

Why Your Child Needs a Safe Place to Fail

Shepherding the hearts of our kids is one of those daily behaviors that does more to refine and challenge me than anything else in my life. In my interactions with my kids, God reveals more to me about my own humanity than I care to know—particularly in disciplinary situations.

One thing I've learned about kids is that I cannot control their actions. There are times when I try. There are times I guide, nudge, remind, even harass. Yet in the end, *they* decide what action they will take. Not me.

I don't know about you, but that really gets under my skin. It's something I have to actively submit to the Father, asking Him for guidance and patience. Recently He brought Ephesians 4:29 back onto my radar:

"Don't say anything that would hurt another person. Instead, speak only what is good so that you can give help wherever it is needed. That way, what you say will help those who hear you" (GWT).

It's a timely reminder for me that my role as mom is to fight for the hearts of my kids—to create a culture of unconditional love in my home that fuels their emotional and moral health. Approaching discipline in a way that is helpful takes practice, planning and patience.

I've got to practice the way that I talk to my kids. That means that through my everyday interactions, I need to habitually speak words that are helpful to them. It's easier to do this in positive interactions than negative.

However, if I fail to speak helpful words in a positive interaction, it's guaranteed I won't speak them in a negative

interaction. Good discipline is preceded by good planning. If my child makes the wrong decision, what are the consequences?

Do my kids know those consequences? There have been times we've sent a child to their room, letting them know, "We're going to think about the right consequences for your action. In a little while, we'll sit down with you and talk through them."

Patience is a discipline I continue to wrestle down. I'm inherently impatient. Yet patience is critical when fighting for the heart of my child. Why? Because they are going to make mistakes. And my ability to be patient with their mistakes communicates an unconditional love to them. They need a safe place to mess up and know they are capable of doing better the next time.

Gina McClain is a speaker, writer and children's ministry director at Faith Promise Church in Knoxville, Tenn. Her marriage to Kyle keeps her marginally sane, while their three kids (Keegan, Josie and Connor) keep her from taking herself too seriously. Visit her blog at [for more information about her ministry.](#)