

## Effective Parent's Toolkit

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### *Improving Behavior by Example*

#### Core Material – Reading (Improving Behavior)

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#### **Identifying what behavior is acceptable**

This is an important conversation to have with your child. You need to make sure they are aware of your expectations. This is important, because if they don't know what is expected, they don't know if or when they have reached it, they don't know why you are still asking for change, and they don't know what the behavior you expect looks like.

How can your child meet your expectations if they don't know what they are.

A great way to do this is to use examples. If you can find examples of what you expect, and can point that behavior out to your child, they will be able to see what they are striving for. But that isn't always easy to do, as you might be holding your child to a higher standard than the children in the local neighborhood, or the local school.

#### **Watch for examples of “what not to do” behavior**

Sometimes it works better to point out behavior that is “not what you want” an example of what not to do.

I am sure that you have been to a restaurant or a department where a child has misbehaved. You can use those situations as learning opportunities.

The next time you and your child are in a store or restaurant where a child is misbehaving, you can help your child learn from it, in an easy, fun, and non-threatening way.

This method is a great way to provide examples, opening conversations around what you expect, what is acceptable, and what is not, all without accusing, judging or scolding your child, and also providing the ability to build self esteem in your child.

This skill is easy to master, but you must keep your eye open for the opportunity to use it. Spending time with your child (not just "around your child") will give you plenty of opportunity to show your child what you expect, even if you are surrounded by misbehaving children.

A great memory of mine is when my mother used this skill when my sister and I were very small. We had gone across the street to visit with our neighbors, a family with two children of similar ages to my sister and I. My mother, a quiet, soft spoken woman, in her mid 40's, was sitting at the kitchen counter in our neighbor's home. She was at least 20 years younger than my mother, and was more interested in the conversation than what her children were doing. My mother's eyes, as I recall, were always searching us out, and throughout her conversation, knew exactly what was going on. When the yelling and tantrums and screaming were more than she could stand, my mother politely and quietly excused herself to return home with my sister and I in tow. I remember the trip back across the street, my mother gripping our wrists as she pulled us in her wake, "Did you see how they were behaving? My goodness! I have never seen anyone behave so badly! Don't you ever behave that way! Let me tell you, if I ever catch you two acting like that, I'll... I'll... Well, let's not find out!" My sister and I knew exactly the behavior my mother would not tolerate, and even though my sister and I had never behaved that way, we knew exactly what not to do!

### **Praise your child for not exhibiting the bad-example behavior**

As we talk about in the Recognize the Good module, finding ways to recognize actions your child takes that are in the right direction help to build self esteem, while providing real examples and reinforcement for good actions. This skill is an easy way to do just that. When you see the bad behavior from another child, you can turn to your child and recognize them for NOT behaving in the same way. *"Jacob, look at that little boy, he is really misbehaving, not listening to his mother, and screaming. I am so proud of you for behaving so nicely." "Thank you, Thomas for not behaving like that, and making me so proud of you."* You have done two very powerful things. You have provided an example of the behavior you expect, and the behavior you do not approve of, and you have praised your child for doing exactly what you want them to be doing (and they didn't even know they were doing it!)

Imagine how your child feels at that moment! They are now observing that other child, and really understanding what they are doing.

### **Discuss how it feels to watch or be subject to that behavior**

Another powerful option is to have your child watch the behavior of the other child, and ask them questions about it. *"Sam, look at that little girl over there. What do YOU think about how she is acting?" "How does that make you feel to watch her act that way? Do you think it is fun, or good, or do you think it is sad that she is behaving that way?"* You will be surprised at your

child's reaction. Take the opportunity to talk about what you have seen, and finish it off by praising or thanking your child for not behaving that way. Ask the child if they think that behavior is benefitting the other child, or if it will result in discipline or unhappiness. Having your child really look at the behavior makes them feel something. It is your job to discover what that is. Give them the opportunity to discover how it makes them feel, as a bystander, an opportunity they don't have when they are the ones behaving badly. Ask questions like, *"what do you think is going to happen when they get home?"* or *"Do you think their mom is proud of them right now?"* *"Do you think that is the way to get what they want? Why not?"* *"Do you think they should get in trouble for acting like that here?"*

Imagine the power of that? You have just allowed your child to see bad behavior from a perspective they never have – the perspective of the parent!

It is also important to allow them to come to these conclusions on their own, not just agreeing with you. It is important for you to guide them but not provide them with the answer to how they feel. You don't want to say, *"That is just terrible, they should be spanked! What do you think?"* Instead, try, *"Look at that child! What do you think of how they are behaving? Do you think they will get what they want? How do you think the mom/dad feels about the way they are asking?"* and even, *"How does this make you feel?"* *"What would you tell that child if you could talk to them right now?"*

### **Ask them what they think would have worked better in that situation**

Another opportunity to get the most out of your experience, and this can be done on site, or later on when you get home, or in the car, etc. Ask them to problem solve by having them think about what that child could have done that might have worked better than pitching the fit, or throwing food, or running around, etc. They may not come up with much at first, or they might say something in appropriate. If appropriate, first, recognize that they thought it through, their idea might not be the best idea, but recognize that they thought about it. *"I hadn't thought of that perspective Janey, good point. I was just thinking she could have asked her mom nicely, what do you think?"*

Other opportunities to use this method come in the form of Television. By watching TV with your kids, you can use situations on TV to make your point. Teen pregnancy, drugs, sneaking out, bullying are topics often shown on TV and are great opportunities to use other's bad decisions, other's behavior as example of what is unacceptable.

### **It's my idea, not yours**

When you allow your child to see, understand and come to the conclusion in their own head, it is their idea, it isn't you telling them what to do and think. When you watch a TV show where there is teen pregnancy, you can ask questions like, *"What do you think her life is going to be like with a baby at 15?"* *"Do you think she will get to go to college, or do the things she had planned?"* *"Do you think this was a good thing for her or the baby?"* *"What do you think she could have done? Could she have done anything differently?"* Now, without really trying, you have allowed

them to think through a really tough scenario, as well as make some decisions or think of options. If, later, they find themselves in a similar situation, they will already have thought it through, and have some ideas, options and convictions of their own.

It is really easy to tune out your mother's voice saying, "don't.... never.... I told you not to...." But when it is their own idea, it holds more weight. If they have had the opportunity to think these scenarios through, they will have formed opinions, and maybe even alternative behaviors that they feel strongly about.

When kids just watch TV, being bombarded with images of glorified bullying, sex, teen pregnancy, violence or drug use, the information or images come in and are accepted as true, fact, or reality. By providing a means of processing that information, you can help them make better decisions. For example, if they are always watching shows where kids are having sex, they will think that All/Most kids are having sex. This information came in, and without alternative information, or the ability to process it along with other information, live values, experience, opinion, or other experience, it is processed as fact.

## **Summary and Review Questions**

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Sample questions:

## **Action Steps – Putting it All into Action**

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