
Notes from the Director

March 1, 2019

Dear Parents,

Hearing what someone says is challenging. It's not that we don't listen; it's rather that the person talking to us is trying to express herself rather than trying to help us understand what she's saying. You see, we don't talk to communicate, we talk to express ourselves. And because we focus on finding the right words to describe how we're thinking or feeling, we never learn how to talk to others so that they understand what we're trying to say, so focused are we on trying to articulate what we're thinking or feeling. Hence, we can say with assuredness that if we manage to communicate with each other that this is some kind of miracle!

Because we don't talk to communicate, we seldom do communicate by talking and this causes a lot of problems for us. We end up misunderstanding a lot of what is said to us and thus we function with incorrect information. We hear the other person say, "no, you don't understand, that's not what I mean." But meanwhile we think we heard what the person said and we continue to think wrongly that we understand.

I have been talking for a long time about the ineffectiveness of punishment on children. And I mean that it is ineffective for us adults to punish our kids. Punishment doesn't change a kid's behavior. Don't punish your kids. It doesn't work. So when I say, "punishment is ineffective," I hope you hear, "don't punish your kids."

When I was visiting my youngest child, now 45 and the father of three boys, his middle child, seven years young, pulled the arm of the babysitter in a hurtful way. My son called me over to tell me what happened and said this was not the first time. He said he has spoken to his son about it but it keeps happening. My son said he thinks his son doesn't like that she can boss him around when they're not home. My son said, "Mom, now we are going to punish him. What punishment should we do?"

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My thoughts were jumping around in my head. Punishment doesn't work, doesn't work, doesn't work kept echoing. How could he now think after all I've said about the reasons not to use punishment that he should now resort to an ineffective action that doesn't work. Hadn't he been listening? Or rather, what did he think he heard? He thought I said, "Use punishment as a last resort, when reasoning doesn't work, when talking doesn't work, when you can't get him to mind you. When he defies you."

I wondered to myself, "How could he have heard that when I never said that?" Well, communication is a miracle and miracles are few!

Because I have spent over 50 years in the classroom as a teacher of young children, I have witnessed enough actions against children to have become an advocate for them. And most children need an advocate! Children are pretty powerless, even the tyrants that some parents are producing now are still not as powerful as their parents.

And as an advocate for children, I have worked very hard to help parents gain some parenting skills. One way I do this is to make sure the parents of the children I am teaching have a chance to hear experts in the field of child psychology with whom I agree. Such a person is Dr. Ross Greene. Mark your calendars, get your tickets, space is limited and you don't want to miss his talk on Thursday, March 21, 6:30-8:30pm. Since you don't have a degree in child rearing give yourself at least two hours of information that you and your children need for you to do. Give yourself some education. It might be the beginning of something wonderful for your whole family.

More later,
Janice Mattina
Founding Head