



## Leveled at the behavior... what does that mean?

If a child yells we tend to send them to their room because they were disrespectful or rude, if they roll their eyes or have an aggressive attitude, there are consequences. But we want to present you an option that may transform those moments to times of learning and growth for your children and less frustration for you as parents.

But before talking about correction and dealing with behavior, we need to remember that connection comes first. Children can only receive what you want to give when they feel connected and accepted by you.

**An unregulated child won't be able to learn in the moment of distress. You have to give them some time, validate his/her emotion and wait next to him/her until they're calm. Always next to them so at the end of the correction the end goal will be connection.**

Children who have suffered from trauma through a relationship, whether it's through abandonment, abuse, neglect, etc., can only heal through a trusting relationship. And this will take time and hundreds of repetitions until it is formed in their minds the trust and the reality of a new and different relationship.

Some key components to help and promote your children's healing are:

- deep connection between you as parents and your child,
- understanding that their behaviors are mostly survival strategies,
- being able to meet their emotional and physical needs,
- give value to their voice,
- praise them & celebrate small accomplishments.

To ensure connection, no matter how long your children have lived with you, whether its 2 weeks or 2 years, we recommend to go out of your way to show affection and

warmth. Don't expect them to come to you or be thankful because you "rescued" them and gave them a new life. When you express affection on a daily basis, it's more likely that eventually they'll be able to do it on their own.

Just like it takes a baby thousands of interactions in the first year to develop a secure attachment with his caretaker, for your child is going to take much more because of what they lived at the beginning of their lives either didn't allow for a secure attachment to be made, or it broke the secure attachment they had. It's necessary to replace many toxic and unhealthy ideas and behaviors in their minds for those new and healthy ones.

**We all make mistakes, what makes the difference is when we acknowledge them, take the opportunity to learn and improve. Sometimes it will be necessary to face it and ask our children for forgiveness. Remind your child your intention is not to hurt them, that you love him/her and you're there to protect them. In addition remember that you are modeling what you expect to be the response of your child when he/she makes a mistake.**

When we get into the routine of using only rules and punishment with children from hard places and leave aside the nurture, we send them farther down the path of maladaptive behaviors. In the same way, when we provide little structure we don't meet their needs and their defiant behaviors escalate. We need to find a balance between structure and nurture. There is not a perfect formula that works for every child, but it's important that you seek that balance.

Professionals and researchers recommend the *sandwich technique*, for every constructive criticism or rebuke, give a compliment before and after. Other investigations back up the importance of words of affirmation or encouragement. It's important to plant seeds of love, truth and care, because having spent many years without their family and the internal messages they have had grow in their minds are negative and toxic.

Take advantage of their mistakes to teach them how to do it properly using "re-do's", which is just a term for "try again". You can even come up with your own term with your child or teenager like: round two, take two, etc. They need it and they want it even though they don't know how to ask for it.

### **Examples**

"I expect that you clean up your room before I get home, then you will be able to go play". In the case that you get home from work and he didn't clean his room, instead of letting anger guide your response try with a calm voice saying: "do you remember what you were supposed to do before I got home?" in spite of their answer, remind them: "I told you that I expected you to clean your room before I got home". Give him the chance to clean his room and encourage him for doing so. However, he won't be able to play what he wanted, but you can give him other options and say something like: "I'm glad you cleaned up your room. it looks great! but I told you to do it before I got home if you wanted to play with your friends. However, you can read a book or come watch TV with me", let them choose and try to always offer 2 to 3 options.

You can vary the options, but keep your boundaries and try to keep the consequence to the same level of your child's fault. Slamming the door, cussing and hitting their brother are in different levels, so keep your calm and instead of letting anger direct your steps, find alternatives that teach your child to behave appropriately.

- "I understand you're feeling angry, but you cannot slam the door in this house,

try that again" and wait until he does that, when he does, encourage him by being specific. Do not expect perfection, remember it takes time.

- "I know you're feeling frustrated, but you cannot use those words in this house, try again with respect". Give her time to do it. If she takes too long to think you can guide her into what words to use. Sometimes they really don't know exactly what to say and it's important to teach them about their emotions from scratch.
- "I understand he took your toy from you, and you feel it's unfair, but it's never ok to hit, come with me". It might be necessary in this case to have a time-in (sit next to them or close by until he/she calms down and is able to think about what happened) Guide them in what happened, in asking for forgiveness to the other child and to do it again with respect. Always give them the chance to do it again the right way, this is what's going to help them know what to do the next time. After many repetitions.

### **Remember...**

- Their chronological age is different than their emotional age.
- Take a deep breath and give them the chance to try again.
- Explain beforehand, every day, the expectations and/or instructions. It may be exhausting for you but little by little it will become instilled in their minds.
- Re-do's are not a form of punishment, it's a strategy to help them succeed in their interactions and an opportunity for you to experience more calm at home.
- It takes hundreds of repetitions of a behavior for it to become part of their mind or regular functioning.
- *Change happens more quickly in a nurturing environment where they feel safe.*

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## **Where in the Word?**

In the 5th chapter of the book of John, we read that Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda, which means "house of mercy", and there laid many people with different illnesses or disabilities.

Among them, was a man that had been there for 38 years. And Jesus meets this person at the house of mercy and asks him: "do you want to be healed?" and instead of saying yes or no, he basically says "I can't". That's not what Jesus asked, but in spite of his inability to respond, Jesus tells him: "Get up, pick up your mat and walk", and instantly the man is healed (Jn 5:1-8).

Can we think of ourselves receiving these children in our house, being a place where they find mercy from us? And what is mercy? it's compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. It doesn't mean we will never be firm, as you can see Jesus was firm when he told him what to do, but you see, Jesus went to find him where he was which implies connection, saw his need, and guided him specifically in what to do.

We pray that God continues to give you wisdom in how to keep a balance between nurture and structure for your family. Every child and his needs are different and God knows that well. We're also his children and His ways with us are full of mercy and grace, and that includes loving discipline so we may become more like His Son Jesus. May you be blessed with His love today and the rest of the week.

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