

LIMITING POWER

Trying to control every aspect of a child’s life provokes rebellion and loss of power. When to act or not to act is the question, it helps to divide problems into three areas:¹

- The issue is not negotiable and parents are directive and take action to ensure that children follow through when their behavior affects others— “I would like you to. . . .” “Will you do . . . now or in five minutes?”
- The issue is not critical and parents act as a sounding board to help children express feelings and solve their problem when their behavior affects only themselves. Parents can openly disagree with their children’s choices but state that the decision is up to them. Losing some battles makes children more willing to let parents win others.
- The issue is negotiable and conflict resolution steps are taken to resolve disagreements and reach long-lasting, satisfying solutions.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STEPS

1. Set a time to discuss the problem when neither parents nor children are pressured.
2. Both parties express their point with the statements—”I want . . . I feel . . . I want/feel because. . . .”
3. Both parties reverse roles and accurately paraphrase what the other has said.
4. Generate possible solutions. Have children give ideas before parents offer theirs.
5. Evaluate all alternatives and pick the one that is most satisfactory to all.
6. When solutions cannot be found, review step 2 and set another time for discussion.
7. When agreements are broken, reevaluate to find out if the original agreement was unrealistic.

TO ACT OR NOT TO ACT

Approaches to Problems	
Directions: To practice deciding how to approach parent-child problems, cover the column on the right and then find out if you (and fellow caretakers) agree with suggested approaches.	
Situation	Problem Approach
• The parents think their daughter wears too much makeup to school.	Not critical
• The parents do not like the way their son dresses on family outings.	Negotiate
• The child does not let his parents know where he is going.	Not negotiable
• The child thinks parents are overprotective about where he can go.	Negotiate
• The child avoids doing his chores.	Not negotiable
• The child thinks he has too many chores to do.	Negotiate
• The child is upset because friends never call her.	Not critical
• The parents are upset because too many boys call their daughter.	Negotiate
• The child thinks his bedtime is too early.	Negotiate
• The child keeps putting off bedtime.	Not negotiable

VALUE CLARIFYING

When an issue is not critical, parents do not have to stand idly by. In addition to feeling back thoughts and labeling feelings, parents can ask value-clarifying questions that help children examine their alternatives, choose carefully, and act on choices. Values can be seen in the judgments people make, in the rules by which they live, and in their attitudes, desires and goals.

Children's values are changing constantly: at various times, it may be important to have lots of friends, make good grades, make the football team, wear the right clothes, be different from everyone else, have a pet, stand up for yourself, or get along with others.

SEVEN VALUE-CLARIFYING PROCESSES

To form values, children need to go through seven stages. Parents can ask questions based on each stage to help young people develop their own personal guidelines:²

1. Being aware of alternatives:
 - Did you think of anything else before you made this choice?
 - What makes this choice better than . . . ?
 - What else have you thought about doing?
2. Choosing freely:
 - Where do you suppose you first got this idea?
 - For whom are you doing this? What pressure are you feeling about this?
 - Is there anything you are avoiding?
3. Choosing carefully:
 - How is this bad for you? How is it good for you?
 - What is your objection to doing . . . ? How did you make this decision?
 - What are your priorities? What do you most want to happen?
4. Prizing and cherishing:
 - Are you glad you feel this way?
 - How is this important to you?
 - Could you manage without this?
5. Affirming:
 - Are you willing to tell others how you feel?
 - Does anyone else know you want this?
 - Are you willing to stand up for that?
6. Acting on choices:
 - What will you have to do?
 - What is your first step?
 - What kind of changes will you have to make in your life?
7. Repeating:
 - Would you want to do this again?
 - Have you done this before?
 - Is this worth the energy you've put into it?

Persuading, judging, suggesting, interrogating, and repeating your own credo is not value clarifying. Nor is it helpful to ask why questions that put children on the defensive and prod them into making excuses or even lying. However, when children are facing a problem and have no guideline to deal with it or when a value that used to work is no longer paying off, they may welcome the above what and how questions to help them discover their own inner truths.

¹ See *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Thomas Gordon (Penquin, 1989) for further information.

² Adapted from *Values and Teaching* by Raths, Harmin, and Simon (Merrill, 1966), pp. 63–65.