

Getting Started with “Quiet” Parenting

Recently posted was Shhhh!: “Quiet” Parenting Zone Ahead. In response, a Mom said to me, “I agree with the information in the blog, but how do I get started with more quiet parenting?” This is such a good question that I felt I would reply with this blog. Thus, this post will focus on two main ways to begin to move from a parenting style riddled with noisy “roadblocks” to one that allows for a more quiet ride to enhanced relationships between all adoptive family members.

The “roadblocks” that are being addressed are reminders, warnings, threats and lecture. These common parenting tools all have in common that the child’s capacity to think for himself is undermined. If children can’t think on their own, no change is possible. Short-term, a threat or reminder may gain greater compliance. Long-term, the behavior continues—over and over. Truly ceasing negative behaviors requires a less talk, more action approach. Or as my boss, [Greg Keck](#) says, “Less talk leads to more listening.”

Changing a parenting style is comparable to dieting. For many, deciding to diet includes a drastic plan of simultaneously ridding the house of snacks, joining a gym, drinking more water and so on! Anyone who has attempted all these changes, at one time, knows that such a large scale effort can fail fairly quickly. Actually, success in dieting can occur by making small gradual changes—over a long period of time. For example, increasing intake of fruit lends to a reduction in calories. Then, reduce trips to fast-food restaurants, etc. Modifying a parenting style is similar. Altering one or two things at a time is more effective than attempting sudden sweeping changes.

So, a first step in moving to “quiet” parenting is taking stock of the type of tools you utilize. Are you making multiple threats each day? Are you reminding from morning to night? Are you delivering warnings with no follow-through? Do the threats and warnings even make sense—can you carry them out? If so, make a commitment to rid your parenting toolbox of one or two of these. This includes monitoring the number of times each day you use the tools and identifying the situations in which you most use the technique (i.e., car, stores, etc.) Then, begin to catch yourself. Then, STOP yourself! Tell yourself, repeatedly, “I am learning to allow my children to think for themselves.” This is positive self-talk. At first, it will require effort. Eventually, it will become habitual and then you won’t have to work so hard at this. Won’t that be nice! Write a note to yourself as well with this message and place it where you will see it throughout the day. Give yourself time—change doesn’t happen overnight. This process may take several weeks to a few months.

Another dynamic of this process is to ask yourself why you continue to use these parenting methods when they are clearly not working.

Why do I parent the same way even when my methods aren’t working?

This may require some depth of thought about yourself. For example,

Katie is 9-years-old. She was adopted from the foster care system at age 4. Every morning she refuses to get up for school. Katie’s Mom, Gloria, calls her and calls her. Katie’s Dad, Paul, grows weary of this matter and so, he enters Katie’s room and states, “Get out of bed now or I’m dragging you out!” Sometimes, he actually has to pick Katie up out of bed to get her moving. This is a lot of work and as Katie gets older and bigger, this is going to be impractical and impossible to implement!

Underlying this issue is that Paul feels he must rescue his wife. He hates the way he sees Katie treating Gloria and as such, he feels he must intervene and solve the problem. He feels a loss of control within his home. His threats and actions give him a sense of mastery. While this is so nice that he wants to support Gloria, this morning routine is just that—a morning routine. Nothing is changing! Threatening is a short-term solution. This family needs a long-term way to solve this problem. Facilitating a discussion between Paul and Gloria gave the couple insight into what having control in the home really means. Gloria was satisfied with Paul's acknowledgement of the difficulties Katie presented. She really didn't expect Paul to be able to solve all of the behaviors. Paul could relax more knowing that Gloria felt supported by him without having to drag Katie out of bed each day. Resolving underlying issues leads to the ability of the couple to parent differently—quietly. This example brings us to our second point—pick your battles.

Select the two or three behaviors your troubled adoptee most needs to change. Selecting which of those behaviors to end and which to let go (for now) can be a challenge. That's right, I said pick a few things to work on and let the rest go. It will appear that the adoptee is "getting away with things."

