

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR

Too often we focus more on correcting behavior when it gets out of line than we do on encouraging respectful behavior. Before teaching you how to address disrespect (especially constant pushing/arguing to get what they want), it's important to let you know that if you don't put most of your effort into doing the following two things, you won't be successful at helping your son/daughter be respectful.

1. Teaching our children the difference between respect and disrespect.
2. Setting an example of how to be patient, control our emotions, and not lose our temper when things don't go the way we want.

By doing these two things, we lay the groundwork for having consistent respectful behavior in our homes. There are many voices in the world (TV, movies, friends, etc.) that teach a standard of respect that is far below what you were likely taught as a child. If we aren't teaching our children what respect and disrespect look like, they'll most certainly learn things such as "it's okay to argue with your parents, especially if you don't agree with their decision or their reasoning." In addition, if we are not setting the example and being respectful to them, it won't matter if we are teaching them or not because they will use our example to justify their disrespectful behavior.

HOW TO STOP YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER FROM CONSTANTLY PUSHING/ARGUING

When our kids are being disrespectful, especially when they are continuing to argue after we have made a decision or are pushing for something they want, the Vegas Principle is a great way to handle the situation.

So what's the Vegas Principle? Consider the following. If you were to go to Las Vegas, enter a casino and place a bet on the table, and then lose the bet, only to have the dealer give you your money back, what would you do? You would undoubtedly bet again and again and again. Why? Because you have nothing to lose!

Parents unwittingly do this quite frequently with their kids. They tell their kids "no" and then put up with lots of complaining and arguing as their kids try to get them to change their decision. And why does it happen despite the parents' repeatedly telling them to stop? It's simple. They have nothing to lose! The answer is already "no," so at best they can get their parents to say "yes," and at worst, their parents will still say "no" So they will argue till the sun goes down...and beyond!

So the key is to create a scenario where they have "something to lose." Here's an illustration to show you how to do just that:

You've agreed to get your son/daughter a cell phone this weekend. Friday comes and he says he wants to go get the cell phone with you right after school. Friday is not a good day for you so you let him know you'll go Saturday morning. He starts pressing to go today and asks why you won't do it. You give him your reasons, but he systematically starts to invalidate each reason. Right here is your moment of decision! You can either start explaining that your reasons are valid and get further into an argument, find yourself getting more frustrated, losing your patience and so forth, OR you can apply the Vegas Principle by doing the following:

Step 1 – Show Empathy But Set a Boundary

"I know you're really excited to get the phone and it's hard to wait till tomorrow, but I've made a decision and it's time to stop discussing it."

Step 2 – Give Him a Choice (if he continues to argue)

"Look, you can either choose to stop discussing this, or you can choose to not get your cell phone until Monday."

Step 3 – Walk Away!

Don't stand there and look him in the eye as if to challenge him. Just walk away.

Step 4 – Follow Through (if he follows you and/or continues to argue)

"Well, I guess you've chosen to get your phone on Monday."

Step 5 – Disengage! (And do not add to the consequence.)

Chances are your son/daughter will likely become even more disrespectful at this point. You'll be tempted to add onto the consequence by saying something like this: "Now we're not going to get your phone till next weekend." Don't do it! Why not? Because it usually doesn't help; and what's worse, you wind up with a big consequence that you may have a hard time carrying out (e.g., waiting 4 weeks to get the phone). Instead, just disengage and let your he/she eventually burn out.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

- Unlike Vegas, where the person gambling decides what it is that they are willing to risk losing, in these scenarios, you are the one who makes that decision. In this scenario, the parent told their son he would lose the ability to get the phone on Saturday and would have to wait till Monday. Had he been arguing because they told him he couldn't use the car on Friday night, the parent might have chosen to tell him if he keeps arguing, he'll lose access to the car the whole weekend. In short, try to logically tie the "something to lose" variable to whatever it is that your son/daughter is arguing about.
- Sometimes upon learning the Vegas Principle, a parent will say something like, "I don't agree with Step 5. I think if he keeps pushing he should lose more." Well, frankly, we're not rigid about that step. Sometimes it's okay to add to the consequences if they keep pushing. But, more often than not, disengaging and not "upping the ante" is the right move with most of the families we work with. Why? Because if your son/daughter gets to this point, he is likely flooded with emotion and not making rational decisions. Thus, adding more on to his consequence isn't going to get him to stop. Hence, you'll get caught in a power struggle trying to get him to stop, only to give up in the end. But now you'll have that big consequence we just talked about, and it's going to be hard to follow through on that when things are more pleasant next week and he's apologizing and asking if he can have it that weekend.
- That said, if your son/daughter doesn't seem to be a complete hostage to his emotions, you might consider returning to Step 2 and giving him a choice to stop or have the consequence extended again. That might sound something like, "You've already lost it till Monday. Do you want to make it Wednesday?" For some, they'll learn quickly and will stop at that point. But many won't.
- In all of this, please realize that your primary goal is not simply to get your son/daughter to stop arguing about whatever it is they don't like at that moment. No, your goal is much broader than that. It's to establish a predictable pattern of handling disrespect that your he/she will recognize! In other words, while he may not stop arguing the first time you apply the Vegas Principle, the next time he begins to argue with you about a decision you've made, and you start going through the steps, when you get to Step 2/3, he's going to hear this little voice in his head say something like, "Remember this? You might want to stop arguing because it won't turn out pretty for you if you don't."
- It might take a few rounds or more for some, but they'll learn. And when they do, you'll be happy you learned the Vegas Principle!