



## Making Connections with Our Children

At some point, parents are faced with choosing what to do when children exceed the limit, break an agreement, or step outside the rules. If a parent chooses punishment, his underlying belief is that children must be made to feel so bad about their misbehavior that they will never do it again. Unfortunately, when we punish, we also push our children away. We create distance in the relationship. This becomes clear when we remember moments from our own childhood when we were punished. While you were grounded, did you spend your time contemplating how you could have handled the situation better or did you consider how you could do it next time without getting caught? Did you feel close to dad when he sent you to your room following a lecture or were you thinking he was a jerk? Did you ask him for help with your homework or did you decide to stick it out alone because you were afraid of his reaction? How could your parents have handled the situation more respectfully? Our level of connection with our children is directly related to our level of effectiveness. The deeper our connection, the more influential we are. Being influential means our children will come to us for help in solving problems, that they will listen to us and honor our requests, and that we have a more peaceful, cooperative home. Here are some ways to connect and build stronger relationships with our children:

**Do something each day to recognize your child.** Notice them when they enter the room. Recognize their helpfulness. Focus on their positive contributions. Do more listening and less talking. Be a part of their team rather than an adversary so that you can help them be successful.

**Choose consequences over punishment.** Consequences are respectful, reasonable, related to the misbehavior or mistake, and they teach responsibility. They can even be fun. An agreement is the foundation for effective consequences. Children know what to expect if they choose to break their agreement. A consequence for a child who paints the house plant is for them to take charge of caring for the plant. They can make sure it regularly gets water and enough sunlight. This consequence is an opportunity to learn rather than a time to feel bad. A child who constantly sneaks candy -- when they have an agreement that candy is eaten as a treat with parental permission -- can give a presentation to the family on healthy eating. They can be in charge of selecting healthy snacks at the grocery store. Again, these consequences are respectful opportunities for your child to learn a different way.

**Choose closeness over being right.** If your goal is to be right no matter the cost, the relationship will become strained. Power struggling with our children adds nothing

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positive to the family. It teaches children that they need to over-power someone else to get their way. If you are power struggling and feeling angry with your child, choose closeness over being right. Kids, Parents, and Power Struggles: Winning for a Lifetime by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka is a very helpful book, along with Redirecting Children's Behavior by Kathryn Kvals.

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