

NOTES FROM UPSTREAM

News from the Arkansas Children's Trust Fund

Winter 2013

Do As I'm Doing: Modeling Good Behavior

Parenting education often focuses on techniques for modifying children's behavior. While it can't hurt to have some strategies for improving children's behavior in your toolbox, the best instrument for shaping your child's development is your own attitude and behavior.

According to Lisa Firestone, "Being a positive role model for good behavior is far more powerful than specific training or disciplinary measures in raising children".¹ But as Bruno Bettelheim observed, "While most parents are ready to teach their children discipline, and know that they are the ones to do so, they are less ready to accept that they can teach [quite effectively] only by example".¹

We act in ways with our children that our parents did with us

For better or worse, our attitudes and beliefs are primarily shaped by those of our parents. This can be a good thing, when positive identification with qualities we liked in our parents helps us take on characteristics we respect or admire. Unfortunately, negative traits in our parents, especially those that caused us anger, fear or frustration, can also impact our adult behavior.

It is not uncommon for scenarios reminiscent of our own childhood to arise when we become parents. Then for good or bad, most parents will reenact how they themselves were parented. Every parent has the experience at some point of doing exactly what they said they would never do—acting with or speaking to their child as their parents did to them. Even as they are doing it, they may recognize that it is ineffective, or even harmful, but still rely on their default model of parenting.

The good news is that parents can become more like the parent they want to be, regardless of how they were parented. At any time, parents can consciously identify the behaviors they want to see in their children, and then seek ways to develop this behavior in first themselves, and then their children.

You are a role model

Just as your behavior was shaped by your parents, your children's behavior will be influenced by you. Lynn Barnett offers her three absolute truths of parenting children by being a good role model:²

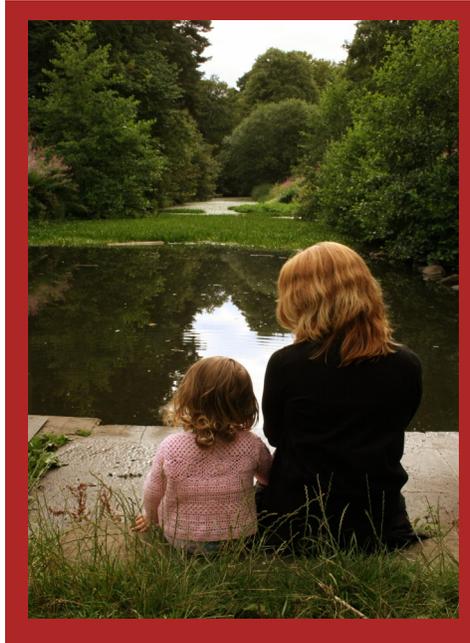
1. Don't do it if you don't want your child to do it. Children develop behaviors through observing their parents and other adults in day-to-day life. For example, studies have long shown that a family history of substance abuse significantly increases the chances that the children will also abuse substances.

Lisa Firestone suggests the alternative, where "every behavior that a parent engages in should be worthy of imitating because children will imitate it".¹ She cites a 2010 research study by Robert Epstein of 2000 parents about what makes a good parent.³ In his list of the ten most important parenting competencies, just five of them were about the parent/child relationship. The other five related only to the parent, and three specifically mentioned

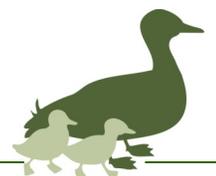
modeling positive behaviors.¹

2. Role model the "golden rule". Young Sarah and her mother were invited to lunch at a friend's house. As the plate was placed before her, Sarah exclaimed "I don't like chunky peanut butter! You know I only eat creamy peanut butter!"

