

Make Life Easier for Parents

By Marilyn Suttle

I want what I want, when I want it. Don't you? I want a great relationship with my partner. I want my kids to be loving and capable human beings. I want everyone around me to get along and get things done. I want my career to be fulfilling, my personal life to be relaxing, my house to be clean, my bills to be paid, my savings to be large, my weight to be small, and I want it like that all the time.

Okay, so life isn't perfect. Given that fact, how can I make it great, even on those challenging days when I'm arguing with my husband, my son won't get dressed, my other son hits the boy next door, the house is a mess, and there's no time at the end of the day to watch an episode of *Desperate Housewives* because I'm too busy being one?

No one ever said raising a family would be easy, but does it have to be so hard? Ease up the pressure by focusing on these parent-helping strategies:

- **Develop a resourceful attitude.** When destructive attitudes begin steering you off-course, do for yourself what you do for your car. Get an alignment. Align your attitudes to the outcomes you want to create. Suppose your child says, "No way! I won't take my medicine. It tastes yucky!" You wouldn't be the only parent to find yourself in that position. The attitude you choose will affect your ability to be effective at coping.

Let's look at five typical parent attitudes to this problem. Parent one feels angry, because she tells herself, "This kid is deliberately disobeying me!" Parent two feels compassion, because he tells himself, "I remember being a kid and hating the taste of medicine." Parent three feels defeated because he tells himself, "Only an incompetent parent would have this much trouble giving a kid medicine." Parent four feels amused because she tells herself, "Look at how determined this kid is at avoiding her medicine."

Which attitude will help you get the outcome you want? Do you make your best decisions when you're feeling angry or defeated? I sure don't. I handle situations best when my attitudes are positive. Did you notice in the previous example that the parents' attitudes didn't come from the child refusing to take her medicine? Their attitudes came from what they told themselves after the child wouldn't take her medicine.

Give your attitude realignment by noticing the things you tell yourself. Then, ask yourself, "Is there a more resourceful way of looking at this situation?" The parent who sees things from a positive perspective, such as, compassion, humor, or calmness will take a more effective approach to the problem.

- **Learn skills to invite cooperation.** You can have the best attitude in the world, but without some skills, it's hard to get the results you want in your life. Become a learner of human behavior - not to manipulate, but to speak to what's best in others. I asked a group of parents what helpful skills they used to help a resistant child take medicine. The most common answer was to give kids a choice in the matter.

One mom shared this story: “My daughter is the worst about taking medicine. We always end up holding her down while she screams. Half the time, she spits it out. I dread it every time. Last week, my friend Linda was over when it was time to give Hannah her medicine. Linda told me how well giving choices works with her kids. I tried it. I said, ‘Hannah, I can see how much you don’t like taking medicine. You especially don’t like it when I hold you down and pour it in your mouth. So, this time, you get to choose how to take your medicine and who will give it to you. Do you want a teaspoon or a small medicine cup with a puppy sticker on it?’ Hannah picked the medicine cup with the puppy sticker on it. She chose to take it herself, and she did it. We all cheered. I couldn’t believe it!”

There is no magic formula that works with all kids, all the time. Giving a choice often diffuses conflict, but not every time. Sometimes kids respond best to a playful parent who makes a game out of taking medicine. Sometimes no matter what you say or do, they won’t cooperate. When that happens, keep your attitude in check and make the choice yourself, “Since you aren’t choosing how to take your medicine, I’ll choose this time.” Then follow through. Next time give the child another chance to make a choice.

- Prepare for your children’s eventual abilities. Being a parent gives new meaning to the word, patience. That’s what it takes to stand by while your kids struggle to tie shoelaces all by themselves. What takes them nearly forever, takes a parent only seconds. It can be frustrating to wait. Here’s the good news - patience pays off. The children who are allowed time to struggle through the learning process of making a bed, putting on their own clothes, and doing chores, eventually learn to do it well. When a child or an adult is learning to master a new ability, it calls for a temporary loss of spontaneity. Progress slows down before it speeds up. Keeping the end results in mind helps to keep your patience in check.

Marilyn Suttle helps parents create happier relationships at home and at work with esteem building communication and life balance strategies. Subscribe to her free monthly e-newsletter by visiting her web site: WWW.SuttleOnline.NET.

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