



Healthy Discipline with Healthy Results, Healthy Children!



Written by Julie M. Armenta, M.A., Educational & Family Specialist

The following are typical parent and child messages that may be controlling and which tend to start resistance and arguments. Even though many of these messages are normal during instruction or direction, they should be avoided during a conflict:



1. **ORDERING, DIRECTING, COMMANDING** – telling the child to do something, or giving the child an order or command
2. **WARNING, ADMONISHING, THREATENING** – telling the child what consequences will occur if the child does something, alluding to the use of power.
3. **MORALIZING, PREACHING, OBLIGING** – telling the child what the child should or should not do.
4. **PERSUADING WITH LOGIC, ARGUING, LECTURING** – trying to influence with facts, counter-arguments, or your own opinion.
5. **JUDGING, CRITICIZING, DISAGREEING, BLAMING** – making negative judgments or evaluations of a child.
6. **INTERPRETING, ANALYZING, DIAGNOSING** – telling the child what the child's motives are, communicating that you have the child figured out.
7. **NAME-CALLING, RIDICULING, SHAMING** – making a child feel foolish, stereotyping or categorizing the child.
8. **ADVISING, GIVING SOLUTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS** – telling the child how to solve the child's own problems.
9. **REASSURING, SYMPATHIZING, CONSOLING, SUPPORTING** – trying to make the child feel better, talking the child out of the child's feelings, denying the strength of the child's feelings, trying to make the child's feelings go away.
10. **PROBING, QUESTIONING, INTERROGATING** – trying to find reasons, motives, causes, searching for more information.
11. **WITHDRAWING, HUMORING, DISTRACTING** – trying to get the child away from the child's conflict, withdrawing from the problem yourself, distracting the child, kidding the child out of his feelings, pushing the problem aside.



Typical episodes of unhealthy discipline are as follows: *blaming, arguing, making excuses, defending, attacking (physical or verbal), name-calling, giving reasons for feelings, jealousy, guilt, compromising (giving in and being angry), accusing, threatening, attempting to control another, power struggles, tantrums or hysterical outbursts, playing the victim, etc.* All of these behaviors are examples of going out of control for child and parent and not healthy disciplinary behaviors. Provide the child with no threats or surprises, and remember to be a consistent and fair model to children. Describe what certain behavior looks like, for example: be respectful and clear, not ambiguous and vague!

A parent can stay in control of himself/herself when encountering a neurotic child by avoiding all of the controlling messages mentioned above, and by not acting neurotic himself/herself. The skill of “active listening” usually works effectively here. Active listening is an intentional intervention whereby the parent simply remains *silent* when a child is arguing and going out of control,



keeps eye contact, and mirrors back what is being said while giving respectful verbal acknowledgment. When responding back, the parent uses “I-messages” by simply talking about himself/herself (I’m feeling ...and my needs are ...) and about what he/she will do and what he/she will not do, and by avoiding arguing by not defending or giving reason for his/her feelings.



Children who are going out of control on a regular basis usually act out with hyper-activity, attention deficit, obsessive/compulsiveness, extreme argumentativeness, defiance, too much physical movement, lethargy or sleeping in class, insecurity, feelings of inadequacy, verbally abusive, extremely disrespectful, suicidal or perhaps violent behavior.

Certainly, the parent needs to intervene as soon as possible with out of control behavior. Most importantly, the teacher or parent needs to stay in control of himself/herself. Active listening and “I” messages are great skills to help the teacher stay in control. Avoiding controlling messages is key in preventing an out of control student from going further out of control. Parents must not feed a child’s erratic behavior by attempting to control him/her. Do not start with or participate in the control/resistance cycle.

Soft interventions should be used first. A soft intervention is more passive and non-assertive for the parent and is non-controlling, and tends to prevent misbehavior. Soft interventions also take less energy for the parent. *Allow no inappropriate behavior to go unnoticed. Always intervene as soon as possible. Use positive re-enforcement as your primary tool of management, and notice good behavior, too.* Examples of soft intervention are: a teacher needs to keep a strong eye-contact with the class and with some students in particular, use body movement around the room, use body movement towards a student who is going out of control, stay visible at all times, visually skim and scan the room regularly, use a physical cue (finger to lips) and stare (looking “bad”), flick the lights to get attention or ring a bell and then wait and stare, tap a student’s desk and stare, use a gentle touch on an arm with some brief verbal cue “Please join us”, and etc.



Interventions within this situation should last no more than 2 to 3 seconds. A teacher or parent should intervene quickly and then change the subject by continuing instruction or direction while walking away. Do not allow an intervention to disrupt the whole class or group unless there is an emergency. Never present verbal data while any student or child is talking out of turn. Make a verbal intervention to a student or child (“I’ll wait until I have everyone’s attention before I continue”) and then wait with silence until all eyes are on the teacher or parent.

Hard interventions are more active, intrusive and assertive to aggressive being more personal, and tend to attack the individual. Hard interventions take more energy for the teacher and the student. Examples of hard to harder interventions are: verbally mention the student’s name and look “bad”. Hard interventions are not effective and not appropriate for your child, and can build animosity and inappropriate behavior habits.

Remember to be loving and supportive and treat your child as you would want to be treated. Let your child know you love them, but not always their behavior.



Armenta Learning Academy
26041 Cape Dr., Suite #270 * Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
949-367-WISE (9473)
academicsuccessnow@yahoo.com
www.armentalearningacademy.com