Select one or two behaviors to work on at one time

This will be true temporarily. Actually, working on one or two behaviors will lead to more overall change. This is a difficult concept to grapple with. Try it! It will work! Keep in mind when selecting behaviors to extinguish:

- Behaviors that jeopardize the safety of the adoptee, brothers and sisters, and parents are always selected first to extinguish—violence is a good example of a behavior in this category.
- Behaviors that lend to long-term impaired functioning of the adoptee are second – stealing, for example, may lead to incarceration. So, stealing should be a priority.
- After the above two categories are covered, any behavior can be selected keeping in mind that there are some battles you cannot win. You can most likely ask a child to go to his bedroom. You can't make him sleep. You can make a child do his homework. You cannot make him turn it in. So, in deciding which behaviors to change, have realistic expectations of what you as a parent can and cannot change.

Once you identify your problem areas, replace noisy parenting methods with natural and logical consequences. If the child doesn't brush his teeth, the natural and logical consequence is that his snack becomes fruit instead of a cookie. The parent can empathically state, "I would like for you to have a cookie. However, I need to take care of your teeth until you learn how to."

Regarding Katie, Paul and Gloria, arrangements were made to have Gloria's mother, Linda, come over one morning. Katie was still sleeping when Paul and Gloria left for work. About 10:00am, Linda woke Katie up and handed her the phone. She said, "Katie, its the school wondering where you are." Katie, half-asleep, found herself explaining to the assistant principal why she wasn't in math class. Please note, this had been pre-arranged with this school professional. Since, there has been a lot less morning difficulty in this family! Of course, Katie was at first angry. Gloria, Paul and Linda remained calm and kept stating, "It's okay. They'll have third grade every year honey. School is totally up to you."

If you don't have school staff that are empathic or understanding, you may wind up driving Katie to school. However, the natural and logical consequence is that the child needs to pay for the gas and parental time. Payment can be in many forms—chores or cash. Payment may also be that while out shopping you can be sad for the child as you say, "Well, I'd like to buy you that shirt. However, I'm putting that money toward the gas it's taking to drive you to school." Then, be done—move on! Don't say, "See, how do you like it?" "How does that feel?" This is anger talking. Anger renders the natural and logical consequence ineffective.

Natural and logical consequences connect actions to outcome. Eventually, the child's brain will form new pathways and he will begin to make better decisions. Thus, natural and logical consequences enhance problem-solving skills too. The child sees or feels the result of his actions. Natural and logical consequences are free of lecture, warnings and reminders—an action simply occurs. Roadblocks are avoided as is conflict. The family atmosphere becomes more calm and relaxed. This produces an environment in which relationships can form. Natural and logical consequences allow the child to experience the outcome of his actions and this, over time, contributes to the development of logical functioning. Delivered with empathy, natural and logical consequences make for a powerful parenting tool.

Natural and logical consequences may mean waiting for the opportunity to deliver a consequence. This is fine. Everything doesn't have to be immediate. Natural and logical consequences may also mean giving up parental desires. We all want our kids to be clean, dressed well, making good grades, having friends, etc. However, we can't control all of these things. We can't make these things happen for our sons and daughters. We can only provide the opportunities and the learning experiences to help kids make the best choices possible.

Learn about new parenting methods

[Parenting with Love and Logic](#) (and other books, CDs and tapes in the Love and Logic series) by Foster Cline and Jim Fay covers natural and logical consequences in great detail. Check out their website (see Resources) to review the entire line of Love and Logic products. It makes sense and it is fun parenting once you understand it. Having more fun is the best gift you can give any of your children and yourself!

Please keep posted to this Challenged Family Building blog. Over time we are going to tackle why time-out, removal of privileges, star charts and so on are ineffective with traumatized children. We will learn how to re-place these tools with joining-in, paradox, prescribing and an array of other very helpful parenting tools! We will also have posts about enhancing the emotional climate of the home. There will be blogs about the role of nurture in healing traumatized children. Overall, a wealth of parenting directions will be available to guide your journey. Parents will be able to navigate strong and close relationships among the members of their family. Professionals will find themselves better able to map out successful pre-placement activities and post-adoption outcomes.