



Empathy Overpowers Anger

Parents who are strong enough to let kids experience the consequences of their actions also need to help kids feel loved. Too often parents or teachers mete out consequences with anger. Missing empathy, the child feels no love and blames others for his/her own mistakes.

A parent recently told a nationally-known educator on child discipline that she needed help managing the art of empathy. Here is her story:

I keep getting mad when I give consequences. I get mad at my daughter and she gets mad at me.

I almost got to empathy last week. I was so close. My daughter didn't study her spelling words. I kept hearing your voice at your last lecture here saying, "These can be great opportunities. Don't blow it by nagging."

So I didn't nag. I also heard your voice saying, "The school will provide the consequences. You can balance them with an equal amount of empathy. She came home with a 'D' on her test and I did a great job of being sorry for her. I said, "Wow! It must really be embarrassing to get a 'D'."

She got real quiet, thinking hard about what she had done. It was great! Then I heard your voice in my head again saying. "When you run out of things to say, transfer the problem to the youngster by asking a question." I said, "Wow! What are you going to do?" With the saddest little face, she said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." I had her owning her own problem and thinking hard. And then...I just had to do it. I don't know why, but I just blurted out. "And you're not going to that party on Friday!"

That did it! My kid started yelling, "What do you mean I'm not going to the party! It's not my fault I got a 'D'. You should see the words that teacher gives! She never gives us any time to study and...It's just not fair"

Isn't it amazing? It only took one remark for me to change the kid from a thinker to a fighter. So I'm back to work on empathy.

The educator, Jim Fay, of the Cline/Fay Institute in Golden, Colorado, told me recently that he hadn't seen this woman at his lectures for several months, so he said he's hoping she's mastered giving equal parts of consequences and empathy.

It helps to remember: using anger, threats and lectures rarely works with kids. Consequences need to come with empathy from parents. Parents who give out consequences in loving, firm tones find this far from easy. But it works.