

Avoiding the “Parent Traps”

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The “Parent Traps” are what I call those things that we do as parents that do not work; yet we continue to do them anyway. Sometimes we think, *“I know this never works, but I’ll try it just one more time”*. Of course we are not surprised when it does not work after all, but we don’t know what else to do. Albert Einstein once said, *“The definition of insanity is endlessly repeating the same process and expecting a different result”*. So, remember, if your old attempted solutions are not working, try something different.

Arguing

You are the parent and you are the adult. Therefore, you are in charge and your child is not. Sometimes we forget these things and wind up in arguments with our children. Your daughter asks *“Mom can I have a cookie?”* You reply, *“No dear, we’re getting ready for dinner and it will spoil your appetite.”* Then the script goes like this between the two of you, *“No it won’t, yes it will, no it won’t, yes it will...”* At this point you finally remember that you are the parent and ask yourself *“Why am I arguing with a six-year-old?”*

We let this occur all too often. The solution is to set the limit, enforce the limit and refuse to argue. If two people are having a tug of war and one drops the rope, the game is over. Essentially you assert your authority and there is no argument. Simply say, *“You may have a cookie after you eat your dinner and I’m not going to argue about it!”* If they continue to argue they receive a loss of privileges as a consequence.

Threatening

Most parents at one time or another threaten their children with dire consequences. I refer to “threatening”, in this sense, as consequences parents have no intention of implementing. In a fast food restaurant a young boy is running away from his mother and being silly. She is in a long line at the counter and says to him, *“Come over here right now!... Brian come here, I said... If you don’t come here we’re leaving right now.”* He says to her, knowing from his experience, *“We’re not leaving.”* He then keeps playing and ignores his mother who then stays in line and orders the food.

A little boy calls out to his father, after the child has been in bed for thirty minutes, *“Dad, I’m thirsty, can you bring me a glass of water?”* Dad sits on the couch, tired from a long day at work, he replies *“I told you to get water before you went to bed, now be quiet and go to sleep”*. Five minutes later the boy calls out *“Dad I’m really thirsty, please bring me some water and I promise I’ll go right to sleep.”* Dad is really mad now *“I’m not bringing you any water, now go to sleep or I’m going to come into your room and give you a spanking!”* Five minutes later the boy calls out, *“Dad, when you come in here to give me a*

spanking would you please bring me a glass of water?" This kid knows dad won't budge off of that couch. He's heard that threat before.

Sometimes following through with consequences means making sacrifices. If a trip to the movies depends upon good behavior and the child acts out severely, then we have to miss the movie. When we do not follow through on behavioral consequences, the child is given the message that he can act however he pleases and escape the consequences. If you allow them to avoid accepting responsibility for their behavior in this way only once in a while it is enough to foster their continued acting out.

Asking: "Why did you do that?"

Every parent in the world has, at one time, asked his or her child "*Why did you do that?*" The answer from the child is always the same "*I don't know!*" Never again should you ask this question. It only frustrates you and your children.

Furthermore, what answer would satisfy you? Your daughter hits her younger brother and you ask her "*Why did you do that?*" Her response is most likely "*I don't know*", but she might say, "*He hit me first!*" You snap at her "*That doesn't give you the right to hurt him, look he's crying!*" Whatever answer they give us will not be good enough. Therefore do not ask that question. Simply tell them this behavior is not acceptable, give a brief explanation why it is not all right and give them the appropriate consequence.

Raising children is at times demanding and exhausting. To be successful you must not only avoid the "Parent Traps" but remember to take time for yourselves and your marriage. Re-energized parents are better able to nurture their children.