

Better Parenting: Never Criticize Your Children

By Sonia Spackman, MA, MFT

I cringe when I recall how I used to talk to my children as a young mother. I didn't realize how critical I was until I heard them talk to their kids. When the memories return, I ache inside.

Why do you criticize? If you are like I was, you are trying to keep them in control. You want them to do what you want them to do. Since my kids were pretty good most of the time, rather than focus on what they did right, I put my focus on their mistakes so they could do better.

Beware! There is a distortion as we form the accept/reject scale. Dr. J. Jones, a parenting expert says we might accept our child's 98% strength, but we usually focus on the 2% weakness. In the end, most of our communication to our children is about the 2% we want corrected. Does this sound familiar to you? No wonder our kids think or even say: "Stop picking on me. Don't you see what I do good?" If we think about it, we can see this is unfair and irritating. Imagine our boss, our friend or spouse doing this to us! Focus on the strengths and the good qualities and stop finding fault.

Does criticizing make you feel better? When we are frustrated or irritable, many of us relieve ourselves by taking it out on our kids with criticizing or blaming. Criticism has no place in our homes or in our relationships. It is always destructive. Faultfinders develop negative personalities. And yes, you can become addicted to criticism. You can bring gloom into everyone's life by seeing other people, and situations in a negative way. I learned my lesson when my sensitive son changed to an angry and critical adult.

What is the message of Criticism? Young children see their parents as all-knowing and take what they say as truth. Children do not filter out the good from the bad; like a recorder in their brain, they store it all. Many parents are not aware of the intense damage they do when they humiliate, put down, belittle, ridicule, or criticize their children. They think: "If mom or dad thinks I am clumsy, dumb, stupid, fat, lazy, etc., then it must be true. "You are not OK" is the message. Even though this is on an unconscious level, this does not mean it is not important.

What are the effects of Criticism? The words spoken to us as a child form the internal thinking we have running through our minds as adults. Criticism of loved ones, especially of spouse and children harms their self-worth and confidence. It discourages and creates a fear of trying new things. The upshot is that regular criticism eventually leaves children feeling turned off to their parents. Every child needs love and acceptance. When these important needs are not provided for, children can end up feeling frustrated, angry, worthless, unloved and undeserving. As adults, either gender may become angry and critical. Or they may learn to develop a high tolerance for criticism, thus making it easier to get into abusive relationships.

What if the criticisms are true? We are not justified in saying something just because it is true. Not all truth is uplifting and supportive. Some truth can be destructive and harmful, and we are not wise to say it: "Mary, your hair looks terrible and that crazy outfit makes you look fat. That's why the dance team lost, and it's your fault." Don't think that it is OK to say something because it might be true.

How do I tell my kids what they are doing wrong? We have a duty to correct our children.

Correction is necessary, but it is not to be done in a critical manner. If you are angry, try to deal with the problem when you are calmer. "I'll talk to you after dinner, see if you can come up with some solutions we can discuss, I'll see you then." If it cannot wait, explain that you are upset and tell your child what you need from them right now and you will talk to them later about it.

How do I reason with my kids so they get it? If you

are tense or angry, your young child 2-6 cannot think logically through a problem and then reverse the logic. (A tall glass of water that is poured into a bowl cannot be seen as the same amount of water.) A little child cannot understand that a parent can be angry and love them, too. They cannot mentally hold two concepts at the same time. They split off from the loving parent while remaining with the angry parent and think that you do not love them. If this happens regularly, it can have a negative impact.

7-11 year olds can reason and deduct what happened, but still need reassurance that you understand their feelings and you love them. They see you as an adult. Your child does not see you as a former child. Use your words in a way so your child gets that you understand. Reassure your children that you are correcting them because you love them, care about them and want them to grow up behaving in a safe, kind, respectful, and responsible way.

How do I keep from getting angry? How would you talk to your good neighbor? When I am correcting my kids, I try to talk to them like I would to my good neighbor. Would I yell out: Have you lost your mind? Why the hell did you leave that rake out in the driveway? Don't you know it could rust in this weather? Now get that rake in the garage before I have to do something to you!" But this is how we talk to our kids. I don't think it would work with our neighbor and it will not work with our kids either.

We must remember not to say or do anything while we are correcting our children that will hinder our relationship with them. Our interaction with our kids needs to draw us closer, so we can motivate them for the change needed. "In the Brown family, we do not steal." "How do you think we can fix this problem?"

- You are being sensitive to your child's feelings.
- You are focusing on the behavior, not criticizing or blaming your child.
- You are providing a way of working through the problem with your child.
- You are giving your child experience in correcting his mistakes.
- You are building trust and relationship with your child.

Once you work through a problem, you forgive and forget, praise the efforts and celebrate the accomplishment.

How can I eliminate criticism altogether? How about starting off each morning with 50 dimes in your pocket and start handing them out each time you criticize a family member. Have them tell you when they feel criticized or put down. Remember, the one who feels it is the one who knows if they were criticized. Hand over the dimes with a smile. If you frown or disagree, you pay double! Then sincerely say, "I'm sorry. That was unkind; thank you for helping me do better. Here, take this money, I want to do better." Tell them how much you love them. If you aren't cured in 2 weeks, raise the amount to a quarter each time, or a dollar, five dollars, whatever it takes to stop criticizing-- and just think how much fun it will be for the family.

Parents need to continually look for the good and see their children in a good light. If parents can focus on "catching their kids doing good," we will see their behaviors getting better. Encouragement and appreciation is a wonderful alternative to criticism and it is a fun way to parent for the whole family.

Resources: Dr. James Jones, American Parenting Institute; Shirley King, Parent News; Jim Fay, Cline/Fay Institute.

