

GOOD ROUTINES, CONSISTENT EXPECTATIONS, CAPABLE CHILDREN

EPISODE 20



Key Principles

- Establishing rules and routines
- Having positive expectations and being encouraging
- Using positive consistency

MEET... Kathy, six-year-old Joseph, and four-year-old Samantha. We first met Kathy, Joseph and Samantha three years ago. At that time, Kathy was working on building her credibility with her children, taking action instead of explaining, and helping her children make responsible choices by letting them experience the consequences of their actions. Now, we have an opportunity to see how the children have benefited from three years in this environment.



Establishing rules and routines

When this topic was first discussed in *Episode 5*, we introduced the idea that without rules and routines, life can be very confusing for children. We saw how Catalina and Adrienne pushed the limits and pulled their mother into power struggles either because clear rules had not been established, or because the girls were not required to consistently follow established rules. When the girls pushed the limits, they were trying to make their world more predictable by establishing boundaries. In *Episodes 9 and 17*, we saw the benefits of establishing and following clear rules and routines. In *Episode 9*, when Esther and Jonathon helped prepare dinner, we saw how clear rules and routines provided an avenue for them to make positive contributions to family life. In *Episode 17*, we saw the same opportunity for Katelyn. In addition, we saw how clear routines during the evening ensured that Katelyn and Dan spent enjoyable time together building their relationship. In this episode, we see how incorporating rules and routines into family life on a consistent basis helps children become capable, cooperative members of the family.

Having positive expectations and being encouraging..

In *Episode 4*, we learned that the way parents express their expectations to their children can have either an encouraging or discouraging affect. When Devante had a successful week of no warnings at school, Juanita congratulated him. She also expressed surprise, though, that he had not gotten a warning. Focusing on a child's positive behavior and minimizing responses to negative behavior is an effective way to let a child know that you believe in him. When your child knows that you believe in him and that you expect the best, he will be encouraged in his own abilities and in his desire to play a constructive role in the family. In this episode, we see how Kathy's years of being encouraging and believing in her children's abilities have paid off.

Using positive consistency

Being consistently positive can be challenging for busy parents. Chores, errands, work and other commitments pull parents in many directions and can distract them from being aware of their children's experience of events. For example, when a parent nags or criticizes to get a child out the door on time, the parent might simply be reacting to everyday stress. A child, though, will probably see a critical parent. Remember: when children pick up on negative expectations, they can be quick to fulfill them. Though being positive and consistent can be challenging, it can also be rewarding. In earlier episodes, we saw that parents' inconsistency encourages children to push and test the limits. While we saw in *Episode 5* how Catalina and Adrienne tested Stephanie at almost every turn, we later saw how quickly their behavior changed in *Episode 6*. When Stephanie started to follow through consistently and began to give the girls appropriate attention for their contributions and cooperation, family life improved. In *Episode 17*, we met Dan, a father who was consistently positive with his children. The payoff was enormous. Family life ran smoothly, allowing Dan and his children to enjoy each other's company, whether making dinner or reading stories. In addition, his children did not demand his attention at inappropriate times, allowing this busy, single-parent father to easily manage a business call during dinner. In this second visit with Kathy, Joseph and Samantha, we see how three years of positive consistency have helped the children to become competent, cooperative children who have found a constructive role in the family.

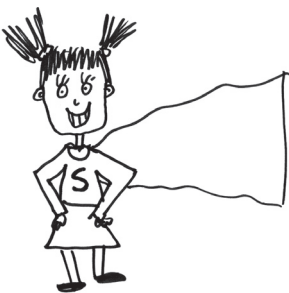


A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Establishing rules and routines

The Order of the Day



In this short morning before Kathy sees Joseph off at the school bus, a great deal is accomplished. Kathy's home practically buzzes with these industrious children who seem to thrive on the balance between structured activities like homework, time for independent play, and contributing to family life by cleaning up their rooms. Even though Joseph does not particularly enjoy his reading homework, he accepts that it is part of the daily routine and enjoys that it gives him time with Kathy. When both children want to play outside, they accept that they need to clean up their rooms first. Samantha is a workhorse, good-naturedly lugging tubs of toys to appropriate spots. When Joseph needs to do a little more cleaning before he can play, he goes along readily because the expectations are reasonable. When it's time for lunch, Kathy sees that there are still toys out in the yard. When Joseph says he didn't take those toys out, Kathy focuses on the routine: if Joseph doesn't eat lunch soon, he'll have to get on the bus before he's finished his lunch. Without further discussion, both children work together to finish cleaning up for the sake of keeping the day moving along smoothly. When Joseph dawdles during lunch, Kathy lets him know that he only has 10 minutes until the bus comes. He knows the rule is "no snacks"

unless lunch is eaten. He quickly finishes lunch. While Kathy and Joseph wait for the bus together, Joseph swings his backpack and hits Kathy. To show Joseph this isn't okay without making a big deal, she simply takes his pack and puts it on her own back. Then, Joseph playfully tries to take the pack from her. Kathy has enforced the rule that people can't hurt each other by sidestepping a potential problem and drawing Joseph into an enjoyable game.

