

Better Parenting: Teach Your Child About Making Choices

By Sonia Spackman, MA, MFT

Last time we talked about parents working their way out of the parenting job. This time we will discuss how parents can be more successful if their kids had practice making choices at home.

Real world experiences now vs. later

As we parent our kids with real world choices and real world consequences they can learn life-long patterns. These patterns guide them to make good choices and decisions that will help them both now in school, and in the future to be more successful in life.

Because the lessons get harder and cost more later, we need to start as soon as possible, but we can start anytime and still help our kids.

A failure example

About ten years ago one of my husbands old students stands out as an example. He was bright but didn't believe in rules, respect or responsibility. Being from a powerful family the pattern this student learned is that his father would run interference for him when he got in trouble. His parents bought him a fancy new car. His father paid his son's traffic tickets and bought him a second new car after he wrecked his driving recklessly. Can you imagine the lessons this young man is now learning because his parents failed to prepare him for the real world when he was at home?

Schools and parents working together

The Vernonia School District put much energy into the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) Program. This program along with the Self

Manager Program and The Class Guidance Lessons help many students develop and practice good behavior at school. However, research reveals that parents have the most influence on how a child learns about making good choices.

Set firm limits

Parents, adults and teachers set firm limits in a loving, kind or respectful way - without anger, lectures or threats. This is how the real world works.

How choices work in the real world

The IRS gives choices like "Would you rather pay your back taxes with cash or your house?"

Your boss might respectfully give you a choice like: "What would be best for you, start getting to work on time or to look for another job?" A police officer gave me choices when I got stopped out of town, "You're welcome to mail in a check for the amount of the fine or you're welcome to show up on the court date to see if you can get it reduced."

This cop didn't get angry or yell at me, or lecture me on what could happen when I speed or threaten to give me a good spanking or ground me from driving.

Kids don't handle the situation better than we do

This might be hard for some of us. Try to remember, if we get angry, lecture or threaten - our kids will focus on our anger rather than on the choices we are trying to give them. Also remember if we react in an angry or frustrated way they might react back, tune us out or become fearful of correction. We can lose the opportunity for the lesson we want to teach them.

Don't worry if you blow it

If you make mistakes, trust me, your kids will give you more opportunities to practice. Try to remember, there is no such thing as a perfect parent, and there is no such thing as a perfect child. We are practicing parenting and our kids are practicing the lessons we are teaching them.

Rules for Giving Choices

#1 Be sure that you like both choices. Do not give one you like and one you don't. Kids know and will choose the one you won't like.

#2 Do not give a choice that you are not willing to follow through on. Kids need to experience the consequences for their choices.

#3 Never give choices if the child is in danger.

#4 Be sure to make a choice if your child won't choose. Saying: "Since I am such a good mom, grownup, or teacher I am willing to give you 5 seconds to make a choice." If the child does not make a choice you might say: "Since you have decided not to make a choice I will have to choose for you, sorry."

#5 The way you state the choices is important. Make the choices short and clear so they are thinking about the choices.

Your welcome toor

Feel free toor ...

Would you rather ...or?

What would be best for youor?

Examples of choices:

For parents, "You're welcome to clean your room in the morning or before you go out to play after school." For teachers, "What would be best for you--to turn in

your work on time for a full credit or later for partial credit?"

Reasons for the use of choices

Choices help kids think. It is harder for them to argue with you while they are trying to figure out what choice they will make.

Choices help kids learn the consequences from their mistakes in real life situations. Choices help us avoid control battles with our kids.

Choices provide ways for kids to feel that we trust in their ability to think, and the process gives them more self-confidence.

Choices help to build trusting relationships between parents and their kids.

BE CAREFUL!

It is very easy to turn your choices into threats. Parent example: "Make the right choice or else you will be sorry." Teacher example: "Knock it off or you're going to the office." This is a little like your neighbor saying: "Do you want to clean up your yard this weekend or get reported to the city?"

In closing, I have two quick to read handouts parents may find helpful on how to deal with arguing kids and how to delay consequences. "What works best for you-to pick them up at City Hall on the table or at the Vernonia Library at the counter?"

Resources, Cline/Fay Love & Logic Institute, Inc. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND, Working Our Way Out Of The Parenting Job By Sonia Spackman MA, MFT soniaspackman@msn.com

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Drawing Class Offered

What: Drawing Class mentored by Sally Harrison

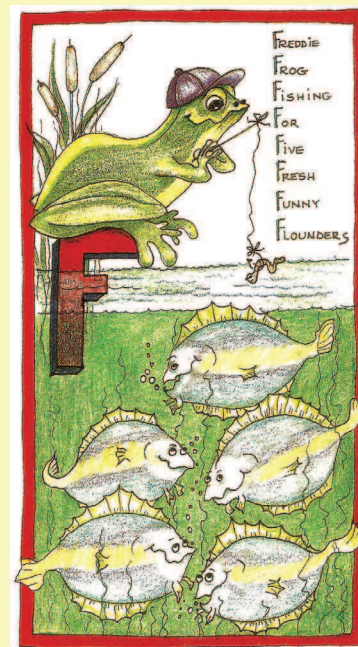
Where: The Vernonia Community Learning Center

When: Every Wednesday, starting March 7th, 7pm to 9pm, for 6 weeks

Who: Anyone, Any age

How Much: Only the rent of the room will be considered in the charge. The rent will be divided equally among students.

Needed Materials: A 11"x14" drawing tablet, 2 pencils (#2 and #6) a gum eraser, a small pencil sharpener.



If you are interested in a fun and creative time please call, Sally Harrison @ 503-429-8425 Take a chance. It's only paper and pencil. You may surprise yourself!

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