

Tips for Parents

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P = Send POSITIVE messages.

Become aware of the number of times you state something negatively that **could be stated positively**.

Also, promise with the positive by using *contingencies*, rather than *consequences*—*which are usually interpreted as punishments*. Notice the difference between how the following two are heard:

“As soon as you finish your work, you can go.” (Contingency, stated in the positive)

vs. “If your work is not done, you’re not going.” (Same message, but negatively stated)

C = Offer CHOICES.

Choice empowers. The choices can be limited, but the sooner a young person starts to make choices the more responsible the person will become. If a youngster will not do chores or fulfill responsibilities, **increase** the number of options so the child has more from which to choose. Choice empowers and gives ownership—a critical component for changing behavior. Best: **Elicit** the choices **or offer 3 options**.

In relationships, not losing is more important than winning. As long as a person has a choice, the person does not lose. Your child has a desire for power, for control. Offer *reasonable* choices.

Choices are both conscious and nonconscious (habitual). A person always has the possibility to choose a response—be it to a situation, a stimulus, or an urge. Teach *choice-response thinking*. Don’t accept victim-type thinking which is counterproductive to fostering responsibility. Examples are:

“He made me do it.” “I couldn’t control myself.” “I had no other choice.” Explore options.

R = Encourage REFLECTION.

Reflection fosters growth and responsibility. **Ask evaluative questions—those which lead to reflection**.

Here is a series of four such questions which leads to a change in behavior:

(1) “What do you want?” (2) “Is what you are choosing to do helping you get what you want?”

(3) “If what you are choosing to do is not getting what you want, then what is your plan?”

(4) “What are your procedures to implement your plan—specifically, what will you do?” “What else?”

Be cautious of “why?” questions; they allow the person to give an excuse, be a victim, and avoid responsibility. Besides, young people often do not know or find it difficult to articulate why they do what they do.

- ✓ **Limit your “telling.”** This requires constant attention. Although your telling may be to help, it is received as criticism. Telling sends a negative message—especially to adolescents—that what the youngster is doing is not good enough.

Consider: When you *tell*, who does the thinking? When you *ask*, who does the thinking?

- ✓ **Seek to understand.** Listen to your child—without inserting your opinion. *Be curious*—instead of judgmental. Cultivating the habit of listening to understand can transform relationships.

Avoid listening *in anticipation* of what you think your child will say. This poor listening habit will tempt you to interrupt. Listen to learn. Your child wants to be acknowledged. A parent who listens well acknowledges. Besides, your listening can be a model for adolescents—who do not listen well.

“Zip the lip” is extremely difficult for a parent, but it is the surest way to improve communications.

- ✓ **Express your needs.** Give your child the opportunity to help you. Children grow by giving. “I need you to help me with this.” “I need quiet time.” “I need assistance with dinner.”

- ✓ **Use acknowledgments** more than praise. Acknowledgment/ recognition/ validation simply **affirm**. “I see you made your bed,” fosters reflection and feelings of self-competence—which leads to more growth. In contrast, saying, “I’m so proud of you for making your bed,” encourages decision-making to please you. Developing responsibility, rather than pleasing you, is better for your child.

- ✓ **Rewards do not motivate young people to be responsible.** *They merely change motivation*—from thinking of the act to thinking of the bribe. Let your child know that you expect responsible behavior. Society does not give rewards for expected standards of behavior.

Besides, rewards fail the critical test: “What will I get if no one is there to see me?”

- ✓ **You can use authority** and be tough without being punitive *by offering choices*. Instill the mindset that your objective is to **raise responsibility**—not to punish. However, if a consequence is necessary, **elicit** it from the youngster—**rather than impose it**. In this way, the youngster owns the consequence.

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