

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP

EPISODE 1



Key Principles

- Setting limits
- Managing yourself, not the child
- Using consequences
- Having fun

MEET... Kathy and her two children, 18-month-old Samantha and four-year-old Joseph. Kathy, who wants to build credibility with her children, is working on being consistent and taking action rather than talking and explaining. She is also working on helping her children learn to make appropriate choices by letting them experience the consequences of their own action.



Setting limits

How can parents set limits and help children respect the limits? Children are a lot like us: they want to be respected and feel that they are being treated fairly. By setting reasonable limits and being consistent in following through, you will have traveled a long way down the path toward gaining your child's cooperation. Demanding that children adhere to rules that don't make sense, or giving them the message that sometimes it's okay to ignore the rules teaches your child that limits are arbitrary and don't necessarily need to be followed. When parents set reasonable limits and enforce them firmly and kindly, children recognize and accept that adults have more experience and knowledge than they do. As a mature adult, it is the parent's role to establish a safe and reasonable family structure.

Managing yourself, not the child

Sometimes parents get so involved in monitoring their child, they don't notice how their own behavior can actually encourage children's difficult or inappropriate behavior. Managing yourself means stepping back and examining your own behavior as closely as your child's. For example, when your child whines, do you tend to get annoyed and give a little lecture? When your child plays quietly, do you let your child know you appreciate it? If you answered "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second, you can expect your child to whine more frequently than play quietly. Yet, you can easily turn this kind of situation around by managing your own behavior instead of your child's.

Using consequences

A consequence is something that occurs as a result of an action or event. A child can experience a natural or a logical consequence. A natural consequence is an effect that would occur whether a parent takes action or not. For example, if a child goes

outside to play in cold weather without mittens, his or her hands will get cold. Most people don't enjoy having cold hands. If you let your child experience the discomfort of cold hands without intervening, this natural consequence (cold hands) will teach the child that wearing mittens is a desirable thing to do. Certainly, if there is a danger or threat to the child, the parent must protect the child, but in many cases the parent is only protecting the child from an opportunity to learn from natural consequences. In contrast to a natural consequence, a logical consequence involves the parent taking an action that has a logical relationship to the child's behavior. For example, if a children fight over a toy, a logical consequence might be that the toy is removed. To have high learning value, a logical consequence needs to be related to the child's behavior and carried out non-punitively. In some cases, the line between a logical and a natural consequence is less like a line, and more like a gray area. In this episode, we will see how Kathy handles one of those gray areas.

Having Fun..... Enjoying your child and having fun together builds a strong bond—a bond that plays an essential part in establishing a solid foundation of trust, respect and mutual enjoyment. Remember, children are a lot like we are. Reflect on important relationships in your life. Do you most want to help and cooperate with people who treat you well and with whom you have positive associations and contact? If you answered “yes,” then it shouldn't come as any surprise that having fun with your children is good for its own sake, and good for the relationship as a whole.



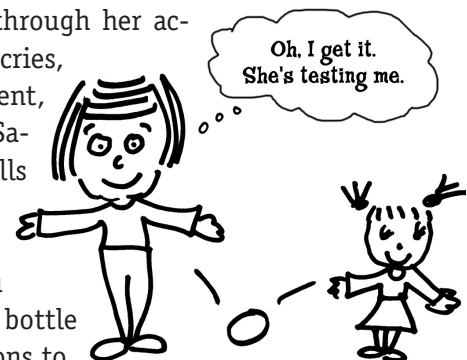
A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Setting limits *Samantha and the Water Bottle*

You'll remember from watching this video segment that Kathy sets a limit that the sippy cup needs to stay in the kitchen. This is a reasonable limit; if water spills on linoleum it is easy to clean up and doesn't damage the floor, unlike on carpet. Also, with several children in the house, it is more practical to manage potential spills with this type of reasonable limit. Samantha knows the rule but tests to see if Kathy will follow through. Kathy takes the water bottle back into the kitchen each time Samantha crosses the line from kitchen to carpet. Kathy doesn't scold

or lecture, she just re-establishes the limit through her action of removing the water bottle. Samantha cries, but Kathy is firm. By being clear and consistent, Kathy is building credibility and teaching Samantha what to expect. Later when Kathy tells Samantha to take one spoon from the utensil drawer to play with, Samantha appears to think it over and then takes only one. Do you think Samantha's experience with the water bottle influenced her decision about how many spoons to take?



Managing yourself, not the child

Kathy's Telephone Call

When a friend calls Kathy, Joseph vies for attention. Initially, Kathy acknowledges Joseph, but as his attempts to get her attention escalate, she either removes herself from the situation or ignores him. Kathy could have tried to manage Joseph's behavior by telling him to stop interrupting or by sending him to his room. Instead, she manages her own behavior in such a way that Joseph's behavior does not become a problem.

Using consequences

Joseph Misses His Dinner

When Joseph ignores Kathy's requests to come to dinner, Kathy and Samantha go ahead and eat. By the time Joseph comes in, the food is put away and Kathy is cleaning up the kitchen. Kathy has explained to Joseph earlier that once dinner is served, she's not going to prepare a separate meal for him. A consequence of being late is missing dinner and being hungry. Kathy's rule seems reasonable. Kathy is busy and doesn't want to spend her evening serving dinners. However, Joseph becomes upset when he realizes he's missed dinner. Kathy, though, remains very matter-of-fact about his fate. She doesn't use the consequence of missing dinner as punishment for not coming in time. In fact, she even expresses empathy that Joseph is hungry. She is kind, but firm. In this situation, Joseph is experiencing a combination of logical and natural consequences. Kathy has established a good logical consequence: If Joseph doesn't come to dinner when it is served, she is not going to prepare a special dinner for him. In addition, Joseph experiences the natural consequence of feeling hungry. Later, when Joseph breaks his sunglasses as a form of revenge, Kathy uses the opportunity to let Joseph experience the consequences of his own actions again. She doesn't get angry; she just says it's too bad that now Joseph won't have sunglasses to wear for the rest of the summer.



Having fun.....

Kathy Includes Fun in Everyday Activities

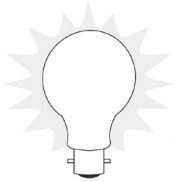
Kathy weaves having fun with Joseph and Samantha into many of their activities together. From turning a pretzel snack into a fun counting activity to making a game out of exchanging pieces of paper with Samantha, Kathy takes advantage of small opportunities for spontaneous fun and relationship building. The goodwill this creates will spill over into all areas of the relationship. It's also important to notice that specially planned activities are not a requirement for having fun and enjoying each other.



Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Give playful, positive attention to reduce negative attention-getting.
- Set clear limits, expect them to be tested, and enforce them consistently.
- Point out the needs of the situation rather than tell children what to do.
- Tantrums will stop when the audience is removed.

WATCH... for Kathy, Samantha, and Joseph again in *Episode 20* when the children are three years older. We'll learn how Kathy's efforts to be clear and consistent and build good relationships with her children have paid off.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Can you think of a situation with your child when managing your own behavior might have been more effective than trying to get your child to change what he or she was doing? If something similar happens again, how could you handle it differently than you did before?
2. Are there times when you tell your child what to do, but get little cooperation? If you were to point out the needs of the situation, would it help her make her own appropriate choices? If this is a possibility, develop a plan for the next time this situation comes up.
3. Can you think of a time when you have protected your child from the natural consequence of her behavior? How could you have handled the situation differently? If something similar occurs again, how would you handle it now?