



Counselor's Corner

April/May 2017

No-Drama Discipline

One of the many challenges parents face is coming up with effective interventions when it comes to discipline. "No-Drama Discipline Workbook: Exercises, Activities, and Practical Strategies to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Developing Minds" by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D. is an excellent resource for parents. It provides helpful suggestions for becoming less reactive, more intentional, clear, consistent, and responsive with discipline.

Choosing Responsive Over Reactive: When choosing to be responsive instead of reactive, parents first need to recognize what they need to be in the frame of mind necessary to respond intentionally to their children. It is important for parents to take time to get their own emotions in check and consider what their child really needs before addressing discipline issues. In doing so, parents can provide more helpful guidance.

When parents address situations during times when they themselves are feeling frustrated, stressed, or exhausted, they might find their responses are not always in line with their own parenting goals. Siegel and Bryson provide recommendations to help increase their ability to respond in a more thoughtful and intentional manner when children engage in unwanted behaviors. Some suggested short-term techniques include: making a list of three things you love about your child or counting to ten and taking deep breaths before responding to a situation. Some longer-term techniques include self-care (e.g., exercise, sleep, etc.) and making a daily visualization of parenting goals (e.g., peaceful family meals, calming bedtime routine, etc.).

Applying Three Questions: Prior to responding, parents can also ask the following questions:

1. Why did my child act this way?
2. What lesson do I want to teach in this moment?
3. How can I best teach this lesson?

Siegel and Bryson acknowledge discipline is not a "one size

fits all" approach. They recommend parents consider factors influencing each situation such as their child's temperament and the events leading up to the situation. Parents may want to ask themselves questions like: "Is my child a perfectionist? Does he or she get overwhelmed easily? Did my child get enough sleep? Were there many unexpected changes that day?" etc. Additionally, when contemplating ways to teach a lesson, they also suggest thinking about how your child learns best.

Can't vs. Won't: It's also important to distinguish when a child can't do something versus when he or she won't. Often, children are perceived as being willfully disobedient when they misbehave. However, much like adults, children "have a fluctuating capacity to handle what's thrown at them." Factors such as: exhaustion, stress, confusion, or uncertainty decrease a child's capacity to appropriately manage a particular situation. In light of all of the reasons a child might struggle, Siegel and Bryson suggest it is not always possible for a child to act in accordance with who she wants to be all of the time.

Reframing Misbehavior as an Opportunity for Skill Building: When children engage in unwanted behaviors, parents are presented with an opportunity to learn more about their children and get a deeper understanding of what they need help learning. A child's behavior can provide information about what skills need to be built. As part of thoughtfully taking steps to intervene, it is helpful for parents to view these situations from the perspective of a child lacking certain skills and needing help to build them. For instance, if a child is having a tantrum, perhaps he or she needs to build skills to better assist with frustration tolerance. Similarly, if a child behaves aggressively towards a sibling over a game or toy, perhaps he or she might need to build skills to better handle themselves when they do not get what they want.

If you would like more information, please reach out to your school counselor. We are here to help you.

For further details or information, please contact your child's guidance counselor:

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