



Smart Mouth Can Be Cured

"What's wrong with that kid?! No respect! Every time I turn around she's talking back."

This complaint from a parent reminded me that concerns about kids who "talk back" come up often. Sassing is a frustrating problem.

Solving this problem usually means a change of behavior for both child and adult. As an adult, I like to look at my own behavior first because that is something I can control. An effective way for a parent to do this is to wait for the next time his or her youngster talks back and think, "What did I say a split second before the sassing happened?"

We often find that the child felt criticized and was reacting to the criticism. It is good to state reasonable expectations for a child, and it is very good to apply consequences with empathy for the child who does not meet the expectations. However, criticizing a youngster does not usually bring about any long term behavior change. Instead, it breeds resentment and erodes self-confidence.

Once the parent has eliminated his/her criticism, it's time to talk with the child. Brief discussion is useful, if parents remember to discuss problems with children only during happy times. The purpose of this talk is to get the child to think about his/her actions and to learn new ways of talking so that there is better understanding. The parent might begin by asking the child what he/she is angry about. It is absolutely necessary that the parent listen without defending or judging. The reaction that works best is to say, *"Thanks for sharing"*.

A parent might also say, *"Sandy, can you think of different ways you can answer me so I'll know what you really want when you talk back?"*

To the usual response, *"I don't know,"* the parent can respond, *"Well, that's sad. But I bet you can come up with some new ideas. If not, let me know if you'd like some suggestions about how adults try to handle these things. Good luck!"*

If the child has no idea what to say, the parent can ask if the child would like to hear the parent's suggestions. Some words the child might use instead of sassing are: *"That's embarrassing."* *"I'm really angry."* *"Can we talk about it?"*

We often make progress with the problem of sassing when we eliminate criticism, help the youngster express his/her real feelings, help the child find new words and then provide practice.

Tip of the Day

Children often talk back as a result of feeling criticized.

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