Sarah's mother politely pointed out that their hostess had made these sandwiches especially for them. When Sarah still refused to try the sandwich, her mother simply stated that Sarah would only be having a glass of milk for lunch.



see *Good Behavior*, page 4



Success Stories

In Stuttgart (Arkansas), people stereotype me every day because I had a child at a young age. I admit that it changed me a lot because I was very involved in extra-curricular activities. Just because I had a baby does not mean that my life is over, it does not mean that I cannot be somebody. I have the same opportunities that I had before. I may have to work harder, but that will not hurt me. When I set my mind to something I will do it. My grades are good, I still attend school functions and in June I attended ACT camp at the U of A in Fayetteville.

My town and community are also stereotyped. When people talk about Stuttgart, they say “our little town does not have much going on”. I have a different point of view. I like Stuttgart, even though it needs some improvement. It needs more youth-centered activities and more places for teens like myself to go on weekends.

Stereotyping can be a dangerous thing. Many people react differently. It only made me want to thrive for more out of life and prove everybody wrong that doubted me. I will be that college graduate and not that high school dropout. I act the same way with Stuttgart. When I hear negative things about it, it makes me want to do more. I just feel like I myself can make that difference. Don't judge a book by its cover.

*Submitted by Chelsea Rice
PEP, Inc.
Stuttgart, Arkansas*



Ananda Martin of Healthy Connections, Inc. demonstrates the proper use of a child passenger seat during a Safety Baby Shower. Children's Trust Fund grantees conducted the showers during 2012. The program was funded by a grant from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas.

Coming in April
Family Strengthening Month
watch our web site for details
www.arkansasctf.org



Save the Date:

15th Annual Arkansas Conference for
Parenting Education & Home Visitation

September 23-24, 2013
Hot Springs, Arkansas

Top 10 Bad Parenting Habits

10: Not Following Through. Failing to enforce the consequences of bad behavior, or failing to follow through on a promise of some kind, makes your child see you as unreliable and easily manipulated. And when engaging in the bad behavior carries no consequences, your child has no reason to change it. If you want to change someone else's behavior, the best place to start is by changing yours. Set the limit, communicate the consequence and then calmly follow through when your child steps out of line. Keep your word.

9: Not Setting Limits. Limits let kids know which behaviors are acceptable and which aren't. These limits are essential for safety and household harmony, but they also help children feel secure by showing that you care and that you want to keep them safe. Limits also help your child develop a sense of responsibility for his or her actions. Keep limits few, basic and clear. Keep in mind your child's level of maturity and his or her ability to meet certain expectations.

8: Failing to Stretch Limits. It can be hard to accept your child's growing independence and separateness, and hard to relax your need to protect him or her. When you think your child is ready for looser rules -- or when he or she starts demanding them -- talk about it. Discuss options for expanded rules and come to agreement. This shows respect for your child's growing maturity. Taking part in deciding the new rules also makes kids feel responsible for sticking to them.

7: Consistently Giving In to Your Kids. When you constantly give in to pressure from your child, you've given up your role as parent. You're no longer guiding your child toward responsible behavior and sound decision-making. Negotiating and coming to a mutually agreeable compromise is sometimes appropriate. But when the short answer to a certain request is "no," and the long answer is "no way," make it immediately clear to your child that you're not budging on this issue and they need to move on.

6: Acting Like a Servant. Chores aren't punishment. They give children a sense of belonging and worth, and they teach skills that will help kids enter the world of independence with confidence. Explain that everyone in the household, even a younger child, is expected to share the work. Explain that certain privileges depend on doing

chores correctly and in a timely manner. Be specific about what items or activities you'll take away if your kid doesn't complete assigned duties, and make sure that you're willing and able to follow through. Explain that privileges will be returned when he or she regains his or her household work ethic.

5: Using Intimidation. Emotions are normal and natural. But just as you want to model good behavior for your child, it's important to model self-control of emotions. Some ways to avoid the appearance of intimidation include taking a deep breath, sitting down at eye level, and putting your hands in your pockets or lightly holding your child's hands to avoid waving or pointing. Focus on the problem, not the child.

