

Is Consistency Overrated?

“Consistency is overrated.” I love that statement!

“That is the most freeing statement I’ve heard in a long time.” That’s what one mom said when we freed her from the guilt she experienced because she couldn’t always be consistent. She continued, “It makes so much sense now. Thank you.” Here’s what we told her.

If you’re doing simple behavior modification, then consistency is essential. Giving the reward or punishment every time you see the behavior will reinforce change. But if you’re using a heart-based approach, you have more effective tools you can use to make lasting change.

Behavior modification as a science began in the early 1900s when Pavlov made some exciting discoveries as he worked with dogs. If he consistently rang a bell just before he fed the dogs, then he could get the dogs to salivate by simply ringing the bell. This discovery of how to motivate a dog was picked up by Watson in the 1920s and he began to apply behavior modification to people. In fact, it wasn’t long before behavior modification became a primary way to help people stop smoking, lose weight and deal with a host of other behavioral issues.

Kids Are Not Animals

People, however, are different from animals because they have hearts and that affects the learning process. The heart contains things like emotions, desires, convictions and passion. In short, the heart is a wrestling place where decisions are made. A child’s tendencies come from the heart. When a child lies to get out of trouble, that’s a heart issue. If a brother reacts with anger each time his sister is annoying, that’s a heart issue. Simply focusing on behavior may provide some quick change, but lasting change takes place

in the heart.

Parents who simply use behavior modification often end up with kids who look good on the outside while having significant problems on the inside. Consistency can teach kids to appear good, clean and nice, but other parenting skills must be added to the picture in order to help children change their hearts.

Here's Rhonda's Story

Rhonda finds this principle particularly helpful. "I have four kids and a household to run. Invariably I'd have to sacrifice consistency in an area with one or more of my kids to accomplish my other tasks. When I realized that there's more to parenting than just being consistent, it freed me up to work on bigger goals with my kids. Now I realize that there's much more to parenting and I feel empowered with other tools as well. I'm continually asking question about my children's hearts and I'm learning a lot about how to mold and influence them to go in the right direction. I'm seeing more change in my kids with this new approach."

Please don't misunderstand us. Consistency is important, especially when kids are young. But if you think more broadly about parenting and embrace creativity into your training, then you'll be more effective at molding the hearts of your kids at any age. Your primary task as parent is to teach your kids, and a little work in the creativity department can make all the difference.

Deuteronomy 11:18-20 not only tells parents to train their kids, but it tells them how to do it. Notice the opportunities God designed for creativity: "Therefore you must fix these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, so that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall write them

on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

If you take that verse apart, you’ll start thinking about your own home and your own kids and creative ways to teach them about life.

Even in Old Testament times God knew that kids learn best through life experiences. Thinking beyond behavior, to the hearts of your kids will give you new insights and freedom.

*This parenting tip comes from the book, **The Christian Parenting Handbook, 50 Heart-Based Strategies for all the Stages of Your Child’s Life** by Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN. **These 50 strategies help you add creativity to your parenting and see beyond the behavior problems.***