-making. For this conversation, you must make it completely clear that you are there for them, to listen, and really hear them, to be present, attentive and supportive.

This conversation is not the conversation where you will be administering punishment, or assigning blame, or correcting. This is a safe space. Some parents need to create a sort of "bubble" in order to accomplish this – a signal between the parent and child that says, "This is an important conversation and I need the 'safe-space'." It could be a room, it could be a phrase, it could be a note, or some other way of indicating "asylum."

Now, this does not mean that anything said in "asylum" is free from punishment, it means, instead that punishment, correction and other negative connotations should happen in a different conversation.

Why should you separate these two? Let's take a scenario – Your daughter has just failed a test. That in itself is unfortunate. However, she failed it, because she was caught cheating. She is coming to you to explain that she cheated because she is falling behind in the class, she doesn't understand the materials being covered and that she is afraid she might not pass the class.

What might your initial reaction be? CHEATING!!! FAILING!! Oh My Goodness! Haven't I taught you better than that (you feel like a failure – you are looking at your own failure here) Punishing her for Cheating or Failing might be your first reaction. Grounding her to spend more time on her homework, might be another.

So, she came to you for a reason – help. What did she get? Punishment and Judgment. Is she likely to repeat this process – coming to you for help? Not likely. What is the result of that? You have just taught her instead that you won't listen nor help her, that she is on her own, and will have to figure it out herself, or with the help of somebody else ... her first idea – cheating didn't work, so now who can she turn to? The point here is it isn't you, and **it always should be.**

That is what Creating the Safe space is about. You need to put all that reaction aside, and be there for her, so she can tell you the situation, you can ask clarifying questions, gently get more details, carefully dig into the reasons, get to the root of it. At this time, you will never criticize, judge, yell, or use any "non-verbal" communications such as frowning, eye rolling, gasping, etc. This takes self control. But imagine the reward for this control? Your daughter's trust, and confidence - Priceless. You may find that she cheated, as a way of getting through the test, so she wouldn't disappoint you, the teacher, her other parent, or to live up to a siblings past performance. She may be falling behind in the class and doesn't understand the materials because she is being pressured to take difficult classes for college, or because her sibling did, or she may be struggling because she has vision problems, attention problems, and may require glasses or medication. She may actually be skipping out on her homework, or spending time in class flirting or talking instead of paying attention, but you would never figure out any of this if she won't tell you.



The goal of Effective Parenting is to create a relationship with your child that makes them want to tell you, makes them want to share with you, makes them want to confide in you, and thereby building respect, seeing you as a role-model, and you become the "go-to" person in their lives – not a questionable friend, not some other person that may lead them astray – YOU.

Some ideas on how to create this Safe Space, is to talk with your child. Tell them that you want to be there for them, tell them you want to listen and REALLY hear them when they need you. Tell them that you are going to really try to keep all judgments, criticisms, and comments out of that Safe Space. Ask them how you can establish this safe space – if he/she needs to talk to you, and you need a moment to prepare and get your "Safe-Space-Face" on (keep in mind, with practice, all conversations can be "safe," once you get the hang of it) perhaps there can be a warning, like a note, or a request, or a special room. For example, your child could hand you a note that says, "I need to talk in the 'safe space'" or "I need to talk – it's important – come to my

room” or they might just say to you, “I need to talk to you, got a minute?” Sometimes my daughter says, “I have to tell you something – you aren’t going to like it.”

What to do with the information you learn in these conversations can be found in other modules, but you must create and hold this safe space before you can act.

So, do you think you can do that? Can you create that safe space, that space where your child can tell you that they had sex, they tried cigarettes, they were approached to try drugs, their boyfriend tried to go too far, etc. Can you imagine the benefits you can enjoy with your child if they feel safe telling you these things? Can you separate the telling and listening from the punishment?

Then you are on your way!



Summary and Review Questions

What is the benefit to the parent in Creating a Safe Space?

What is the benefit to the Child in Creating a Safe Space?

What is never allowed in the safe space?

How can you establish a safe space to talk to your child?

Action Steps – Putting it All into Action