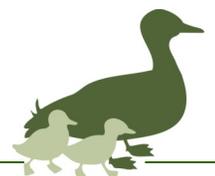
4: Being a Friend Before Being a Parent. You're not a friend; you're a parent. And that's what your child needs and wants you to be. You can't simultaneously be a pal and tell your kids what they can and can't do.

3: Comparing and Criticizing. Verbal putdowns aren't constructive criticism, and kids don't feel motivated to improve their behavior because of negative comparisons. Instead of making negative comparisons between your children, or between your child and his peers, identify your child's unique strengths and qualities and cultivate an appreciation for them.

2: Doing Too Much. Parents want their kids to have choices, opportunities and nice things. They want them to be happy. But instead of ordering the latest gadget or signing your child up for yet another activity, schedule time together. Kids just want your time and attention.

1: Not Listening Enough. Listening is an important part of helping your child work through problems and make decisions. Instead of telling your kid what to do in a given situation, ask him or her to tell you what he or she wants the ultimate outcome to be. Ask to hear your child's thoughts on how to get to that endpoint. Ask guiding questions and offer encouragement as they develop a plan or solution. Then hold your breath, hope for the best and let your kid learn from experience.

Kolich, H. (n.d.). *10 bad parenting habits*. Retrieved from <http://health.howstuffworks.com>



RESOURCES

What Makes a Good Parent?

The Parents' Ten were identified by Dr. Robert Epstein as the parenting skills that research says produce good outcomes with children.

1. Expressing Love and Affection
2. Stress Management
3. Relationship Skills
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education and Learning
6. Life Skills
7. Behavior Management
8. Health
9. Religion
10. Safety

For more information about the study and examples of the Parents' Ten, visit www.drrobertepstein.com.

To take the test that was used in the study, go to <http://MyParentingSkills.com>.

Good Behavior, continued

Sarah's mother modeled the golden rule. She showed respect for Sarah's choice while remaining calm and showing respect for their hostess. Missing lunch didn't cause Sarah any harm, but the opportunity to observe good manners was a valuable one.

3. Get on the same page with those you are parenting with (spouse, partner, extended family). Surround yourself with friends and relatives who support you as a parent. Children need to see their parents and family members consistently behaving in ways that are accepted as family behaviors. Where the parents or adults disagree, children will spot a discrepancy between talk and behavior, or a weak spot to be exploited. Parents who find it necessary to live with family members who don't fully support them would do well to find a parenting group, church family, or other support system. The most effective way for parents to teach

Be Out There

A survey from the National Wildlife Federation shows that 94 percent of parents says kids aren't getting enough time outside. Extreme weather, safety concerns and the lure of technology keep many kids indoors.

The "Be Out There" campaign from the National Wildlife Federation offers tips and advice to parents who pledge to help get their kids outdoors every week. Their website, BeOutThere.org offers lists for rainy-day activities, tips on weather-proofing outdoor adventures, and directories to nearby play areas. The goal is to make it easier for parents to guide children to more outdoor time in spite of barriers, especially as recesses have been reduced, and busy schedules cut into outside play.



children the values they want them to replicate is to live them at every opportunity.

Most parents want to be considered "good" parents with "good" children. This begins by providing good role models. They can build on the positive traits they learned from the adults in their own lives or they can identify new characteristics they want to see in their family. Either way, parents and children alike will benefit from the effort to parent by good example.

1. Firestone, L. (2010 Oct 11). *How to be a good parent: It's all about you!*. Retrieved from www.psychologytoday.com/blog/compassion-matters/201011/
2. Barnett, L. (2011 Nov 22). *Role modeling good behavior*. Retrieved from www.midamericacounseling.com
3. Epstein, R. (2010). *What makes a good parent?*. Retrieved from <http://drrobertepstein.com>

Arkansas Children's Trust Fund

415 North McKinley Suite 462
Little Rock, AR
501.664.2227

www.arkansasctf.org