

Confession: I'm Too Harsh on My Kids

Recently, I realized I'm too harsh with my kids.

The other day, I was driving with my two kids in the backseat. My daughter started to do things that annoyed my son. He was clearly upset and started laying into her. Immediately, I noticed his harsh words and tone. My daughter was hurt and began to cry.

That didn't stop him from continuing. Then I became upset and was about to shout at him to stop when he slammed her with familiar words, "Don't you ever do that again!" He used the same exact words and tone I had used with him before. It was ugly. He was merely acting out what I had modeled to him. Too many times, I respond in frustration rather than good sound guidance.

Parents need to be firm, but harshness can cause significant damage. Don't get me wrong. Sometimes a harsh truth is an appropriate wake-up call for personal growth. This is particularly true when the person continues in repeated misbehavior.

However, it is an issue when harshness is the norm. These four simple steps helped me change harsh and angry to strong and sound. If you struggle with this, it will help you too:

1. Admit it. When you hear your kids repeating your harshness, admit to yourself and them that you modeled the wrong thing. Apologize to your kids and then tell them how they should speak and act. Tell your wife or a trusted friend. Ask them to put a hand on your shoulder when you start going down the harsh road. This will help propel you into changed behavior.

2. Write It down. Identify and write down all of the things

your kids do that cause you frustration. Think about why it makes you angry. Again, talk it over with your wife or friend. Then craft your most ideal response to each. Keep in mind what you can teach your child in each scenario. Nothing will give you more joy than when you hear your kids repeating the great things you said to them in a calm and gentle way.

3. Prepare in the morning. These encounters will arrive throughout the day. Say this to yourself and understand this reality so you can be prepared. Look the list over in the morning. Memorize your responses so they flow naturally.

4. Review at night. Before bed, review the day. How did you do? What improvements can you make? If you're married, ask your wife for feedback. At different times, it would even be good to ask your kids. Focus on getting better each day. Don't be afraid to pat yourself on the back. Be encouraged by the harsh words that have disappeared.

Sound off: What are some other ways to avoid harsh responses? Huddle up with your kids and ask, "Are there times when I'm too harsh?"

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