

DEVELOPING A MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIP

EPISODE 3



Key Principles

- Encouraging children to contribute
- Taking action; less talking and explaining
- Learning to observe yourself
- Having fun

MEET... Mark, Tara, three-year-old Anthony and his baby brother. Mark and Tara are building strong bonds with their children and are working on modeling the kinds of behaviors they would like to see in Anthony. They are also working on being consistent and talking less when action is required.



Encouraging children to contribute

One of the most important goals of parenthood is helping children become independent, responsible adults. Offering opportunities for children to contribute to family activities sets the stage for their transition from total dependence to independence. Begin with small tasks that affect the child directly, like putting away toys. This way children see early on how being responsible relates to their own behavior. As children become older and more capable, they can make contributions to the larger household by doing things like setting the table and taking out the garbage. When their contributions are acknowledged and appreciated, and their efforts—even if the results leave something to be desired by adult standards—are met with goodwill and encouragement, children will usually feel proud and eager to help.

Taking action

In *Episode 2* the principle of taking action, rather than talking and explaining, was discussed. An important aspect of this principle that comes out in this episode is the idea that once a child understands the limits and rules, it's not necessary to review them or warn the child, giving what many parents might consider "fair warning." A "fair warning" contributes to children's idea that it's reasonable to get a warning—or two, or three—before cooperating.

Learning to observe yourself ...

In *Episode 2* Rick and Linda wanted to change their basic child-rearing approach. Making this kind of change means they must be willing to look at their assumptions and behavior critically. Another aspect of this principle that comes into play in the current episode is the idea that to foster the kinds of behavior we want to see in our children, we ourselves must model those behaviors. Children can be very astute and

will quickly see incongruities between what we expect of them and how we behave. In fact, children can be mirrors. We might want them to be honest, but if we fudge the truth, they will notice and be more inclined to do as we do, not as we say. Sometimes it can be hard to face the reality that children are not misbehaving; they are mirroring back to us what they see.

Having Fun.....

In *Episode 1* we saw how Kathy used opportunities for spontaneous fun to build goodwill in her relationships with Joseph and Samantha. In this episode, we'll see how Tara has created a regular time for fun for herself and Anthony that Anthony looks forward to each day. Routines and planned activities help children know what to expect, but it is important that they are not so rigid they preclude the kind of spontaneous fun that can help build a strong relationship with your child. Tara has done a good job of combining a planned activity with spontaneous fun.



A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Encouraging children to contribute

Anthony Helps Make Dinner

Every night Tara and Anthony make dinner together. Even though it would probably be easier and quicker for Tara to make dinner herself, she wants to build Anthony's sense of contribution and provide opportunities for him to learn new skills. Later in the evening, Mark makes a point of letting Anthony know the meal he helped his mom make was great. By reinforcing Anthony's sense of contribution and accomplishment with this simple comment, Mark is helping Anthony feel proud of himself, as well as helping him make a connection between his behavior and the well-being of the household.

Taking action

Anthony Tests the Limits

Anthony seems to be very reasonable and cooperative. When Mark tells him he has some block cleaning up to do, Anthony goes along willingly. Yet, there are still times when he is clearly testing the limit and undoubtedly keeping careful track of how many times he can push the limit before he needs to get with the program. For example, he knows that he should use silverware, not his fingers, at the dinner table. But he still gives his fingers a try, letting Tara remind him not to. Instead of reminding, Tara could simply remove his plate until he's interested in eating reasonably. In this case, Anthony already knows what the rule is. In the case of difficult bedtimes (when Anthony gets out of bed to visit his parents) a clear expectation about bedtime needs to have already been established so Tara and Mark can act, confident that Joseph knows the rule. A discussion about the rule could occur at a relaxed time

when it is not time for Anthony to go to bed. Once Anthony knows what to expect, it will be reasonable to follow through with the consequences without explaining or warning. Sometimes the first few times a child experiences the consequences, he or she will cry. This can be hard for parents who feel they may be being too harsh. In most cases, though, the tears are children's last, best hope of getting their way.

Having fun..... *Chef Anthony and the Potato Peels*

Even though helping prepare dinner is serious work, there's no reason Anthony and Tara can't have some fun while they're at it. When a piece of flying potato peel lands on Anthony's face he responds with delight, and Tara sends another piece his way. Soon, Anthony leans down to deliberately "catch" the flying pieces, turning peeling potatoes into a game. Because Tara is flexible, her special time with Anthony now does double duty: Anthony is gaining a sense of contribution, and they are building a bond forged from fun and goodwill.

Learning to observe yourself.... *Anthony Mirrors Back What He Sees*

During dinner, Anthony asks Mark and Tara if Mark said "Oh, God." They say, "No, he said gosh," but in fact he had used the word "God." This can be considered a little fib, but later Tara and Mark become upset when it seems like Anthony might have fibbed about being full so he could leave the table to watch cartoons. By observing themselves and recognizing that they had recently modeled the very behavior they were displeased about seeing in Anthony, they decide to change their own behavior, recognizing that this will be a strong influence on Anthony. It can be difficult to look at yourself critically in this way and accept the wisdom of changing yourself rather than trying to change your child, but the long-term benefits for the relationship and the child's future can be well worth the effort.



I-messages are an important aspect of observing yourself. An I-message is a statement that tells your child how you feel. When Tara told Anthony she was uncomfortable with his potato peeling,

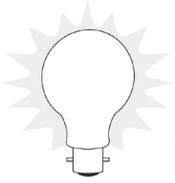
she spoke about herself, not about Anthony's behavior. She said she was uncomfortable watching him peel and that she was going to take over. Remember that Anthony accepted this quite easily. He wasn't told he hadn't done a good job, or that he wasn't capable of doing a good job. His mom simply told him she was uncomfortable. How do you think Anthony would have responded if Tara had instead talked about Anthony, perhaps saying something like "You're making me uncomfortable. You're not doing it right, I think you should stop now." These kinds of statements that describe the other person (you-messages) don't keep the focus on the needs of the situation and are tailor-made to put someone on the defensive. An effective I-message includes a statement of how you feel in a certain situation, and ends with a plan to improve the situation.

Example of an I-message

I feel _____	when I see _____	. I'd like to _____
upset	toys all over.	come up with a clean-up plan.
unhappy	the dishes on the table.	do the dishes together.
worried	that your homework isn't done.	set aside time when we both study.

Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Make opportunities for children to contribute and stretch their limits.
- Have simple rules. Act on them rather than remind children.
- Model for the child the behaviors you want to teach.
- Show appropriate actions rather than point out inappropriate ones.
- Have fun together.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Do you remind your child to do things she already knows she needs to do? Instead of reminding or warning, try stating the needs of the situation once and then move forward. For example: It's time to wash hands for dinner. If she doesn't choose to wash her hands, it's perfectly reasonable for the rest of the family to go ahead and eat.
2. Do you see behaviors in your child that disturb you, such as telling little fibs, or agreeing to do something and not following through? If so, try taking a close look at yourself to see if you might be modeling these behaviors. When there is a contradiction between what you say and do, your child will almost always follow your actions, not your words. If you identify one of these behaviors, try changing what you do and watch for changes in your child.



See, Mom. I can put my toys away.