

## Being the Boss –Without Being Bossy

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There's a reason why we talk about the art of parenting much more than the science of parenting. There is clearly good science behind lots of parenting ideas and techniques – science about child and adolescent development, science about human psychology and how children learn and science about resiliency and risk factors. Still, in the year to year, day to day, hour to hour parenting job, many times we just feel our way along, learning from our experience about what works for us and each of our individual children. And the really good news is mostly that works out just fine. It works out fine because most of the time, intuitively, we are working from a framework that recognizes the most basic and important needs of children (beyond food, clothing and shelter).

The Assets Framework takes our intuitive community wisdom, backs it with research and reminds each of us what children need in their lives. The Assets framework gives us a clear guide for living everyday life with our families. It helps us focus on how we can support, empower, discipline and guide our children so that they can develop into the healthy, caring, contributing adults we want them to be.

Within that framework, we still we have to find the balance. How much support is too much support? When do we loosen the rules and when do we tighten them? How many rules and are there too many rules? When do we just let annoying behaviors go, when do we take a stand? How do we balance support with empowering our children to contribute where they can? The Assets model gives us the guide, but there's still plenty of “art” in parenting. Setting limits and being the boss draws on a lot of parenting art.

Visiting families with children (and teens), I'm reminded how tiring being the “boss” - the parent in charge - can be. It's really hard to keep setting the limits and making demands of our children over and over and over, especially in a supportive and empowering way. It's discouraging and some days we just want to give up. Don't give up and don't think you're doing something wrong with all this repetition! It's a repetitive and occasionally very exasperating job. But **children and teens need to know they have a supportive caring parent(s) who is in charge**. So let's think about how parents can be in charge in the everyday life of families in ways that save you time and energy. (Then you can use that time and energy to do some more fun parenting things!)

Here's an example. Your child comes home from school and leaves a trail of belongings in his wake – backpack here, coat there, shoes somewhere else. Everyday you remind her to hang up her coat and her backpack and put her shoes in a place so she'll know where they are. Seems like a perfectly reasonable request, but somehow everyday it turns into a very time consuming, exhausting event. What could you do to make this better? You might think about:

- Breaking the tasks into smaller steps. Sometimes, especially for young children, things that seem very simple to us are overwhelming to them. Breaking any task

- into steps – “First your coat goes on this hook, and then your backpack goes on this hook” can make it easier.
- Sometimes kids are just plain tired when they get home. They’ve spent the whole day trying to listen and do the “right thing” and now they’re home and they just can’t cope with one more demand. You are in charge and you want your child to help keep himself and the family organized by taking care of his belongings. Now here’s one of those “boss - bossy” places. Does it really matter exactly when that gets done? Does it have to be as soon as he walks in the door? Maybe you could say: “Coats, shoes etc. have to be where they belong before dinner.” That gives your child time to unwind and also gives him a measure of control over what is expected of him – and that can be very empowering!
  - You go about your business and your child goes about his.
  - And then dinner time will come and perhaps the belongings are right where he left them several hours ago. Taking a deep breath, and conserving your energy, you give **one** quick reminder right before dinner – “Your coat – your backpack . . .” are plenty of words.
  - Your brief reminder may inspire a lengthy response from your child about the fairness of life – “But Jennifer didn’t have to hang her coat” (she’s 18 months) or it may inspire a lengthy statement of your child’s opinion of orderliness – “Oh this is so stupid! Who cares if I hang up all this stuff?”
  - **DO NOT RESPOND!** This is the cool thing about being in charge – you don’t have to respond to your child’s explanations and opinions. They have so much more time and energy, they can easily use up all of yours defending their position! Just sit down and eat your dinner and tell your child you hope she’ll get to the table soon before the food gets cold.
  - Then you all eat dinner and hopefully your child will decide that this is a fight not worth fighting and she’ll come to the table.
  - Again, conserving your time and energy, there is no need to rehash the scenario at dinner!

And what if she doesn’t come to the table? Well, what would you do? What would the next step be?

Remembering that the whole point of all of these everyday interactions is to empower your child to become self-disciplined, what would you do next? Got an idea you’d like to share – email me.

We’ll think more about consequences next month. Meanwhile, be encouraged and believe your patient and consistent efforts will pay-off. They will . . . all in good time!

Happy Fall!