

WHY ALL THE “WHY’S”?

by Sally Burgess, Forefront families LLC

Do you ever wonder when your kids are ever going to stop asking, “Why?” Fortunately, my children didn’t totally drive me crazy with it, but I have been around other kids who have incessantly asked, “Why, why, why?” As a very busy young parent I used to find myself sometimes fobbing my kids off by saying, “Because I said so!” When they asked why they couldn’t have something I would say, “Because I am a mean mother!” When I look back on it as an older and saner parent, I realize that perhaps that wasn’t the wisest reply!

Currently, I am attending a parenting class at the church I attend. I always like to learn new things on the subject of parenting and last night I certainly did. It made me realize that kids are asking questions for different reasons as they go through different ages and stages. When they are toddlers the word they use a great deal is “No”. This is because they hear parents say it to them often and it requires an immediate response – like STOP! It is a powerful word and little ones will say it to make a point just like parents do.

This is a toddler’s way to challenge authority once they realize that big people are the boss of little people and that big people make boundaries that little people don’t necessarily want to abide by. Sometimes, when the rebellious, “No”, accompanied by stamping of a foot or pouting of the lower lip results in ‘time out’ rather than getting what they wanted, a child will resort to the softer option, “But, why?” The questions very young children ask come at a time when their learning curve is at its greatest. These are valuable opportunities for you to have major input into your children’s lives. If you show frustration at their constant questioning they may feel that asking questions is annoying you and cease doing so, thus missing out on so much learning.

It is important to ascertain the reason for the question. If the child keeps asking, ‘Why?’ over and over again, even though we have explained why not, then our response can be, “I have explained that you can’t have a pet guinea pig because of neighborhood dogs and that is the end of the story. If you ask again, there will be a consequence.” We don’t have to come up with a compromise like offering them a canary instead. Kids need to learn that sometimes the answer is a flat, “No, not now.” That is life. Mind you, it is sometimes a good idea to use a distraction like going to the zoo to see the animals instead.

When we are really involved in our kids’ lives we can often detect where the root of the questions are coming from. When kids reach Middle School they begin to realize that other people think differently than they do. There are many different ideas, values and ways of approaching life, and so the questions fly. We need to explain the reasons why we believe and act the way we do. “Because I

said so”, or “Because God said so”, is not sufficient for the young enquiring mind. Kids need to see the benefits of staying within set boundaries. If we just stop and give a clear explanation once, then much of the whining and ‘Why’ing” will cease. In fact, you can often minimize the ‘Why’s’ greatly by giving explanations as you do things with them.

When it all boils down, the tone of the question dictates how you answer. If a child is whining, they are objecting to your first response. If they ask respectfully, then they usually really want to know. If their question is a challenge to your authority, this is not the time to reason with them. Let the heat diminish before an explanation is offered. Restate your values and be open to listen to their request. If a “No” is necessary, be confident in your decision. Don’t give in to keep the peace. Your kids will then know that if they whine long enough you will give in. You have just invited them to question your authority and pursue annoying behavior.

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.