

#2

Discipline-based parenting makes the effort to communicate clearly and fairly. Punishment-based parenting is not concerned with communicating either clearly or fairly, involves few words of explanation and leaves kids surprised and caught off guard.

Discipline-based parenting

Since discipline-based parents place a high priority on clear and fair communication with their kids, when ever a problem arises that requires discipline, they are careful to state clearly and specifically what they think the problem is, along with an explanation as to why what they have just done is unacceptable. They then communicate specifically what the consequences are-or will be-if at this point they are just warning. Communicating in clear and fair terms fits well with their efforts to be consistent, and also helps establish the all important ingredient of predictability, both of which were previously discussed in #1.

Punishment-based parenting

Punishment-based parents do not place a high priority on communicating clearly, fairly, nor specifically what it is they expect of their kids. It also seems to be of little importance to them that they communicate clearly what consequences they can expect if their unacceptable behavior continues.

They are usually concerned only with putting an immediate end to the unacceptable behaviors and attitudes that are currently taking place. Not only is their goal to bring to a screeching halt the undesired behaviors, it is often their only one.

The idea or notion that this misbehavior or challenge to their authority could provide them with a valuable learning opportunity with their kids doesn't usually enter their mind. And since for them, punishment to bring about change is their primary focus their kids are often left surprised and caught off guard-even when they may actually know what it is they did that was unacceptable.

These parents use few words of clarification and explanation to help their kids understand or learn. As a result, they are usually left on their own to figure out what just happened, what can be learned, and what consequences they can expect if their behavior doesn't stop.

What's a parent to do?

kids-especially our younger ones- do not have the natural capacity to effectively and successfully process and evaluate what is appropriate behavior and what is not. Nor are they always capable of clearly understanding what it is that we expect from them without our telling them. They must learn much of this through their interactions with us after they have misbehaved or in some way challenged us. Our kids are in fact, an “unfinished product”.

When they have misbehaved or challenged our authority, it is easy for us to assume that either they do know, or that possibly they are intentionally challenging our authority in order to gain control over us. While this may at times be the case, there are also times, especially with our younger kids, when they simply don't know how they are to be and what is expected of them. This is why it is important that we clearly and fairly communicate verbally, along with any actions we need to use. It is our efforts to communicate to them that will help them learn more appropriate and acceptable ways of conducting themselves.

The following situation occurs millions of times a day in grocery stores all across this great nation:

It's after work, mom is exhausted, in a hurry, hungry, frustrated by the long lines at the check stand, and, to top it all off she is overwhelmed by the high prices of groceries these days. Scott is in his usual place inside the cart that mom is frantically pushing down and around the aisles. Unlike Mom, he's not in any particular hurry, nor do the high prices or long lines overwhelm him. But he is tired, and just like Mom, he too is hungry.

Since he's hungry and because it is his nature to want just about anything and everything within his reach-especially if it contains sugar-he keeps asking Mom to buy things that aren't on the shopping list. With each, "no, not today", Scott responds with a whinny, "why?" and a continuation of the begging and pleading.

Consider the following discipline-based parenting response to this all too common grocery store experience:

"Scott, we came to the store today for just the things on our shopping list. I am not going to buy anything else, and I want you to stop asking ". (Scott continues to beg, plead, and whine anyway) "Hold it, Scott. I told you that I do not plan to buy anything that isn't on our list. I also made it clear to you that I did not want you to continue asking me to buy more. You can either continue to beg me and bug me, and to whine when I refuse, or, you can stop right now.

If you decide that you are going to continue asking me to buy things that I don't want to buy, then when you get home, you will eat dinner and go right to bed.

You will not be able to play your usual game, or to see your T.V. program. You have a choice to make. If you choose to stop begging and pleading, then I think you and I can make the best of our trip to the store and maybe even have a good time talking about something other than what you want me to buy. So, what's it going to be?"

We'll never know what choice Scott made. But we do know (as did he) that if he made the decision to continue begging and whining, that he went right home, ate dinner, did not play his favorite game, and did not see his customary T.V. program. We know this because that's what Mom clearly communicated. It is this kind of communication and follow-through with specific consequences that is an important part of discipline-based-parenting.

Compare the above discipline-based-parenting approach with the following punishment-based parenting approach:

(The same weary, overwhelmed Mom, with the same demanding, whining, Scott) "Stop your begging and whining. I knew I shouldn't have brought you. If you don't quite making my life even more miserable than it already is, I'm going to give you something to whine about! I might even just leave you here!"

If time were the only consideration, then possibly this punishment-based parenting approach would have worked just fine. What time-pressed parent would choose a dialogue and interaction with their kids that takes ten times as long to complete if the shorter effort would get the job done just as well?

The point to keep in mind here is that even if the shorter punishment-based effort worked in getting an immediate behavior change (although usually it doesn't even accomplish that) it does not clearly communicate to kids the values that are important for parents to instill within them. Instead it leaves them at the very least, confused and angry. And usually they are angry not so much because they failed to get their way, but rather, because of how they were treated in the process.

This is a very important idea to give further consideration to: it isn't usually failing to get their way that lights a fire of rebellion under our kids, but rather how they are treated in the process of our discipline.

So what's the bottom line?

Designing great and healthy kids really does take more time, more thought, and certainly, it takes more effort, than does just simply "growing" a kid. Quite honestly, wouldn't it would be so much easier for us parents if we could somehow extract the desired behavior changes from our kids with just a little pain that didn't leave physical or emotional marks? Or if only all it took were for us to throw out

some ill defined "catastrophic expectation" they could count on, and they would be frightened into submission. It would be tempting for most of us parents if our only goal were to raise kids who just simply behaved, rather than kids who did indeed learn to behave, but who were also-because of our extra efforts- emotionally healthy as well.

But the wonderful-and sometimes taxing-task of raising healthy kids requires that we often weary parents be willing to take the time to confront and challenge them. And it requires something else from us just as important and even more time consuming. The task of raising truly great and emotionally healthy kids requires that we throw into the mix of challenging and disciplining them, a healthy dose of communication that clearly states what our expectations are and what the consequences are that they can count on when they have stepped outside the boundaries we have set.

Discussion Questions

As a child did your parents usually take the time to follow your misbehaviors and consequences with helpful and supportive communication about what had happened and what could be learned?

Looking back, would you say that if they did take the extra time to help you understand what had just happened, that it was helpful to your growth and development?

Would you say that as a parent you take the time and effort to process with your kids when they have misbehaved and had to pay the consequences?

Do you see any positive results so far in your efforts to communicate and to follow up after your kids have misbehaved?

If you do not usually take the time to follow up with constructive and healing communication regarding what has happened, do you see any possible negative results?

What are some possible fresh ideas you might have for making an opportunity for learning out of your kids' misbehaviors and challenges of you?