

# Loving Your Kids Through Their Disobedience

I have three sons ages 24, 20, and three. The thing I love about boys is they adore their mom. My approval of them matters and I forget sometimes that my disapproval hits the heart of a boy.

I've been reminded of this after raising another young boy after having big guys around the house. After adopting Casey last year, we went through months and months of therapy to build a bond. When he first came to our home, Casey could care less what I thought of him (or his actions!). He did what he did because he wanted to.

His favorite thing was dumping. Dumping a gallon of milk on the floor. Dumping all the laundry detergent. Dumping every bucket of toys he could find. Sigh.

As our bond was built, Casey's actions changed too. When he was choosing whether or not to dump toys, his decisions were based on more than just the fun factor. He looked to me—his mom—and learned to seek my approval.

When Casey does something good, he looks to me for praise. When he does something he knows he shouldn't, he looks to me, wondering what my response is going to be. Knowing how to behave and consider others is important, but I have to remind myself there is something my boys need to know most of all: my love is not tied to their performance. They need to know this deep down, and they need to hear these words from us, "While I am thankful for your obedience, son, I still love you even when you choose to disobey. I hope you'll make better choices next time, but I still love you."

I started thinking about the importance of this recently because every time Casey disobeyed and had to face

consequences, he asked me the question, " Do you still love me?" I don't know where he got that from, but I know his concern is genuine. If any kid understands this, it's this one. He is a child that has come from a "hard place."

In the first two years of his life he moved six times for "placements." Even though he could hardly talk, he'd learned a lot in his young life. "I better be good or I'm going to have to go to another home." The truth is that none of the chances in his placements had to do with his obedience—but try explaining that to a young heart still trying to figure out this world.

And the truth is, Mom, that even though your son might not be so vocal, the question is still there, "Mom, I've messed up...but do you still love me?"

Yes, we get frustrated. Yes, we sometimes are short with our boys. But even on those days when we keep calm and react as we should, the worry and fear still rises up in our sons' heart.

Because of my littlest son's question, I'm doing better and reminding him often—with my words as much as my deeds—of my love.

Here's your breakfast . . . do you remember I love you?

Let's go for a walk . . . I love being with you, and I love you.

That was not a good choice, and you have to be disciplined . . . but I love you all the same.

I guarantee this is a concern deep in every boy's heart, but thankfully today your words—your assurance of your love—can make all the difference, today and every day of your son's life.

**Tricia Goyer** *has written more than 35 books, including both novels that delight and entertain readers and nonfiction*

*titles that offer encouragement and hope. She has also published more than 500 articles in national publications such as Guideposts, Thriving Family, Proverbs 31, and HomeLife Magazine.*