

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 hear 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 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 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 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.

Things To Ponder

By Grant Williams

If you are after adventure nothing surpasses the Christian life. No other religion is offered free of charge (Ephesians 2:8) yet Christ Himself said if we don't deny ourself, pick up our cross, and follow Him we risk losing everything (Matthew 16:24-26). Salvation is free but the price exacted for this adventurous life will cost all that we possess. It's a big mistake to misrepresent the true nature of the Christian life. Although categorized along with the other religions of the world it is most properly understood as a relationship between God and man, mediated through the person of Jesus Christ. Born again Christians believe Jesus Christ is God in the flesh sent by His Father to reveal God's fullness, to save us from our sins, and offer us a new life.

Hypocrisy has caused many to reject the Christian life. Truth be known, everyone is a hypocrite

at some point in their life. Unfortunately many Christians rationalize their behavior by living according to their own set of standards. These man made rules go beyond what God has given as His requirements for our behavior. Many ignore the life Christ lived and substitute their standards for His. Instead of living a life of moderation in all things they produce a long list of thou shalt nots. Many of these people claim they see everything in black and white. Is it their black and white list or God's? I can't help but wonder if these people are able to see the damage they inflict on the Church as it is seen by the man on the street who knows nothing of Christ. Would Jesus even be welcome in some of our churches? How would we handle the fact that He might choose to provide good wine for a wedding, or touch a leper, or pray with a prostitute? It's pretty easy to imagine the raised eyebrows and wagging heads!

Our lives must offer a clear reflection of God's love to those who are hurting and alone. Our religious rituals are no more fulfilling today than the old system under the Law. People must see Jesus living in us before they will respond to the message God has entrusted into our care. Our friends and neighbors will reject the Gospel if we consistently overlook our slander, gossip and back biting yet continue to condemn their sins. People are eager to be loved and find forgiveness but we must first show them a good example by accepting other Christians as Christ has accepted us. In John 7:37-38, on the last day of the Feast of Booths, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (NASB). Are we offering people a cup of cold water or lukewarm legalism with few takers?

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