

# BEING FIRM BUT FAIR

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

At a seminar we ran recently Brian talked to the participants about effective discipline. Having just had a session on creating family values, the audience now understood that kids need a clear explanation of expectations and boundaries.

Brian demonstrated the most effective method for handling a situation where a child has violated the boundaries. He said, "Get down to the child's level. Make them look at you, and in a firm voice tell them *what* you expected, *what* they did wrong, and *what* the consequence will be." He used a member of the audience to demonstrate the difference that the tone of voice makes. At first he spoke quietly and in conversation style. Then he really eyeballed the person and added the sound of authority to his tone of voice. It made the other person really take notice.

After the seminar was over and we were packing up, the Children's Pastor came back into the room and said, "You will never guess what just happened! Jonnie, the little boy we have most behavioral problems with in Sunday school, just threw a tantrum because he didn't want to leave child-care after the seminar. His parents (who had attended) took him kicking and screaming to another room, closed the door, and applied the principles they had just been taught. Jonnie just left the church like a little lamb!" It really does work! Here were parents with a 5 year-old who had never been controlled appropriately. Yet when they eyeballed him, and spoke with authority, the change in behavior was dramatic.

Kids really do want clear expectations and boundaries. They not only want to know 'what' the expectations are, but as they get to an age of reasoning (about 10-12 years of age), they want to know why you have created particular family values and why they need to behave certain ways. Kids also want parents to be consistent. The best way to ensure this is by role-modeling the desired behaviors and by having clear expectations.

You will know you have done a good job with discipline when your kids behave well at home, and when they are out of your sight. How can you make this happen? Kids need to not only know what the behavioral expectations are, but why they need to adhere to them. They need to mature past the mentality that negative behavior always means punishment. They need to understand how their misbehavior affects others; and that it shows disrespect. Unacceptable behavior also damages a person's reputation for later life.

The term, 'Say what you mean, and mean what you say' is very true when it comes to giving clear messages to your children.

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