

WHEN PARENTS ARE WRONG

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Wrong? What do you mean 'wrong'? While many parents do a fabulous job of bringing up their kids, I think we would all agree that sometimes we do get it wrong. It is our responsibility to be fair to our kids. Fair means that we give equal love, protection and attention to each child; that we don't indulge or neglect them; and that they know ahead of time what we expect and what will happen when they overstep the set boundaries. Wow, that is a big responsibility isn't it?

So what do we mean by 'wronging our kids'? Let's discuss it under two categories: active and passive. 'Active' means to knowingly act in certain ways for example responding to a situation without getting the facts of the situation, or acting too harshly because of anger and frustration. Perhaps we favor one child over another through unequal distribution of time and stuff. Maybe we make promises without following through or even make hurtful remarks on the spur of the moment without thinking of the injury caused over a child's lifetime. Perhaps we praise one while downing the other.

Passive wrongs might include such things as living out our hopes and dreams vicariously through our kids, or creating impossibly high or even having low or no expectations. It could be that we protect our children because we don't believe our little Jonnie 'would ever do such a thing' so the child never has to take responsibility for his own actions. It could be that we don't address disobedience and inadvertently create a disrespectful child that is impossible to manage. Kids will behave like us. If we act one way but expect our kids to act another, then we are effectively saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." On considering the list above, I know that I have transgressed in a number of areas. It is hard going being a parent. It feels like we need a permanent 'Super Nanny' on hand to keep us on track doesn't it!

Let's look at how to fix our negative responses so that we can develop and maintain a happy, healthy family unit. The first thing is to recognize that we all make mistakes, admit them and deal with them as we go. I am relieved that we live in an enlightened age where the infallible 'macho' parent image is out the we are encouraged to be vulnerable (human) with our kids. In answer to the 'active' misdemeanors here is a suggested response.

Take the child aside and say, "I am sorry that I reacted the way I did when you threw the ball through the kitchen window. I shouldn't have yelled at you and told you that you NEVER do as you are told. The truth is that you do, do as we ask most of the time but I was so angry about the cost of the window that I spoke without thinking and that was wrong. We have told you not to throw balls towards the house and you will have to pay for the window but I am asking you to forgive me for how I reacted to the situation."

To address passive 'wrongs' we sometimes need to be open to the helpful suggestions of objective others. Most of the time we don't realize the habits we get into, so it is important that we heed a friend or family member when they have concerns about our parenting techniques. If it means apologizing to our kids for the way we are responding to them, then let's do it. If it means getting professional help, then let's go for that.

The best method of prevention is to create a set of family values. These values cover all aspects of family life and provide a set of expectations for the family to respect one another as well as live peaceably in the world around them.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.