

Teaching note #3 Speak Louder

Relationship building – Usually the less said and the calmer it is said the more effective it is. For the most part be very brief in pointing out what they are doing wrong or just did wrong. At times do not even point out what they did wrong. Instead just re-direct or teach them the appropriate action.

Definition of brief: It is simply stating the situation one time, it is not going on and on. It should usually be unemotional, save the emotional for really important matters.

Definition of re-direct: Simply telling (directing) the person to do something. An example: A child is being too loud and you have calmly asked them to not be so loud. They continue to be loud, so instead of asking them again to be calm, you simply instruct them to go do something entirely different.

I would like to talk about attachment disorder. I will use an example of a story that an adopted mother told me. She said she was always complaining to her daughter that she could not hear her. The mother would ask her daughter a question and her daughter would speak so quietly in responding the mother would have to say I can't hear you. This was extremely frustrating to the mom. She would hear her talk to her siblings and talk to other kids and she would talk very loud, so loud in fact at times the mother would have to ask her not to talk so loud. Yet when the mother or others in authority asked her a question even ones which were not confrontational the daughter would talk so softly the mother couldn't hear.

The mother asked me what she should do. I told her it sounded like RAD (reactionary attachment disorder) to me. That it was a disability. That she should not blame or shame her daughter but that she should try to understand what is wrong and try to help her daughter. That the mom needed to realize that her daughter was probably not doing it on purpose. Her daughter needed help. That it is important to work on building their relationship.

A child with RAD has an unreasonable sickness. I started to say an invisible sickness, but at times you certainly can see its symptoms. I have known kids that did ok in a group home or a foster home where they were not being asked to love and be loved. I have seen these same children start having bad behaviors when placed in a loving pre-adoption home or a loving foster home.

It is as if they want the parents to reject them. This is usually very sub-conscious. Because they've been hurt in the past or perceived that they been hurt in the past they often have a very hard time trusting or loving others. Do not take it personal, it is an illness in them. Be patient, be calm, and gently work with them.

Realize this may just be the way it will be, but they may get better. Your getting upset will not help, it will only make things worst.

At times I have suggested to parents a very radical technique, to be less loving but not to be harsh. To be available to their child when they want love but not to force it upon them. It makes sense that if the child's behaviors are okay in a group home and then not ok in a loving home. Then if we as parents will create that atmosphere for them in our home and let them become comfortable in our homes that there is the possibility that they will then be able to make progress towards bonding.

A well-known adoption/attachment therapist told me about a child who simply could not attach to his wonderful adoptive parents. She worked with him for years to no avail. She honestly felt that this young man would never be able to attach to any one. Several years later he came up to her at a mall and introduced his baby and his wife, he was obviously attached.

So even if you do not appear to be making progress it does not mean that you are not. Remain calm, do not shame and blame, do not judge them, do not take personally their actions or attacks. I often remind myself that I'm not only teaching them for the present but I'm also teaching to their future. Unfortunately, all too often they do not get it in the present.

A parent recently told me that they were talking with their son who lives on the streets and that he had said that it didn't matter how wonderful of a family you were or how terrific parents you were, by the time I got to you when I was seven I had been so deeply hurt and damaged that there was no way I would ever trust you or make myself vulnerable to anyone again. No matter what you tried to do for me I refuse to let you in or make it work. I'm really sorry for all the conflicts that were between us. It was almost always me. Now, I'm homeless and I still struggle to trust anyone.

The boy went on to say that most street people are messed up because of their mom's drinking and doing drugs while pregnant.

This boy is homeless and is still struggling to trust anyone, he has options available for housing, education, employment, but won't take them, he insists in doing it his way.

For parents who are struggling with children with attachment disorders I highly recommend the book "Wounded Children, Healing Homes," by Jayne Schooler. A common statement after a person reads this book is that the authors wrote it about their family. It explains a lot about why our children are sometimes the way they are. It also talks about how fetal alcohol and other disabilities compound the problem.

Hope comes from understanding. Be calm, be as loving as they can handle, be there for them.

If I can be of help please give me a call John Hays (of Adoption Support Network) 218-969-2116 or e-mail me at johnhays@nacac.org. Thank you