

Last month we talked about **Positive Discipline** and how that might look and work for your family. Today we'll review effective communication - one of the core principles of **Positive Discipline**. As with any thing else, the way you come across and how well you communicate your messages can and will make a huge difference. These cues may be helpful. They are geared towards parents of kids under three because that age set tends to bring the most parenting stress, but I think the tips pertain to families with children of all ages.

- Be respectful at all times: Discipline is communicated and enforced without humiliation, and differences are resolved with no use of put-downs, insults or name-calling. When correcting inappropriate behaviors comment on the unacceptable action not the child. For instance, a child hits their friend, instead of "No hitting-you're a bad girl!" say "You may not hit-hitting hurts!" The message is: hitting is not acceptable - I care for you, but not what you did.
- Admit it when you are stressed! Ironically, once you stop expecting parenthood to feel warm and fuzzy all the time, life as a parent gets easier. It's okay to feel frustrated, angry, or irritable sometimes, that does not mean you're a bad parent. It's not even a bad parenting experience. It's just normal.
- Spend time with your children: Children require constant education and support to grow into capable young people. Kids do not develop in a vacuum. Dads and moms who are available to play with their infant, read books with their toddler, help siblings to problem solve a rivalry issue, monitor homework or answer preteen and teen's questions about important social issues, not only provide support and information but convey the message, "You are my top priority."
- Ask open-ended questions: When talking with your child avoid questions that will illicit one word responses, such as; 'Did you have fun today? - yes! or How was school? - fine.' Instead ask; 'What did you do today? What did you like best about the field trip? or Tell me about your day...' Then really LISTEN and respond with more open-ended questions and comments. * Create a secure and loving home environment: Children flourish in homes that are stable, calm and secure. Where they know they are safe, that adults will be there when they need help. Where they feel secure knowing that gentle voices and hands will assist them during life's many ups and downs. Also, when they know that laughter and love will be plentiful.
- Talk openly with your children: Kids thrive when families communicate regularly. Discuss family issues and limits calmly and respectfully, ask for your child's point of view. Avoid yelling, nagging and lecturing. Do not try to solve problems during an argument. Instead, wait until you have calmed down, then discuss the issues in a constructive way. Be open to listening to the child's thoughts and concerns, often they will come up with an appropriate solution. Hearing the mini-crisis of your child's day may seem minor, however, a parents willingness to listen to the day to day issues encourages children to come to you for advice or council when their problems get tougher.
- Hold Family Meetings: To solve problems, set limits, create family job boards, and discuss family issues, with the cooperation of all family members. This is key to creating a respectful, loving atmosphere while helping children develop responsibility, co-operation, self-discipline, and problem solving skills. During family meetings children can help decide the logical consequences for not doing one's jobs, breaking limits, not acting responsibly, or other family problems.
- Set and enforce clear behavioral limits and guidelines: Kids need guidance and structure. They want parents who will teach them right from wrong, then reiterate those limits over and over. Often children will test limits just to see if the parent will stand firm, when parents are consistent they give their child(ren) a sense of security in knowing what to expect. Children with no clear limits feel out of control and insecure, they will push and push until someone says STOP.
- Tell them they're GREAT: Great kids feel loved by their parents. They feel independent, secure and appreciated for their individual differences and personal strengths. Encourage and support your children to grow and experience new challenges based upon their interests and talents. Continual hugs, kisses and smiles help develop a strong sense of self and let children know they are on the right track.