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Are You Concerned About Your Health?

Is healthy nutrition important to you? If so, would you like to join a group of Vernonians who are banding together to maintain the eight-year tradition of Azure Standard deliveries to our town?

Since we have a new delivery/drop-off site (at the Vernonia Museum parking lot, Bridge Street) we have to be sure to have enough people ordering to guarantee the delivery (enough money in orders).

For the moment we are aiming for a June 11 or 12 delivery with a June 9 cutoff date for orders. Tell your neighbors; tell your friends; check out the amazing variety at www.azurestandard.com; and /or order a catalog (and the bi-monthly sales catalog).

Regular stock includes organic meats, vegetables, and fruits from the Dufur area organic farms, grains in bulk, oils, some canned and frozen specialties, as well as the complete range of supplements, toiletries, cleaning products, from the best known and lesser known brands (even farm and gardening supplies, organic seeds, and starts, etc!) For those like me with lactose intolerance or allergies there is available a non-dairy, probiotic-bacteria-loaded (and delicious!) yogurt made from coconut milk. I have even found German homeopathic products from the Weleda Line.

Sales are bi-monthly.

Get on board. Help support Oregon organic farms, the tiny town of Dufur, and other Vernonians who'd like to get access to the best healthy products without driving over the hill.

Call Carol Sawyer today at 503-429-4748.

Vernonia Health Board Considers Changes

The Vernonia Health Center Board of Directors has contracted with Providence Health & Services for the last decade on behalf of the community to provide health care to the town and surrounding areas. Many of you may not be aware of the years of service The Board has quietly provided this community. Even prior to the contract with Providence, the Board (a non-profit organization) has diligently sought to make affordable, convenient and accessible health care for this community a priority for over 30 years.

The building currently occupied by the clinic is owned by The Vernonia Health Center, and medical services and staff are provided by Providence. The flood raised several issues as to the safety and accessibility of the building should another event occur. After thorough study of resources available, the Board has determined that flood-proofing or raising the building is not a viable option. In order for medical services to be accessible during any event, the Board is currently reviewing options to move the clinic.

Providence, likewise, has begun an assessment of how they can best participate in continuing to provide quality care to the region. In order to become a more invested partner with Providence, the Board will be restructuring its organization and business model.

To maintain compliance with new regulations regarding floodway management, the Board has set a deadline for moving by fall, 2011. Reorganization of the business model will be done concurrently with consideration to providing a seamless transition for the community. As a first step of this restructure, the Vernonia Health Center Board of Directors would like to invite applications for new board member positions from any person currently living in the service area. This is an exciting time for members of the community to participate in designing how health care services are provided here in the Upper Nehalem Valley.

To apply, please submit a written summary of experience and why you would like to participate in this process to: Carolyn Keasey, 14426 Keasey Rd., Vernonia, OR 97064.

For Goodness Sake... Promoting Health of the Mind, Body, Spirit and Community

By Heather Lewis, LMT, CLT, NT

In the early morning stillness, we begin our day. Dawn is just breaking and light is gently pouring in the bedroom window. It looks to be another of our glorious spring mornings. Before our walk, I let the kids (Bridgette and Lily) outside and I take a few moments for myself. Morning ritual: Brush my teeth, brush my hair, large glass of warm water with lemon juice and 5 minutes of gratitude.

It is so easy today to get caught up in the insanity of our hectically scheduled lives. They fill up quickly with the worries of the day: unstable banking system, unemployment rate, to bailout or not to bailout, wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters. Even locally: to commute to work, whether or not I have a job to commute to, kids to school, whether or not there will be schools for them to go to (there will be), to raise my house or not, where will I get the money to raise it. Even when we are not directly affected, our neighbors' grief impacts us. Their worries become ours. We are a community.

Now, more than ever, it is beneficial to take time in stillness for reflection on what we can be thankful for. I hesitate to use the word meditate. So often when we think of meditation, we think

something mystical, of rooms filled with incense and people chanting unfamiliar sounding things. However, every world religion sees benefit in meditation and thanksgiving. The Hebrew Scriptures say: "Meditate within your heart, on your bed and be still," (Ps. 4:4, note: this is not translated "you've made your bed, now lay in it"). Meditation is not so much making your mind blank as it is sharpening your focus, so that all of the clutter falls away, leaving only that which you are focusing upon to be clearer and bring, hopefully, a deeper understanding. I like to focus on things I am thankful for.

You might ask, what do I have to be thankful for? Let's start with the basics. I am thankful that today I have breath to breathe. I am thankful for clean drinking water. I am thankful for food for my family. I am thankful that I will hear a child laugh today. I am thankful for the opportunity to make someone else's life better today...

My routine is using my breath as a cadence. On the exhale, I give thanks and on the inhale, like Oliver Twist, I say, "May I have another please sir," as I envision being filled with more things to be

thankful for. By the end of 5 minutes, I feel calmer, more balanced, and prepared to face the challenges of the day.

There are specific physiological changes that occur in the process of meditation that promote this "feeling." Studies from the NIH, University of Pennsylvania, Harvard and the University of Montreal, show meditation stimulates changes in brain chemistry that affects all of our major body systems. Other studies show that continued stress and worry depletes our immune system and is a major risk factor in many disease processes today. How fortunate that we have available a resource that is free, easy to use, can fit into any hectic schedule, and that when practiced on a regular basis will counter the effects of stress with no hangover or side effects. One more thing to be thankful for!

So instead of reaching for a cup of java to start your day, (or in addition to it) try stimulating your neurons and dissolving those worry lines by reaching for a cup of "peace that passes understanding" and see if you don't feel bigger and stronger and, before you know it, able to leap small curbs in a single bound!

Here's wishing you all good health...