Having positive expectations and being encouraging..

Competence and Confidence: That's My Middle Name

Samantha and Joseph are two very capable children. One glance at Samantha's room-cleaning skill—and her willingness to do the job well—should be enough to convince any parent that being positive and encouraging reap big rewards. In both small and big ways, Kathy ensures that both children feel appreciated and encouraged. By working every day with Joseph on his reading and believing in his ability, he has improved at school. Kathy has an expectation that the children won't interrupt when she's working with only one of them, but she does take a short break to talk with Samantha to let her know she cares about her. When Joseph tries to get Kathy's attention by waving his homework in her face, Kathy stays positive. She simply tells him she can't read a paper that is moving around. Joseph quickly stops the annoying behavior. Later, Kathy spends time with Samantha looking at alphabet cards and Joseph plays independently. During clean-up, Kathy comments on the good work Samantha is doing. In the past, Kathy has cleaned the rooms with the children to demonstrate how to do it and what the results should be. The clear expectations Kathy has established undoubtedly play a role in Samantha's good work and results. Kathy has worked hard to help her children become competent and clearly believes in their abilities. As a result, her children are confident and self-sufficient, while still valuing and relying on appropriate involvement from their mother.



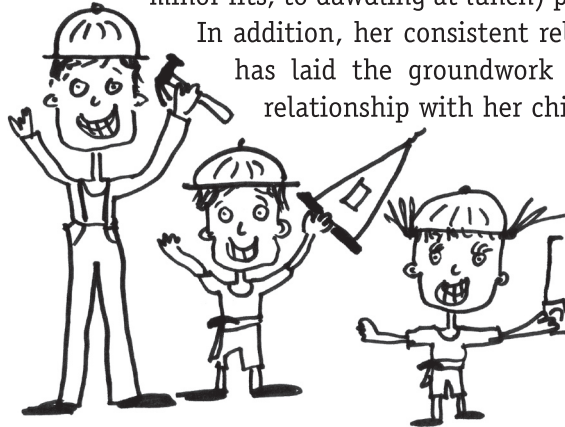
Using positive consistency

Humming Along

It has been over three years since Kathy first began using the principles in *Improving Parent-Child Relationships*. While she says in her discussion with Dr. Morse that she still "loses" it sometimes, it is clear that she is consistent enough of the time to provide her children with clear boundaries and large doses of encouragement. This consistency, coupled with a positive, encouraging attitude, has fostered Joseph and Samantha's can-do spirit and willingness to be cooperative members of the household. In small and large ways, Kathy shows her respect for, and belief in, her children. As a result, her children reciprocate. For example, when Samantha seeks Kathy's attention while Kathy is working with Joseph, Kathy provides Samantha with information about the effect of Samantha's interruption: homework with Joseph will take longer. This gives Samantha the opportunity to make a responsible choice to play quietly in her room while Kathy and Joseph work. While a small incident, it's interesting to see all that is going on: Kathy gives Samantha information in a positive way; Samantha considers the information and makes a choice that furthers the

family goal at that time. Goodwill and routines are maintained. On a larger scale, when we see Joseph tell Kathy that he wants to play video games, she matter-of-factly reminds him that he cannot play video games that day. Earlier in the day, he threw a fit when she said he couldn't play at that time. Even though the rest of the morning has gone well, Kathy sticks to her earlier restriction to let Joseph know that throwing a fit will not get him what he wants. This set-up has the ingredients for a major power struggle, but Joseph just finishes cleaning up his room and goes outside to play. Kathy's positive approach to dealing with difficulties (from interruptions and minor fits, to dawdling at lunch) prevents small incidents from escalating.

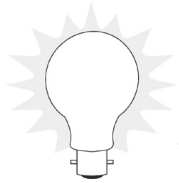
When children and parents work together, there is more time to enjoy the relationship.



In addition, her consistent reliance on reasonable rules and routines has laid the groundwork for an enjoyable, mutually respectful relationship with her children.

Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Follow established routines.
- Necessary tasks can be done in positive ways.
- With positive expectations, children can be very capable.
- Maintaining consistent expectations isn't easy, but it's worth it.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Can you think of a small habit your child has that is annoying? During the next week, take a lesson from Kathy and try to respond to your child in an upbeat way to let him know his behavior is not appropriate. Think about how Kathy responded when Joseph waved the homework paper in her face and hit her with his backpack.
2. When clean-up time rolls around, does your child participate willingly? If not, try setting up some fun practice time when you can work with him to demonstrate how to clean-up well. Invite your child to make a mini-mess with you. Tell him you are going to clean up together to learn about good ways to clean up. Talk your way through the clean-up, describing what you're doing. Involve your child in the thinking too: ask him what he thinks should happen next. Make it fun: after all, this is not a "real" clean up!